

Formal Education Of Administrative Officials In The Republic Of Croatia Article

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Abstract

It is an indisputable fact that the administrative officials are a key factor for quality, efficient and good administration. Administrative officials are educated in-service also but in this paper we will focus on formal training programs for potential candidates for state and public administration.

Binary system of higher education is established in accordance with the Bologna process. The professional study should, through their study programs, train students for specific skills and competences required in the labor market.

The best ways to acquire certain skills are the practical work and learning.

For the purpose of this paper the authors compare eight existing professional programs of administrative studies, in particular by analyzing the way of implementation and length of professional practice. Professional practice is one of the fundamental subjects where students are trained for specific tasks.

Keywords: Education, administrative officials, specialist graduate professional study, study of administrative law

Introduction

In all reforms and changes that are a constant feature of functioning of the public administration, the key focus is always on the issues of quality of work of the administrative staff. Issues related to the type and qualities of formal education of public officials are the subject of numerous scientific and professional papers and research. On this path every country is trying to find a model that is most appropriate for its administrative culture and tradition. Lately, especially during the enlargement of the European Union, there are attempts to find common models and standards for public officials that are applicable in all member states.

The key emphasis within these standards is on professionalization and de-politicization of the civil service and actions in the public interest (Koprić et al, 2012).

The Republic of Croatia (Croatia) is no exception to these trends. In the early nineties, Croatia has undergone a process of transition from a communist to a democratic, liberal political environment and gained independence. Also, it is faced with globalization issues and challenges. An additional problem is definitely a management and officers remaining from the previous regime. In solving the accumulated problems (which are inherent in all transition countries) Croatia needs and is trying to find ways to strengthen the administrative capacity and change for the better. One possible solution offers a special kind of administrative education. Students are educated about the fundamental values of the legal system, in particular respect for the public interest in procedure.

This paper analyses the professional three-year study programs of administrative education which we consider excellent for professional training of administrative officials. In addition, in the paper we analyse the four specialist professional studies that are intended precisely to persons who have previously completed professional administrative studies. Analyse was done by reviewing available data from the official website of performers. Special emphasis is placed on determining the ratio of theoretical and practical training in the total teaching load.

Education of officials

When we talk about education of public servants we should note that it is carried out on several levels. The first is the question of formal education required for employment in the public service, then the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills necessary for the concrete work place and there are various specific exams at the end. Also there are all forms of post-training and training of civil servants. All these forms of formal education of civil and public servants are regulated differently in different countries. It is known that the German public administration long preferred the legal profession as the most appropriate for public officials.

This is partly offset by the last decade of the establishment and functioning of special study programs of public administration. In addition to the basic legal, on that study are other related disciplines as political science, economics, sociology and so on. A similar attitude is known in Italy and Hungary, while in the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries, the impact of the legal profession is significantly lower (Koprić, Marčetić, 2002).

In recent years, the concept of public administration is attached to the status of interdisciplinary areas and study programs of public administration are characterized by a combination of collegium from the fields of law,

economics, sociology, political science and related social sciences, in different proportions (Koprić, Marčetić, 2002). On the other hand, there is an example of France and its National School of Administration (ENA). There are enrolling people with a degree in which they prefer to managerial positions in the administration (Koprić et al., 2014). The specificity and advantage of this school's program is that students get both; a practical and theoretical part (Šimac, 2002).

As a result of the harmonization of legal systems of the European Union Member States there are specific trends in the development of administrative education. Regard this, there are vertically passable studies with specific administrative directions which are characterized by a multidisciplinary approach with an emphasis on managerial skills. Study programs are tailored for a wide range of jobs, from the simplest to the most complex. In addition, it is important to emphasize that the study programs of the administrative direction are becoming independent and they stand out from the pale of law faculties and they are usually held at schools of professional higher education and polytechnics (Koprić et al, 2014).

