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EGPA Permanent Study Group 5 on The Politics and Management of Policing and Public Safety

Public Administration and Risk

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General Description

This Permanent Study Group (PSG) is dedicated to examining the evolving role of public administration in addressing the increasing complexity of risks that affect contemporary societies, including natural, environmental, technological and urban security risks. Climate change, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization, social fragmentation, and the growing frequency of extreme events – such as floods, wildfires, heatwaves, and earthquakes as well as urban unrest and public safety threats – are profoundly challenging traditional public frameworks, regulatory approaches, and governance models. These phenomena expose structural vulnerabilities within public institutions and demand new forms of administrative capacity, coordination, and adaptability.

In particular, the PSG expands the analysis of risk governance to include the paradigm of urban security, understood not only as policing or crime control, but as a multidimensional governance challenge involving public order, social cohesion, spatial planning, technological infrastructures, and citizens trust.

Urban environments represent privileged laboratories for observing the transformation of public authority under conditions of uncertainty. Cities concentrate on environmental vulnerabilities, social inequalities, infrastructural interdependencies, and security demands. As a result, public administrations are required to manage overlapping risks – natural hazards, infrastructural fragilities, social tensions, and public safety concerns – through integrated and multi-level arrangements.



Public authorities are increasingly required to operate under conditions characterized by elevated levels of scientific uncertainty, incomplete or contested knowledge, and severe time constraints. Decision-making in the field of natural risk management often involves balancing precaution, proportionality, and urgency, fundamental rights and democratic accountability, while simultaneously navigating legal mandates, political pressures, and societal expectations.

Particular attention is devoted to:

- the interaction between scientific expertise and administrative discretion;
- the role of policing and public safety institutions within broader governance frameworks;
- the integration of risk-based regulatory approaches in urban policy;
- the relationship between security, resilience and legitimacy.

As scientific assessments of risk become more complex and probabilistic, public administrations must interpret, translate, and integrate expert knowledge into policy choices and operational decisions. The PSG explores how this interaction shapes regulatory design, emergency preparedness, crisis response, and long-term planning, as well as how it affects the legitimacy and effectiveness of administrative action.

The PSG examines the legal, organizational, and policy instruments employed by public administrations to prevent, mitigate, and respond to natural disasters and other hazards that represent a challenge for abroad idea of natural ad urban security. These include regulatory frameworks, planning tools, risk assessment procedures, early warning systems, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and collaborative arrangements with private actors and civil society. By adopting a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective, the PSG highlights similarities and differences across administrative systems, governance traditions, and territorial levels - local, regional, national, and supranational- shedding light on how institutional contexts influence risk governance outcomes.

In addition, the PSG addresses key normative and democratic dimensions of natural risk governance, extending this reflection to the field of urban security. Issues of accountability, transparency, and responsibility are particularly salient in contexts where decisions are made under uncertainty and may entail significant social, economic, environmental, and public safety consequences. In urban settings, where risk governance intersects with policing, spatial planning, and social regulation, administrative choices directly affect fundamental rights, social cohesion, and perceptions of security. The PSG



also reflects on the role of public trust, citizen engagement, and communication strategies in enhancing societal and urban resilience, strengthening community-based prevention, and ensuring the legitimacy and acceptability of administrative decisions in both environmental and public safety domains.

By integrating administrative theory with empirical analysis, the PSG aims to advance scholarly debate on the capacity of public administrations to adapt to complex, systemic, and transboundary natural risks, as well as to multifaceted urban security challenges. Overall, the discussion seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how contemporary administrations can evolve to manage uncertainty, govern interconnected environmental and urban risks, foster resilience, and maintain democratic legitimacy in the face of escalating natural and public safety challenges.

The PSG will be progressively strengthened through field-based research, thematic seminars, and dedicated workshops focusing on specific issues, with the aim of consolidating and expanding its research agenda over the years.

The PSG welcomes contributions that engage with a broad range of research questions related to the role of public administration in the governance of natural risks. Papers may explore how public administrations adapt their structures, capacities, and decision-making processes in response to the growing challenges posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and extreme natural events. Special attention may be given to the ways in which administrative models and institutional arrangements shape the ability of public authorities to anticipate, prevent, and manage complex and systemic risks.

A central focus of the PSG concerns public decision-making under conditions of scientific uncertainty and time pressure. Contributions may examine how scientific knowledge, expert advice, and risk assessments are integrated into administrative processes, and how this interaction affects administrative discretion, the application of the precautionary principle, and the legitimacy of public action. Relatedly, papers may address the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern natural risk management, including the design and implementation of preventive, mitigation, and emergency response instruments.

The PSG also encourages research on governance and coordination mechanisms across sectors and levels of government. Comparative and multi-level perspectives are particularly welcome, as they can shed light on variations in risk governance across



administrative systems, territorial contexts, and institutional traditions. Contributions may analyse forms of inter-institutional coordination, collaboration with private actors and civil society, and the role of local and regional authorities in disaster preparedness and response.

