MPA Students' Involvement in Research –
Administrative Consultation Wiki Case Study

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Abstract: In developing the competences of students at the Faculty of Administration of the University of Ljubljana, we devote particular attention to the triple integration of specialist knowledge, methodological skills and the addressing/resolving of problems which are specific to public administration (PA) as a key social subsystem and a pillar of modern good governance. This paper considers the given context through analysis of the development of competences via student participation in the project Administrative Consultation Wiki (ACW). Via a Web 2.0 system, the ACW offers opinions and assistance regarding the application of administrative rules to complex real-life events to citizens, businesses, NGOs and administrative bodies that use the rules of administrative procedure and operations, as the central operational processes in (Slovene) PA, in their work. In June 2013 we conducted a survey among the 71 students of the Master's study program in Administration (MPA) who participated in the ACW project between 2009 and 2013, with regard to the extent to which participation in the ACW project had contributed to the development of their competences, in particular research within administrative science and complex problem-solving. With a 60% response rate, the results reveal that the ACW project, in terms of both content and methodology, with an emphasis on the integrated connection of various elements and stakeholders, can be considered a role model for the development of the professional and personal competences of students that are necessary for work in PA and for its development.

Key words: public administration, competences, study program, MPA, research, case study, Administrative Consultation Wiki.

1   INTRODUCTION

When designing and implementing postgraduate study programs in and for public administration (PA), several specific characteristics need to be taken into account. First, in higher education in general and in Bologna second- and third-cycle programs in particular, teaching and learning must be closely combined with research in terms of acquiring original new scientific findings and knowledge. The latter applies to both teachers/lecturers and to students, especially if participating in mid-career Master's programs in Administration (MPA), in which they enhance their knowledge of theory and undertake applied empirical studies. Secondly, PA as an interdisciplinary discipline has become an integrated science, requiring researchers and students to address administrative problems from legal, organizational, managerial, economical, political, sociological and other points of view simultaneously.

The development of the competences of postgraduate students of PA is largely associated with the achievement of the objectives of the study program. It is not always clear whether the specific objectives are related to the demands of the profession and/or the labor market. On the other hand, it is difficult to provide an adequate number of complex cases to be considered as case studies at postgraduate level in order to achieve these objectives. The third problem is reflected in the fact that the solutions found by the students rarely find their way back to the holder of the problem. The Faculty of Administration of the University of Ljubljana (FA) has combined all three aspects into a single system (solution), by involving postgraduate students in research work using an approach known as problem-based

learning. The first aspect is the acquisition of the relevant problems from administrative practice. The second, most important in terms of the competence development of students, is finding the relevant solutions (research work). The third is to offer solutions not only to the holder of the problem but also to the interested public (public authorities, citizens, etc.).

The paper analyses several theoretical characteristics of research and teaching (e.g. didactical approaches) in MPA programs from these perspectives. On this basis, a case study regarding the involvement of MPA program students in the Administrative Consultation Wiki (ACW) research project at the FA is analyzed. The ACW is an innovative applied research portal designed by the FA and the Ministry of Public Administration in 2009 and constantly upgraded within the relevant legal, administrative and information sciences, helping citizens, businesses, NGOs and authorities to resolve their legal dilemmas in administrative procedures through a Web 2.0 approach. The students participate in the ACW in order to strengthen their general competences, particularly problem-solving and interdisciplinary research skills, resulting in enhanced employability and better work competences. In June 2013 a survey was conducted among the 71 students of the MPA study program (also accredited by EAPAA in 2008) who collaborated in the ACW project between 2009 and 2013, in order to gain feedback on the realization of learning objectives and competences to be developed, as laid down in the study program, using the Tuning model of general competences. We address the content, benefits and disfunctionalities of students' involvement in the research project as an ACW case study, their methods of work, expected and acquired competences, and higher employability and real work competences. By generalizing these findings, they can be applied in a systematic manner throughout the MPA program at the Faculty and shared as examples of good practice at the cross-border level. They can also serve as a fruitful resource for the EAPAA Tuning competences initiative.