Formal education of officials in the Republic of Croatia started with the reforms introduced by the Empress Maria Theresa (then Croatia was part of the Habsburg monarchy) by the establishment of the Political cameral studies in Varazdin in 1769. From these beginnings, there was formed Faculty of Law in Zagreb in which they performed a cameral study and legal studies (Pavic, 2002). Specific administrative education at first was provided at the School of professional study of Administration (from 1956) that had been integrated into the composition of the Faculty of Law. It is important to emphasize that the specific administrative education in Croatia exists for sixty years without interruption (Koprić et alt., 2014).

Apart from the Faculty of Law in Zagreb, Faculty of Law in Osijek also had performed two-year administrative studies from 1980. The tradition of special administrative two-year studies continued until the adoption of the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education in 2003 (Official Gazette 123/03). With that Act binary system was introduced in Croatian education system conducted of professional and university studies. The duration of professional studies has been extended to three years, after which there is specialized graduate programs. The original intention of the legislator was to completely isolate professional studies from universities and organized them in polytechnics and schools of professional higher education. That was not successful⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Constitutional Court found unconstitutional the legal provision of Article 114/8 of the Act which determine the deadline by which the universities could admit students to professional studies. Indirectly it prohibit universities to establish professional studies, Croatian

Today in Croatia professional studies are performed at the universities and polytechnics. Table 1 shows the institutions, title of study, duration, ECTS and professional titles on existing professional studies of administrative orientation in Croatia.

Table 1. Performers of professional studies of administrative orientation

Institutions	Title of study	Duration in years	ECTS	Professional titles
Polytechnics in Vukovar	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
Polytechnics in Pozega	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
University in Rijeka, Faculty of Law	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
University in Split, Faculty of Law	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
University in Osijek, Faculty of Law	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
Polytechnics in Gospic	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
Polytechnics in Sibenik	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.
University in Zagreb, faculty of Law	Administrative study	3	180	bacc.admin.publ.

Source: List of professional titles and their abbreviations of Rectors' Conference of Croatia, Official Gazette 50/15

After completing three years of professional studies (or university undergraduate studies), students should have the ability to upgrade the acquired knowledge and competences with additional specialized professional programs. Although this system in the Republic of Croatia is in the application for 12 years, there is a very few specialist graduate studies in this area. Table 2 shows the institutions, title, duration, ECTS and professional titles on existing specialist graduate programs in Croatia. As may be seen from their name (or the content of the program), they are very similar. The justification for this situation lies in the fact that Croatia is a relatively small country and it is unprofitable to establish and organize some specific, specialized programs that would be deeply engaged in certain administrative areas or acquiring any special competence. In this way, practice deviate from specialization. Students at these professional graduate studies are studying a wider range of different areas that cannot provide the required specialist skills. On the other hand, the problem of acquisition of specific skills is neglected. In the theory there is emphasize for the need to

Constitutional Court Decision No. UI-1707/2006 from 20th December 2006., Official Gazette 2/07

find better ways of teaching that would enable students to put the knowledge into concrete skills (Marčetić, 2005).

Table 2. Institutions that performs specialist graduate study of administrative direction

Institution	Title of study	Duration in years	ECTS	The abbreviation title
University in Osijek, Faculty of Law	Public Administration	2	120	struč.spec.admin.publ.
University in Split, Faculty of Law	Public Administration	2	120	struč.spec.admin.publ.
University in Rijeka, Faculty of Law	Public Administration	2	120	struč.spec.admin.publ.
University in Zagreb, Faculty of Law	Public Administration	2	120	struč.spec.admin.publ.

Source: List of professional titles and their abbreviations of Rectors' Conference of Croatia, Official Gazette 50/15