In addition, the PSG invites studies that address the normative and democratic dimensions of natural risk governance. These include issues of accountability, transparency, and responsibility in administrative decision-making, as well as the role of communication, public trust, and citizen engagement in contexts of risk and emergency. Papers may also examine processes of institutional learning and administrative reform following disasters, as well as the use of digital tools, data, and emerging technologies in risk management.

Overall, the PSG seeks theoretical and empirical contributions that advance understanding of how public administrations can enhance resilience, maintain legitimacy, and effectively govern natural risks in an increasingly uncertain and interconnected environment.

In addition to natural risk governance, the PSG welcomes contributions addressing:

- Urban security and risk governance;
- Security, rights and administrative appropriateness;
- Multi-level and networked security governance;
- Crisis emergencies and public order.

Topics to be developed

Administrative Decision-Making under Scientific Uncertainty: Governing Natural Risks in Complex Policy Environments

Natural risks increasingly require public administrations to take decisions in contexts characterized by uncertainty, incomplete data, and contested scientific knowledge. This PSG investigates how administrative decision-making adapts to such conditions, focusing on the balance between precaution, discretion, and accountability. Drawing on administrative theory and selected case studies, it analyses the institutional mechanisms that mediate between scientific expertise and public authority. The PSG argues that effective risk governance depends on the capacity of administrations to integrate uncertainty into decision processes without undermining legitimacy. Particular attention is paid to procedural tools and organizational arrangements that support informed and transparent choices.



From Prevention to Resilience: Institutional Capacities for Natural Risk Governance

The shift from reactive disaster management to resilience-oriented governance has profound implications for public administration. This PSG examines the institutional capacities required to support prevention, adaptation, and long-term risk reduction in the face of natural hazards. It explores how administrative structures, resources, and skills are reshaped by resilience-oriented policies. Through a comparative analysis of different administrative systems, the PSG aims to highlight best practices and persistent gaps. The findings suggest that resilience depends not only on technical planning but also on administrative learning and inter-institutional coordination.

Multi-Level Governance and Natural Risk Management: Coordination Challenges across Administrative Levels

Natural risk management typically involves multiple levels of government, from local authorities to national and supranational institutions. This PSG analyses coordination challenges in multi-level governance systems, focusing on competence allocation, information sharing, and decision-making authority. Using examples from disaster prevention and emergency response, it shows how fragmentation can weaken administrative effectiveness. The PSG also discusses institutional instruments designed to enhance vertical and horizontal coordination. It argues that coherent risk governance requires clearer frameworks for cooperation and shared responsibility.

The Role of Expertise in Public Administration: Integrating Scientific Knowledge into Natural Risk Regulation

Scientific expertise plays a central role in the governance of natural risks, yet its integration into administrative decision-making raises significant challenges. This PSG examines the institutional relationship between experts and public administrations, focusing on advisory bodies, risk assessments, and technical discretion. It explores how administrations translate scientific inputs into regulatory and operational decisions. The analysis highlights tensions between expertise, democratic legitimacy, and legal accountability. The PSG concludes that effective integration of science requires procedural safeguards and clear allocation of responsibility.

Accountability after Disaster: Administrative Responsibility and Public Trust in Natural Risk Governance

Disasters often expose weaknesses in administrative systems and trigger demands for accountability. This PSG explores how public administrations are held responsible for



decisions related to natural risk prevention and response. It analyses legal, political, and administrative forms of accountability and their impact on public trust. Drawing on post-disaster inquiries and judicial proceedings, the PSG discusses the risks of blame avoidance and over-deterrence. The PSG argues for accountability frameworks that promote learning and institutional improvement rather than solely sanctioning failure.

Risk Governance beyond Emergency: Administrative Learning and Policy Adaptation after Natural Hazards

While emergency response is crucial, long-term risk governance depends on the capacity of public administrations to learn from past events. This PSG focuses on administrative learning processes following natural hazards, including policy evaluation, organizational reform, and knowledge retention. It examines how lessons from disasters are incorporated into planning and regulation. The analysis shows that institutional inertia and political pressures often limit learning outcomes. The PSG aims to identify conditions under which administrations can effectively transform experience into adaptive risk governance.

Urban Security as Risk Governance: Policing, Prevention and Democratic Legitimacy

Urban security increasingly operates within a risk-based framework in which prevention, anticipation and resilience replace purely reactive models of law enforcement. This topic explores how public administrations conceptualize and regulate security in urban context marked by uncertainty, social fragmentation and technological transformations.