2   LINKING PA PRACTICE TO RESEARCH AS PART OF EDUCATION

2.1   Special characteristics of the study of PA in research and study programs

Like all academic disciplines and professional fields, public administration has its own unique features. One of the most important of these is its interdisciplinary nature, which demands a synergetic connection of different sciences and disciplines from law and politics, sociology, organisation and management and economics to information science, psychology, etc. in order to achieve the coordination of different interests in society (cf. Raadschelders, 2011: 181, Wright, 2011: 96). An interdisciplinary treatment of PA is essential because the approaches of individual disciplines in complex social situations are not sufficient for the understanding of these situations (for example if the question if raised of collecting a certain amount of euros in taxes, it is necessary to balance the legalistic aspect and the management rationale regarding the organisation of the resources necessary for enforcement). This shows the importance of PA as a complex social subsystem. The common denominator of administrative activity is that it is not an end in itself (Pavčnik, 2007: 577), since PA is always a professional and indispensable holistic activity, more than just auxiliary in its operations, enabling the running of the basic public policies adopted by others. PA is therefore not only a productive activity but a necessarily creative one (Kovač & Virant, 2011: 30), contributing to the value of overall progress of society, since its main characteristics include constancy, a systematic nature and initiative. For this reason both work in PA and research and study programs in this field must be interdisciplinary (cf. Pusić, 2002: 53, 59, Schuppert, 2000: 46). The latter is the main thrust of the accreditation scheme of the EAPAA, since it underlines the multi- and interdisciplinarity of PA study programs (e.g. recently via the competence-based graduate profile in the field of PA, van der Krogt & Reichard, 2012: 1–10, cf. Hajnal, 2003: 245–258).

Important for the research framework in PA is the addressing of administrative problems in the context of administrative science (*Verwaltungswissenschaft*) or PA as an autonomous

scientific discipline, with PA as an integrated subject of study and a combination of research methods that builds on the content and approaches of the disciplines that make up PA (e.g. law, policy, economics, organisation and management, sociology, etc.; cf. Schuppert, 2000: 41, Wright, 2011: 98). A scientific, research-based approach based on universally recognized theories generates the new knowledge necessary to address complex issues. If we were to study PA without a research method, we could only redefine existing solutions, but not create new ones. The subject of administration science or PA as a discipline from the research point of view is, above all, PA as a social subsystem and a pillar of the administrative level of public governance in the sense of the implementation of institutional public policies (cf. Godec et al., 1993: 5–12, Raadschelders, 2011: 12–41). PA researches administrative institutions, bodies and officials, structures and forms, and the function of administration, where PA is treated simultaneously as authority and organisation. The purpose of research in the field of administration science, where various methods from sciences closely connected to administration (e.g. normative, dogmatic, comparative methods; cf. Pavčnik, 2007: 31) are employed alongside empirical methods, is to identify key administrative phenomena and improve the implementation of public policies through effective and democratic PA.

Through research, administrative science fulfils its functions, which range from the cognitive and doctrine-related (which regards the dogmatic definition of phenomena, processes and causality in PA and the submission thereof to practitioners, public service users and the general public), to the creative, for the development of new forms, modes and solutions of administrative operations. The latter is essential because PA and the nature and content of administrative law, as the principal formal framework for its work, change relatively quickly as a result of radical social changes, even in terms of fundamental principles, when they also assume the logic and mode of operation of the private sector (more in Kovač et al., 2012: 26, Peters & Pierre, 2005). For this reason, alongside regulations, participants in administrative relations also make use of additional resources, i.e. knowledge-providing legal resources (cf. Pavčnik, 2007: 371) such as interpretative websites, including the ACW. In this process these objectives are supported by the development of IT, since it enables e-participation (more on the most successful e-government projects, e.g. those based on Web 2.0, in Klein, 2008). In this way, too, it develops, through the doctrine of good administration, into a less top-down authoritarian system, where networking and partnerships are formed in society between the holders of authority in administration and the addressees of authoritative acts or the users of public services (cf. Statskontoret, 2005, Bevir et al., 2011: 289, Rusch, 2011: 5–6). The development of PA in the sense of a good administration concept is a prerequisite for political and economic performance, hence the considerable recent increase in PA research and study program developments (cf. Raadschelders, 2011: 3, Hajnal, 2003: 252) on the global scale.

