

# Guest editorial: Advancing public procurement: an interdisciplinary perspective

*The inaugural International Conference for Advancing Public Procurement (ICAPP), was held in Dublin, Ireland, in November 2024. ICAPP was established to provide a forum for scholars and practitioners engaged in advancing the field of public procurement, fostering the exchange of research findings and substantive discourse on emerging challenges and opportunities within the discipline. Reflective of this spirit, this Special Issue – in the premier journal devoted to topics in public procurement – provides implications for advancing the practice and study of public procurement through various methodological approaches that span the normative – empirical continuum. Ranging from qualitative interpretation to quantitative evaluation all the way to meta-analytical conceptualization, this Special Issue reflects the diversity and multidisciplinary nature of public procurement research.*

Consistent with ICAPP's vision, the five articles in this Special Issue offer insights with implications for both scholarship and practice by connecting theories with practice. The selected articles adopt an explicitly interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon theoretical frameworks and empirical cases from public administration, public management, public policy, political science, administrative law and public budgeting. All five papers focus on public procurement as a strategic governance and policy tool framework and through this synthesis, the Special Issue contributes to ongoing efforts to deepen our understanding of public procurement as a multifaceted domain of governance and to inform evidence-based policy development and implementation. Moreover, these articles introduce current and novel approaches to public procurement, thereby rendering avenues for future advancements in the field as well as highlighting potential challenges.

Romina Štaba opens the Special Issue with her article entitled “Protection vs Access to Confidential Information in Public Procurement using Modern Technologies” in which she presents a legal analysis of over 20 Member States in the European Union (EU), examining the tension between confidentiality and transparency in public procurement bidding processes and judicial proceedings, especially when sensitive data are involved. Through a normative and legal-analytical lens, the author finds evidence of explicit legal provisions allowing access to confidential data in judicial proceedings, prompting a review of case law from the Court of Justice of the EU and the Regional Administrative Court in Lazio. Finally, the author discusses how digital technologies can help guide case law and decision-making in complex cases where the relationship between transparency and confidentiality exhibits substantial ambiguity and uncertainty.

Balancing objectives of transparency and confidentiality with goals of sustainable public service delivery, Marcel Stuijts, Jolanda van Grinsven and Jochem Berns offer an analysis in their article titled “Opportunities of public infrastructure procurement to enhance environmental goals: a case study in the South of The Netherlands.” This innovative study adopts a local and behavioral focus to explore how smaller local authorities in the Netherlands use public infrastructure procurement to advance environmental sustainability. The authors interviewed 14 civil servants across the country, finding that green public procurement is widely accessible but inconsistently implemented across jurisdictions. By focusing on the motivations, behaviors and internal coordination among actors, the authors



highlight how collaborative governance may positively impact sustainability strategies among resource-constrained municipalities. They propose earlier involvement with external actors to help improve project design, internal alignment and organizational performance in the implementation of sustainable infrastructure.

Indeed, innovation intermediaries – such as public–private partnerships, accelerators and advisory bodies – play a key role in bridging the gap between the public sector and solution providers, helping to translate innovative ideas into scalable interventions. However, there are challenges to this approach, though this is rarely examined according to Hendrik Bangert, Christian von Deimling, Michael Essig in their article titled “Mapping the research landscape of innovation intermediaries in public procurement: A review of reviews.” This article conducts a review of the literature on innovation intermediaries in public procurement. The authors find that most of the applicable research on innovation intermediaries exists in private-sector innovation and procurement, where translating ideas to the public sector environment is lacking. To bridge the gap, the authors propose a conceptual model for how innovation intermediaries can support procurement management, particularly in environments and jurisdictions varying in technological expertise, readiness and capacities.

However, bureaucratic red tape remains a significant barrier in any public procurement objective, often slowing down procurement cycles and stifling creativity. This is empirically examined by Andreas Glas, Michael Essig, Maximilian Holzner and Dominik Oehlschlaeger in their article entitled “Need for Speed Most Wanted: Red Tape effect on Procurement Time”. In a methodological shift to quantitative efficiency analysis and leveraging over 42,000 contract notices from 2018 to 2024, these authors examine red tape reduction and its measurable effect on procurement speed in the German defense sector in an ex-ante/ex-post design. The authors find that red tape and procurement duration are correlated, where red tape also affects procurement speed. This becomes critical in situations requiring accelerated procurement, such as in crises, thereby emphasizing the importance of streamlining procedures, reducing administrative burdens and embracing flexible procurement models for creating a procurement environment that supports innovation, delivers long-term value, and responds effectively to societal needs. In short, they provide empirical evidence linking regulatory reform to performance improvements.

The final paper in this Special Issue was not presented at ICAPP but was submitted to JoPP, and the Guest Editors felt it appropriate to include an additional manuscript given the substantive nature of this article. Dadang Suwanda in his paper titled “Self-blocking in Defence Procurement: A Case Study of Budgetary Coordination Failure in Indonesia’s Satellite Acquisition Project” presents an interesting case study that extends the Special Issue’s concern with red tape, monitoring and digital integration by identifying budgetary “self-blocking” which is a unilateral, opaque budgetary freeze that generates horizontal information asymmetry within the state. This distinct administrative pathology reveals that governance failure may arise not only from excessive regulation or weak capacity, but from strategically withheld information within bureaucracies themselves.

Together, this Special Issue emphasizes public procurement as a powerful instrument for achieving broader policy goals and public values – whether it concerns innovation, sustainability, efficiency or fairness. The articles making up this Special Issue explore public procurement implications across various levels of government and stakeholders of procurement, testing hypotheses from a variety of methodologies in both qualitative and quantitative schools. Importantly, they identify systemic barriers in effective public procurement processes that may hinder advancements in the field, including legal ambiguity in overseeing digital transformation; the lack of supplier interactions and underexplored intermediary roles; weak internal coordination and limited monitoring of policy initiatives;

and red tape and bureaucratic inefficiencies in organizational performance. As a result, this Special Issue presents clarifications and calls for institutional reform, suggesting improved integration of innovation intermediaries, regulatory streamlining and standardization of performance, planning and integration of co-producers earlier in procurement processes, and use of digital tools to resolve challenges arising across the decision-making process and within the implementation of procurement for citizens and other end-users.

We are pleased that taken together, these studies reflect the pluralistic evolution of the study of public procurement as it moves from prescriptive frameworks toward evidence-based, interdisciplinary and systems-oriented analyses of procurement's role in governance, sustainability and innovation.

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