Security and Risk as Paradigms of Public Governance – Including Urban Security (Specialized Panel)

This panel explores the structural interconnection between security and risk as foundational paradigms of contemporary public governance. Security is no longer conceived merely as the preservation of order, but as the outcome of institutional processes designed to manage uncertainty. In complex and urbanized societies, environmental, technological, and social risks reshape legal reasoning, administrative discretion, and regulatory design. The panel examines how anticipatory mechanisms, precaution, proportionality, preparedness, and resilience structure decision-making across multiple levels of government. Particular attention is devoted to the interaction between scientific expertise, policing practices, administrative authority, and democratic accountability. By fostering interdisciplinary and comparative dialogue, the panel aims to advance a refined understanding of security as an institutional and normative construction of uncertainty in contemporary governance.



Methodological Approach

The PSG adopts an open and pluralistic methodological approach, welcoming both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Contributions may draw on comparative case studies, single-case analyses, cross-national comparisons, and multi-level analyses to investigate how public administrations govern natural risks in different institutional and territorial contexts. Qualitative methods such as interviews, document analysis, legal and policy analysis, and process tracing are particularly suitable for exploring decision-making dynamics, governance arrangements, and the interaction between scientific knowledge and administrative discretion.

At the same time, the PSG encourages the use of quantitative and mixed methods approaches, including survey data, administrative datasets, policy evaluations, and statistical analyses of risk governance outcomes. Longitudinal designs and post-disaster studies are especially welcome, as they can capture processes of institutional learning, adaptation, and reform over time. Conceptual and theory-driven contributions are also invited, particularly those aiming to refine existing frameworks or develop new analytical models for understanding administrative responses to complex and systemic natural risks.

Target Research Community and Planned Activities (2026-2028)

The PSG is addressed to a broad and interdisciplinary research community engaged in the study of public administration, public policy, and governance. It is particularly relevant for scholars working on administrative theory, public management, public law, environmental governance, and disaster and risk management. Researchers with an interest in climate change governance, regulatory policy, multi-level governance, and institutional design will also find the PSG highly pertinent.

In addition, the PSG aims to attract both early-career and senior scholars, as well as researchers employing diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. By fostering dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and research traditions, the PSG seeks to create a forum for exchange among academics studying public administration in different national and comparative contexts.

Between 2026 and 2028, the PSG will coordinate thematic panels and roundtables at the annual EGPA conferences, promote special issues in leading peer-reviewed (Class A and open access) journals, and strengthen comparative research networks focused on sectoral and transnational variations. The PSG will also encourage and promote joint publications and policy briefs addressing emerging regulatory gaps, while actively supporting early-



careers scholars through mentorship initiatives and collaborative research opportunities in the specific fields.

Contribution to EGPA

The PSG contributes directly to EGPA's core mission of advancing knowledge on public administration and governance in Europe and beyond. By focusing on natural risk governance, the PSG addresses a pressing and increasingly salient challenge for public administrations, one that cuts across policy sectors, levels of government, and administrative traditions. The PSG aligns closely with EGPA's interest in administrative capacity, governance under complexity, and the relationship between institutions, expertise, and democratic accountability.

Through its emphasis on comparative analysis, theoretical development, and empirical evidence, the PSG aims to strengthen scholarly debate within EGPA on how public administrations can adapt to uncertainty, enhance resilience, and maintain legitimacy in the face of systemic risks. More broadly, the PSG seeks to contribute to EGPA by fostering cross-national dialogue, promoting methodological pluralism, and advancing a deeper understanding of the evolving role of public administration in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

Invited Scholars

Dr. Angeliki Bourboulis; National Centre for Public Administration & Local Government (EKDDA), Athens, Greece

Prof. Endrius Cociolo; Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain

Prof. Isabel Celeste Monteiro da Fonseca; University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

Prof. Judith Gifreu Font; Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Prof. María Ángels González Bustos; University of Salamanca, Spain

Prof. István Hoffmann; Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

Prof. Emmanuel Jimenez Franco; University of Salamanca, Spain

Prof. Anna Pallarès Serrano; Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain

Prof. João Vilas Boas Pinto; University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

Prof. Marina Rodríguez Beas; Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain



Practicalities

If you wish to present a paper in one of the Permanent Study Group's, Ad Hoc Group's, or Specialized Panel's sessions at the conference, please upload an abstract outlining your proposed conference paper. This may be done through the conference website.

Important dates

- Deadline for submission of abstracts (extended): April 21, 2026
- Deadline for submission of abstracts (extended) for Transatlantic Dialogue: May 10, 2026
- Deadline for submission of EGPA Booster Grant applications: April 15, 2026
- Acceptance notification and opening of registrations: May 5, 2026
- Deadline for submission of EGPA Travel Grant applications: May 10, 2026
- Full paper submission deadline and registration deadline: July 19, 2026

Website

- <https://www.iias-iisa.org/egpa-2026-conference/>

Submission

- <https://www.conftool.org/egpa2026/>
- Unless specified otherwise, 500-words limit for abstracts

Contact

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