2.2   Competences according to the needs of work (in PA) and the educational process

The development of society places new demands on employees. PA as an employer does not expect from its employees merely knowledge in an individual field of work, but a willingness and ability to use this knowledge in an appropriate manner, since the employee is expected to develop adequately all those competences which are a condition for the successful performance of work. This also has a significant influence on education, since university faculties, in cooperation with employers, must among other things define study program objectives, expected results and competences that will enable the graduate, on meeting the study requirements, to enter the labor market effectively. This also means that in the case in question we are in fact talking about the same concept – competences – although this concept is sometimes defined from the point of view of the requirements of work, and other times from the point of view of the educational process. In order for an individual to demonstrate competence in the sense of the effective performance of work and use of resources (cf. UN, 2011: 6, Stare et al., 2007: 3, Mayer et al., 2005: 784, Lucia &

Lepsinger, 1999: 7), he or she has to develop general competences (e.g. addressing problem situations, use of technology) alongside specialist knowledge.

Competence, or competency, is about the skills and talents that an individual needs in order to perform particular tasks in accordance with a particular standard in real life (cf. Hornby & Wehmeier, 2007). But various authors point to the difficulty of defining competences and to the semantic variants of the term. It is also necessary to take into account the special characteristics of individual disciplines. All of them, however, highlight as important the fact that competences indicate both (1) the ability of an individual to perform a specific task and (2) that he or she has a positive attitude towards the performance of the task. Although cognitive skills and grounding in knowledge are decisive elements in the structure of a competence, it is also necessary to include other aspects of competences such as motivation and value orientation (OECD, 2002).

A competence can change over time and the individual can also gain or achieve a higher level of competence (Plessius & Ravesteyn, 2010: 302). This is an important consideration, since individual competences have a different and changing importance both for the everyday performance of work and for the development of work. Formation of competences is a demanding professional task in itself, where on the basis of different sources (more in Stare, 2005), four areas in particular need to be taken into account: (1) professional competence, (2) social competence, (3) personal competence and (4) methodological competence. Professional competence relates to (vocational) education, knowledge and abilities, from sector-specific skills to strategic thinking and the ability to use the methods and techniques of work that are particular to a given sector. Social competence relates to interpersonal relations with regard to the achievement of a particular task or objective, in other words communication and cooperation; personal competence also covers the autonomous, flexible and responsible formulation of work goals and one's own role in the work process. Methodological competence refers to the ability to use professional knowledge appropriately and address problems, and to project work, presentation and creativity. All competences can be improved through targeted education and training, where it is necessary, particularly in PA as a result of the reforms, to develop the possibility of successful functioning in changed conditions of work.

2.3   Development of competences in second-cycle study programs at the FA

Since the suitability of the competences and/or knowledge acquired by graduates of study programs for the labor market is one of the important guiding principles in the study programs' design, it is essential even at the initial design stage to identify the competences currently required and those that will be required in the near future in the field covered by the education program. Within the provision of the individual program it is necessary to ensure mechanisms that guarantee, for the duration of the study program, the systematic monitoring of learning outcomes and competences acquired, and their relevance in the labor market. The formulated competences of the study program must thus reflect the requirements of the labor market and, on the other hand, satisfy legal requirements. In Slovenia, Article 33 of the Higher Education Act provides that Master's study programs should enable students to enhance their knowledge in broad professional fields and train them to find new sources of knowledge in professional and academic fields, apply scientific research methods across a broad spectrum of problems and in new or changed circumstances, take responsibility for managing the most complex work systems and develop critical reflection and social and communication skills for managing group work. Under the Act, project assignments in the working environment or basic, applied or developmental research assignments are an obligatory component of these programs.

