Transforming into Open, Innovative and Collaborative Governments

1. Introduction

Collaboration within governments, and between governments and third parties, like private businesses, organizations and citizens, is essential for efficient policy making, public administration, public sector service delivery, and democratic participation. Digitalisation and the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) offers new possibilities for a more efficient, transparent and effective government. However, the digital transformation may also complicate collaboration and challenge traditional notions of policy-making, public administration, management, organisation, accountability, and engagement. TROPICO deals with this question: How do public administrations across Europe meet the demands of the digital era when collaborating, and how are they transformed in the process?

TROPICO analyses collaboration in and by governments, with a special emphasis in the exploitation of ICT and their impact on legitimacy, accountability and government efficiency. To achieve a fuller understanding of the transformation of governments towards greater collaboration, the project assesses institutional and individual drivers for collaboration, compares collaboration practices within government and between public, private and civil society actors, and analyses the effects this has on legitimacy and accountability. This is done via multiple methods from the social sciences, using expert surveys, survey experiments, and in-depth case studies across ten European countries. The project started in June 2017 and will run until May 2021.

TROPICO consists of 12 partners in 10 countries: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom, and engages a group of expert scholars from public administration, political science and public management with a strong track record of scientific publication, consultation, executive teaching and previous research collaboration.
2. Impacts

TROPICO, firstly, examines institutional conditions as well as individual drivers and barriers in order to understand the transformation of governments towards greater collaboration. The assumption is that state structures and administrative traditions influence digital governance and provide different ‘starting points’ for the public sectors in Europe. Likewise, we assume that, individual attitudes, skills, and expertise of officials plays a decisive role in understanding this transformation. Secondly, TROPICO examines collaboration practices within governments (internal) and between public, private and societal actors (external), across a variety of policy sectors. This includes studies of different actors and means of innovative collaboration, including ICT, and how they are interlinked. Lastly, in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the transformation towards open, innovative, and collaborative governments, TROPICO assesses the effects of collaboration for legitimacy, accountability and government efficiency.

TROPICO aims to provide practical recommendations to governments and policy makers, public administrations and public sector managers derived from solid research, and to create impact by focusing on collaboration, transparency and participation. The findings from the project will contribute to better working practices of governmental employees, and improved interactions between government authorities, stakeholders and citizens across Europe. Private sector firms and third sector groups collaborating with governments and public authorities across Europe are equally important outlets for our research. The project will further seek to improve the relationship between citizens and public administrations by focusing on success factors of e-participation initiatives involving governments, key stakeholders, societal groups, and users. Moreover, TROPICO interacts actively with the academic research community and aims for a major impact on public administration and management research, as well as on related disciplines within the wider social sciences and humanities.

3. Focus and cases

The research in TROPICO is organised in eight scientific work packages, which focus on different aspects of collaboration and the use of ICT in the public sector. In total, TROPICO will provide more than 35 cases for further exploration and exploitation.

- Work Package 2 explores the institutional conditions shaping collaboration in and by governments, including formal rules and norms embedding administrative traditions and cultures.
- Work Package 3 seeks to explain what drives civil servants’ willingness to collaborate with the private sector in a policy delivery setting.
- Work Package 4 studies the emergence and nature of innovative collaboration practices inside governments, examining actors, means and how they are linked in collaborative policy design,
focusing on actor constellations and actors capabilities in terms of their formal authority, salience, expertise and means of collaboration.

- **Work Package 5** examines external collaboration and focuses on e-participation platforms, studying their goals, administration, organisation and influence.

- **Work Package 6** studies whether and under which circumstances collaborative public management arrangements deliver innovative public services, and looks at the potential of ICT and digitalisation to manage and overcome tensions between networks and single organisations. The research also focuses on the use and implementation of national e-government and digitalisation strategies.

- **Work Package 7** examines whether and under which conditions different types of public, private and user partnerships result in innovative service delivery. The research looks at how this is influenced by partnership features such as management, leadership and trust, and examines drivers, levels of participation, and the application of ICT tools.

- **Work Package 8** analyses the impact of collaboration on legitimacy and accountability, and develop assessment tools to measure those for collaborative governance. Comparative case studies of collaborative governance are combined with a social network analysis aimed at identifying patterns of account-giving and sanctioning. Based on this, the work package will design and test indicators for measuring legitimacy and accountability of collaborative policy processes and public managers.

- **Work Package 9** focuses on the effects and impact of collaborative practices on public sector efficiency, by conducting a meta-assessment on red tape and providing an innovative measurement of efficiency.

4. **Policy recommendations**

As the project progresses, TROPICO engages with policy makers, public administrators and public managers, as well as third sector groups, private sector firms and citizens across Europe. Recommendations and lessons learnt will be actively disseminated to these groups through workshops, practitioner-oriented events and conferences. TROPICO’s online presence will provide tools for interaction and dissemination with the public, especially through a collection of codes of collaboration, a case study repository, a meta-analysis of e-government and digitalisation strategies, and eventually a collaboration monitor.

The collection of **codes of collaboration** provides scholars and policy-makers access to a selection of rules and regulation on collaboration in ten European countries. The collection shows the variation of how collaboration is regulated across multiple areas of governance and public administration, including
constitutions, laws, administrative regulations and instructions, as well as government guidelines and strategies referring to collaboration within government and/or with external actors.

The TROPICO case study repository will present more than 35 condensed case studies on various dynamics and aspects of the digital transformation of public administrations in Europe. The repository will include cases on internal collaboration for policy design, on e-participation, on both internal and external collaboration practices for service delivery, and cases highlighting the effects legitimacy and accountability.

The meta-analysis of e-government and digitalisation strategies will assess the role of governments in open and innovative collaboration, and provide an online collection of public documents from governments in selected European countries to facilitate the retrieval of relevant material for practitioners and researchers/students.

The collaboration monitor is an online tool for policy-makers and public managers that will provide examples of good practices, and assessment of indicators for measuring and comparing the efficiency, legitimacy and accountability of collaboration efforts in both policy design and service delivery.

TROPICO will organise two TROPICO summits, the first in Tallinn in 2019 and the second in Antwerp in 2020. The summits will target the scientific research community, policy makers, practitioners, private sector actors as well as third sector groups, where discussions and insights concerning collaboration and the use of ICT to facilitate collaboration, open government and participation are put on the centre stage.

5. **Sustainability**

TROPICO presents results that will be exploitable and made accessible at the TROPICO website, also after the duration of the project. The research results and publications from the project will be made openly available through open access publication. The TROPICO research data will also be deposited and made available for research purposes with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).