System of civil servants in the Republic of Croatia

In accordance with the current Civil Servants Act (Official Gazette 92/2005, 140/2005, 142/2006, 77/2007, 107/2007, 27/2008, 34/2011, 49/2011, 150/2011, 34/2012, 37/2013, 38/2013, 1/2015 i 138/2015, hereinafter: CSA) in Croatia civil service system is based on the version of the classification of workplaces. According such a system, positions are classified by the degree of complexity of operations with prescribing additional criteria related to the level of education (Koprić et al, 2014). Civil servants are persons in governmental bodies as their regular profession carry out activities within the scope of these bodies and persons engaged in IT, general and administrative tasks, planning, material-financial tasks and similar tasks in State bodies (Article 3, paragraph 2 and 3 of CSA). The system of classification of positions includes three categories: positions of managerial civil servants, positions of senior civil servants and positions of junior civil servants (Article 74, paragraph 3 of CSA). Positions within in each category are determined by a directive of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. Positions shall be classified in compliance with the standards, and these are: necessary expertise, complexity of tasks, independence in work, level of cooperation with other State bodies and communication with parties and degree of accountability and influence on decision-making (Article 74, paragraphs 1, 4 and 5 of CSA). The titles and descriptions of positions in State bodies shall be determined by internal organisational rules adopted by the chief executive with the prior consent of the central State authority responsible for civil service affairs (Article 75 of CSA).

In general, for the positions of managerial civil servants it is required to complete a university or specialist graduate study (five years), for the positions of senior civil servants it is required to complete undergraduate

university or professional study lasting three years while the positions of junior civil servants normally are reserved for persons with secondary education. Persons can be accepted in the civil service through a public tender with different professions and educational levels, depending on the specification of positions. All persons in that are accepted in the civil service for the first time, after completing trial work, are required to take the state exam, which consists of two parts. The first part is general and the other part is special, consisting of written and oral part of the specific tasks to which the employee worked (Article 56 and 57 of CSA). It is interesting to note that all new civil servants, regardless of the type and degree of their professional training and background knowledge (especially juridical) take identical, unique general part of the exam. This part consists of the basic provisions of the constitutional and administrative law, civil service system, the system of state administration and local self-government, office operations and basis of the European Union. State exam is a requirement to remain in the civil service. As we can see, the regulations do not distinguish between people who already have received a legal or administrative training of those who do not have. We consider that illogical. Therefore, this kind of unified examination partly devalues the need for special administrative education. As mentioned above, a prerequisite for entry into the civil service is not a legal or administrative education. However, there is a significant part of the positions that are at the description and content best suited for people with legal or administrative education, especially positions in the services and departments of general administration. For such positions are ideal candidates who have completed three years of professional studies of administrative direction (bacc.admin.publ.). In the continuation of this paper we provide a view of the study programs of the administrative directions that are currently structured in Croatia.

Study programs of the administrative direction in the Republic of Croatia – results

For the purposes of this paper, data was collected through review of official web sites of institutions and their study programs or of curricula. The study was not without challenges, for one higher education institution there is no complete and usable data. Further difficulties we found in the inequality of the evaluation of certain collegium, in particular the final work and professional practice. So some institutions final work does not express with the hours, in which case the final semester have less hours than other semesters. There are cases in which other semesters hours are "build up" to provide adequate total number of teaching hours (that is rare). Final work is valued differently, there is no uniform criterion, somewhere it counts as

lectures, exercises, sometime as a seminar and sometimes it is not evaluated through the hours, but only carries a certain number of points.

With this research we wanted to determine the real possibility for the students to be competitive for administrative organizations seeking employees after completing the program of administrative direction. In order to determine the correlation we placed hours of practical and theoretical education in the total teaching load, with special emphasis on professional practice as well as practical work in one of the partner institutions. The assumption is that quality practical education provides an appropriate level of knowledge for specific tasks. Table 3 shows the numerical ratios hours of theory (lectures) and practical training (this include professional practices, exercises and courses of seminar).

Table 3. The numerical ratio of hours of theoretical and practical education

Institution	Hours total	Hours			Exercises in %	Seminar in %	Total practical education in %
		lectures	exercise	seminar			
Faculty of Law in Rijeka	1395	1065	240	90	17,20	6,45	23,65
Faculty of Law in Zagreb	1285	1030	215	40	16,73	3,11	19,84
Faculty of Law in Osijek	1710	1320	210	180	12,28	10,52	22,80
Faculty of Law in Split	2325	1620	-	705	-	30,32	30,32 ⁵¹
Polytechnics in Vukovar	1785	1080	525	180	29,41	10,08	39,49
Polytechnics in Pozega	1785	1185	525	75	29,41	4,2	33,61
Polytechnics in Gospic	There is no available data on their web site						
Polytechnics in Sibenik	1725	1230	-	495	-	28,7	28,7 ⁵²