Achievement of the objectives, learning outcomes and competencies defined by the program is realized through the achievement of the objectives, knowing outcomes and competencies of individual subjects. Learning outcomes represent a statement of expectations of what, on

completion of learning, the student should know, understand and/or be capable of presenting, while competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities (cf. Tuning, 2013, Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2007: 5–38). The development of competences is thus an objective of students enrolled in education programs. As a rule, however, individual subjects have a narrower focus, or represent merely a fragment in the "mosaic" of the achievement of the program's objectives and competences. Objectives, learning outcomes and competences in the second-cycle Administration program at the Faculty of Administration of the University of Ljubljana were formulated on the basis of the above principles. They have been evaluated several times in the light of the development of the discipline and of PA. With each accreditation procedure (national accreditations and EAPAA accreditations in 2005, 2008 and 2012), the findings of our own research (among employers) and foreign research (e.g. Tuning, Hegesco) have been added. Among other things, less attention than formerly has been devoted to (merely) legalistic aspects (cf. the EAPPA project, van der Krogt & Reichard, 2012: 8–10). The idea of developing students' competences in the sense of bringing them closer to the competences expected by employers and the competences of study programs also represents a guiding principle in the case of the ACW project. With regard to the trend in the European Higher Education Area, i.e. the basing of general competences on the generic competences developed within the Tuning project, we have researched how the ACW has contributed to the development of the latter.

3   STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT AND COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN RESEARCH IN THE ACW PROJECT

3.1   Design and operation of the ACW for students and external stakeholders

The ACW is an applied research project set up by the FA and the Ministry of Public Administration in 2009. Since then, it has been constantly upgraded within the relevant juridical, administrative and information sciences and in terms of user response (for the initial design, see Kovač & Dečman, 2009: 74–84). The ACW is in effect a public freely available database, acting as a forum and a knowledge base for all PA stakeholders, currently including more than 1,000 cases of varying complexity drafted between 2009 and 2013. The overall objectives of the ACW are to identify the actual dilemmas surrounding the application of the Administrative Procedure Act and the Decree on Administrative Operations in sectoral legislation in a number of specific fields. The project was initially designed to develop students' competences and, eventually, connect theory with practice by assisting citizens and officials in their resolution of real-life administrative situations (i.e. applications for building permits, public subsidies, tax collection). The ACW is not, however, designed to act as a substitute for the legislator's role in the explanation of a regulation. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary research platform for administrative operations. Consequently, each page of the website carries a disclaimer warning users of these dimensions. Despite the ACW being basically a students' project, the public response has been considerable and the frequency of visits has increased regularly (currently approximately 2 million visits, around 1,200 per week – see Figure 1 – with over 50 Gb of data transfer), even among specialists such as officials, who use the ACW as an additional knowledge-providing legal resource. An important role is played here by the Ministry, which as the central State institution in the field of PA (independently in 2009 and, since 2013, as part of the Ministry of the Interior) verifies the project and, through the ACW, with the help of the FA, also implements its role under the APA (Article 322), which requires it to monitor the implementation of the APA and its development both in PA and in relations with parties to administrative procedures.

Figure 1: ACW visitors/users (citizens, officials etc.) per week 2009–2013 (source: FA, own)
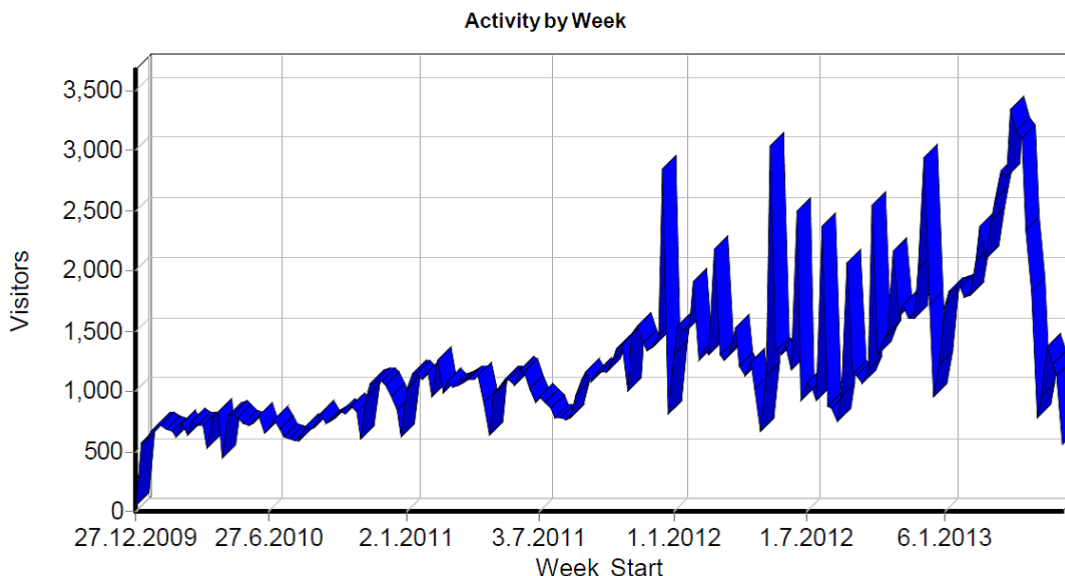
In terms of content and methodology, then the ACW connects two different aspects. First, as regards content, the treatment of administrative law dilemmas, since PA takes place above all via normative activity, but here a fundamental problem arises when we attempt to circumscribe an empirical phenomenon within static legal norms and analyze them using the strictly formal rules of logic. For this reason, when analyzing legal issues, we must first devote attention to understanding (interpreting) the abstract and general legal rule, and then, using a research method, to feedback or information about potential discrepancies between the establishment of the norm and its implementation (cf. Šturm et al., 2011, Kovač et al., 2012), which provides grounds for a regulative feedback loop.

Figure 2: ACW as a networking platform (source: own)
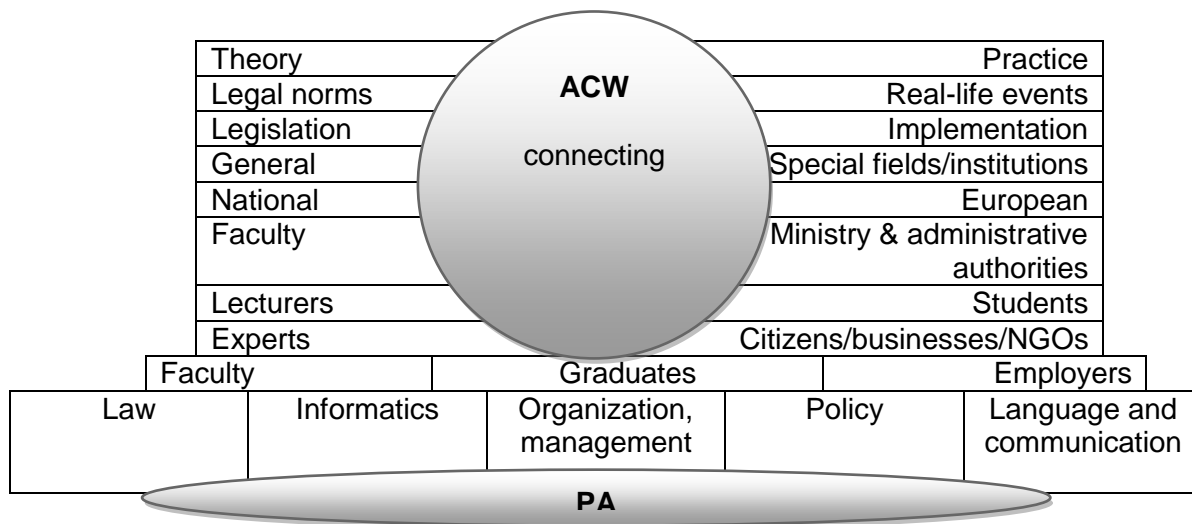
Appropriate interpretations are especially important for citizens, as they usually do not have the specialized knowledge, but the priority of the public interest puts them in a subordinate position; hence understanding of the rights protect them from the authorities' arbitrariness. This is of particular importance since no one can avoid administrative procedures and when the acquired rights have multiplying effects (cf. Rusch, 2011: 2; e.g. an entrepreneur obtaining a building permit for a new facility will employ new workers). In technological terms, the ACW involves the use of Web 2.0 tools, allowing interactivity and facilitating a quick

response from the ACW team of specialists. If there are no explicit answers in the database existed, the IS solution encourages the user to submit a question by e-mail with a reply given in a few days. Different stakeholders in administrative relations participate actively in this process and co-decide in line with good governance, which creates an inclusive networking community (see Figure 2).