Source: research of authors

As shown, the share of practical education varies from 20 to 40% which is not a bad ratio. However, for the real situation it is necessary to analyze what is included in these numbers. First of all, we said that practical education includes the creation of seminar papers. This is a practical and independent student work but it consists of collecting and summarizing various sources about a topic. Under that we definitely cannot talk about acquiring of any specific job competencies and skills. Further, in all study programs teaching of foreign languages are performed as exercises but it cannot be considered as exercise for acquiring specific skills. As part of the study programs in Osijek, Vukovar and Pozega physical education is also listed as exercise. Finally, the teaching of statistics and informatics is also carried out through exercise and enters the sum total of hours of practice.

⁵¹ According to the study program, professional practice is planned in the VI semester but is not expressed in teaching load schedule. Therefore, this institution has a share of practical education greater than shown.

⁵² The same as footnote 2

Excluding all of the above, Table 4 shows the number of hours and the ratio of practical exercises that acquire specific administrative skills and competencies. A relatively large percentage of the exercises shown in the third column are the result of physical education, language and statistics as exercise.

Table 4. The ratio of hours of professional practice and exercise in relation to the overall hours

Institutions	Hours total	Total exercises in %	Specific exercises through classes in %	Professional practice in hours	Professional practice in %
Faculty of Law in Rijeka	1395	17,20	4,3	30	2,15%
Faculty of Law in Zagreb	1285	16,73	2,72	40	3,11%
Faculty of Law in Osijek	1710	12,28	-	-	-
Faculty of Law in Split	2325	-	-	There is, but not expressed in hours	
Polytechnics in Vukovar	1785	29,41	14,29	90	5%
Polytechnics in Pozega	1785	29,41	-	360	20,17%
Polytechnics in Gospic	There is no available data				
Polytechnics in Sibenik	1725	-	-	There is, but not expressed in hours	

Source: research of authors

At the end we should mention data on specialist graduate studies. A review of study programs has shown that in two studies (Zagreb and Split) has no professional practice, program in Osijek has 19.76% of professional practice in the total hourly rate while program in Rijeka has no professional practice but every college has a number of exercises and they carry 21.85% of the hourly rate. Given that these are "specialist" study we believe it is necessary that proportion of practices and exercises is higher.

Conclusion

Special administrative education in Croatia has an tradition of over 70 years. A large number of people was educated through programs of administrative studies. That people have devoted their working life (or still do) in the state or local public administration. Crucial paradigm that administrative officials must adopt is the respect for the public interest, democratic institutions and the social dimension of the country. Through programs of administrative studies, students gain basic knowledge about the meaning and role of government in society and the role of employees in the practical implementation of management responsibilities. Therefore, we believe that people who have completed administrative studies are well prepared for work in public administration. New specialist graduate degrees

in public administration are the perfect upgrade for professional studies and starting point for recruiting people for managerial positions in administrative organizations. What the research shows is definitely too small proportion of practical training during studies. The reasons are numerous: from the relatively complicated techniques of changing study programs, inertia, lack of ideas to the overall "climate" in the academic community that the professional studies looks with the underestimation. Some, not too big, intervention in the study programs could quickly solve the problem. It would be good that the procedures of changing and adaptations of existing study programs is slightly liberalized. In this way, the study programs will be more easily adapted to constant changes in the environment. Professional practice should be define in the study program clearly and precisely, with clear and measurable learning outcomes and acquired competences. Performance of practices should be designed appropriately to administrative studies. Putting practice at first, or even at the second year of study is not effective. Given the nature of the study and the necessary theoretical background knowledge, it is much more appropriate to organize practice after the courses. The practice should consist of concrete work (circulation file, making administrative decisions, making proposals for regulations etc.) and of planning and strategic decision-making at the specialist graduate studies. It is certainly necessary to increase the hourly rate of practical training, especially professional practice which should do a minimum of 1/3 of the total hourly rate. In this way, the students, after graduation, would be competitors in the labor market.

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