Thus, the skills and competitiveness of all participants in these and similar situations are enhanced generally, as each case is generalized to increase its applicability to various administrative areas. In essence, in the case of the ACW, competences are acquired by students, who play a central role in the process of preparing solutions to existing dilemmas. Additionally, and directly on the basis of cases from the ACW, with additional studies of the theory of PA (see Kovač et al., 2012: 25–62) and administrative law practice, two monographs have been published, in 2010 and 2012. Since the ACW provides tangible and growing results on different levels of networking and refers to several EU policies (HR development, life-long learning, e-Europe Action Plan, etc.) the ACW was among 206 applications acknowledged as one of six finalists in three categories in late spring 2013.

3.2   Method of work and the importance of the ACW for students

Students have been a key element of the functional structure of the ACW project from the very beginning, since the aim of the ACW was not only to connect practice and theory at the level of content (practical problems are resolved according to theoretical principles and rules), but also to connect various stakeholders (see flowchart in Kovač & Dečman, 2009: 80). Offering students the opportunity to gain an insight into the real practice of PA, as well as theory, was thus one of the basic aims of the project at the faculty level – with the result that in addition to theoretical knowledge, students acquire practical experience and skills by resolving problems, since the PA study programs offered should correlate with the way PA is practiced in the field (cf. Hajnal, 2003: 253). The ACW introduces problem-based learning as a student-focused didactical approach in which students learn about PA (i.e. administrative procedures) through the experience of resolving real problems from practice. The pedagogical goals of such active learning, usually in the form of teamwork, are to support students in the development of flexible knowledge, effective problem-solving skills, self-directed learning, effective collaboration skills and intrinsic motivation (more in Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

The process of work, which has undergone slight improvements in the light of experience from year to year, is as follows: each new real-life dilemma posted on the website is received by an editor at the faculty. By agreement with the project manager, who is a lecturer and researcher (in most cases a teacher of administrative law, given that the majority of dilemmas come from the field of the APA), the editor examines the posted question to see whether it corresponds in terms of content and methodology to the forms accepted by the ACW as per the restrictions posted on the website homepage. The case is then allocated to a particular student out of the approximately 10 students simultaneously working in a given period, i.e. the winter or summer semester of any academic year, and to his or her tutor. The eight tutors at the FA are in most cases teachers of administrative procedural law, but also of administrative operations and e-administration or informatics; each is responsible for directing a maximum of three students simultaneously. Originally around 400 cases were created on the website, with over 50 students taking part, but since 2011, in view of the existing knowledge base and the growing complexity of the open cases, annual participation is around 15 students per year, generating approximately two to five new cases each week. The work of the students begins with a one-day training period based on the action learning system, with the result that they tackle their first case during the course of their training, following written instructions on the methodology of work (with regard to the content of the work and the use of the wiki system) and the continuous verbal direction of their tutor. Subsequent work takes place for the most part from home via e-channels and on average is concluded in approximately six months per individual participant.

In allocating cases we are particularly careful to ensure that each student is given a range of issues to deal with. In the beginning these were slightly easier, but recently they have become increasingly complex, although each case requires on average five to eight hours of work by the student. The student has approximately three days in which to prepare an answer in wiki form (thereby also practicing his or her IT skills) to the questions that are received on an ongoing basis (approx. two per week), starting from the basic hypothesis which he or she put forward and whose suitability he or she verified at the moment of accepting the work. Each student is constantly guided throughout the process by a teacher who, when forwarding the dilemma to the student (by e-mail), immediately provides specific guidelines on how to approach the problem, what to research, in what resources to expect to find help, etc. In this phase it is important to be careful that the guidelines are suitably balanced: they are designed to help the student but must nevertheless facilitate independent work and an original contribution, both in terms of content (administrative law) and methodology (with regard to research in the field of social sciences and the use of the information system). The essence of the research work of students (and also of teachers and supervisors at the Ministry) in the ACW places a priority on the administrative law aspect, since it involves above all the interpretation of administrative legislation in specific, concrete circumstances, but the legal aspect alone is by no means sufficient. The student is required to define more broadly the administrative systemic dimensions of the problem (i.e. policy, organisation, human resources, management issues). In formulating a solution to an open problem from practice, the essential focus is on the quality not quantity of the discussion. Nevertheless, students must base their answers on established sources from the relevant sector: in each case at least two to three sources that differ by author and type (e.g. one textbook or scholarly article, case law and statistical data).

When analyzing a problem, students confirm or reject the basic hypothesis and provide alternatives until a definite answer to the dilemma is formulated which genuinely represents added value for the user of the website. This is achieved by ensuring that the student has to seek a connection between different administrative institutions and, moreover, to confront theory and case law and, finally, put the case for a specific solution out of several possible solutions. At the same time it is important for the students to work in an organized manner, since the user of the ACW expects a relatively rapid response, while the whole coordination process requires that each participant completes the individual steps within the allocated time, something which trains students for real teamwork in a time-pressured situation. The tutor then reviews the case, offering additional pointers and corrections as necessary, after which the student finalizes the case. Before publication of the case, the editor sends a generalized answer to the Ministry for approval, where in the case of non-compliance (which occurs in approximately 10% of cases) the answer is redefined. Students are kept informed of what is happening with their cases throughout the communication process, while through the learning process they have already been instructed to pay close attention to differences between their own original solutions and those provided by the experienced experts (teachers at the FA and the Ministry) in the final publication phase. At the end of the period, after preparing approximately 15 cases, students must carry out an analysis of contents, study/research methods, problems and lessons and write a final report, which is the basis for recognition of the compulsory course component, i.e. the Research Seminar. In 2013 four students also took on the specific task of preparing selected cases – mainly regarding the rights of foreign nationals – in English. In this way we aimed not only to extend the service to foreign users of the ACW, but also to develop the Tuning competences of the participating students as regards the *Ability to work in an international context* and the *Ability to communicate in a second language*.

In view of the basic purpose of the ACW, in the sense of the resolution of real administrative law dilemmas requested by the users of the website, and given the great interest among students, it was necessary to make a selection of invited and actually participating students. Even at the call for applicants stage, priority was given to postgraduate students, in that they

may be supposed to possess solid previous knowledge and, in most cases, at least some work experience. The conditions for participation stipulated a grade of at least 8/10 in those subjects in the program which are directly connected to the ACW (administrative procedural law, administrative operations, and informatics). Students were warned in advance that the project would include several hours of compulsory technology training, and that the work itself was demanding. Even so, in these four years we have received more than 200 applications. To begin with, in order to establish a critical mass of cases, we selected a larger number after which we selected approximately 15 students each year (see Table 1). In three and a half years a total of 71 second-cycle students have taken part in the ACW, with around a third of them engaged in the project twice. The willingness of students to participate more than once is indicative of the success of the established objectives, but out of a desire to enable more students to participate we limited engagement in such a way that the same student was only able to participate twice at the most while enrolled in the same program. We also took into account the total number of enrolled students/graduates in the study program concerned, i.e. the second-cycle MPA program, which between 2009 and 2013 was on average 170 students enrolled in the first year of the program with approximately 70% progressing to the successive year, where a majority of the students participating in the ACW project were in their second year and progressed normally. This means that through the ACW an average participation of 15% of all students in the program was assured. It is worth highlighting here that among those students who began their studies in the first and second years of the ACW project and who have, to date, been able to graduate with all their study requirements completed on schedule (a total of 50 students of the 314 enrolled), almost half have taken part in the ACW project!

Table 1: No of students involved and published cases (source: ACW, own)

Year	No of all MPA students enrolled in 2nd year	No of students in ACW	Year	No of ACW cases
2009/2010	119	58	2010	671
2010/2011	127	17 = total 75	2011	268 = total 939
2011/2012	110	15 = total 90	2012	**92 = total 1,031
2012/2013	123	15 = total 105*	1 Jan–30 June 2013	131 = total 1,162
All	**479**	*71/479=15%*		*1,162*

*   The figure 105 indicates all forms of student collaboration in the ACW, in both first- and second-cycle programs, while the figure 71 includes MPA students only.
**The number of cases grew at the same rate, in correlation to the response to the ACW among users and the involvement of students, despite the evident increasing complexity, but in 2012, in order to achieve a higher level of complexity, the structure was overhauled by radically reducing the overall number of cases to merely the more complex ones. As a result, growth appears to have fallen.

But the relationship between the ACW and students is not one-way, as though the ACW were merely a source of knowledge and the students the recipients of that knowledge. Instead, the relationship is an interactive loop. Because students play a part in creating such an important project at the faculty and (supra-) national level, an initiative of this kind exploits the potential of, in particular, the faculty as an institution that connects different generations and links theory and administrative practice. Normally the faculty "loses" students when they graduate, but participation in the ACW project means that when, on graduating and taking up employment, those students who previously prepared answers for the website become users of the website themselves, they also become, experience has shown, ambassadors of the project, of the study program, of the faculty as a whole and of PA as a discipline.

4   RESEARCH ON COMPETENCES OF MPA STUDENTS IN THE ACW PROJECT

4.1   Starting points and response to the research

For the purpose of analyzing the development of the competence parameters of students involved in the ACW project, in June 2013 we sent a pre-prepared and tested online questionnaire to the 71 MPA students ("Administration", second cycle, also EAPAA accredited in 2008) who took part in the project between 2009 and 2013. The questionnaire consisted of several sections, for the most part containing statements of the closed type and incorporating some control questions:

1. "Achievement of expectations", where by means of nine elements we established the subjective expectations of students and the differences between their expectations before taking part in the ACW project and the situation today, i.e. one to four years after their three to six month participation in the ACW project;
2. "Development of competences", with a range of 30 general competences, 28 of them taken from the Tuning project;
3. "Advantages of participation" with eight elements;
4. "The ACW as a form of research work for students" with seven elements;
5. demographic data for the analysis of content data depending on the profile of respondents, and
6. two final open questions on opinions and proposals regarding the ACW and the work of students at the FA.

All the elements in the four main sections of the questionnaire were scored on a five-point scale, where 1 represents the lowest score and 5 the highest. Given the qualitative nature of the analysis, the data were processed above all through compilations of average value and standard deviation (SD) and a comparison with the control questions or elements.

If we exclude inactive addresses according to the FA's records (7), a total of 42 students (66%) responded to the questionnaire within two weeks on the basis of the original invitation and one reminder. We estimate the response rate to be statistically adequate for extrapolation of results. It is clear from the demographic data of the respondents that the indicators corresponds to the general population of all students enrolled in this program (approximately one-third male, average age approx. 26, full-time students).

4.2   Analysis of expectations of students and their realization in the ACW project

Through the questionnaire, we verified students' expectations on starting work on the ACW project, immediately on conclusion of the work, and in the present moment, i.e. a number of years after completing this form of education. Below, for the purposes of clarity, we mainly compare results before and after the development of competences via the ACW project. Overall we can state, with regard to all the expectations covered or the realization thereof, that, as anticipated, expectations were evidently highest directly after conclusion of work on the ACW project, where it is however essential to note that expectations today (after 1–4 years) still exceed the initial values before the start of work or on applying for work on the ACW project. Further analysis of this part of the research shows us that, as expected, perceptible differences exist in individual elements depending on the stage of development of the students, i.e. before and after the research work as part of the ACW project. The significance of the average values is confirmed by the standard deviation, in all cases around 1, which expresses the expected limit deviation or the correspondingly uniform views of the respondents (see Table 2). Two segments of the processing of the results are shown below: (1) values by elements and a comparison between them – what expectations are most and least expressed regardless of time or at a specific time and (2) a comparison of the individual element in terms of whether expectation fail all grew over time, since the latter indicates the level of development of permanent competences and therefore the greatest importance of the ACW project within the set of MPA objectives.

From the analysis of values by individual expectations, it emerges that in all phases students gave the highest score to the quality and organisation of work within the ACW project, which we consider an encouraging but predictable result, since considerable attention was devoted to setting up the system and to constantly improving it, in the awareness that excellent research results are conditioned by a structure that is clear in advance and by well-defined guidelines for participants. While working on the project, it appears that cooperation with their direct supervisor, i.e. the tutor, is extremely important to students, since given the complexity and method of the work, a one-to-one relationship is the key to success, both for the completion of tasks and for the development of competences. Or in the words of one of the respondents: "*Personally, I am extremely proud of the fact that I was able to take part in this project and that my contribution was valued!*" We believe that it would be advisable to systematically develop a more permanent system of connections and encouragement for students at the FA, in the first place via those teachers who are their main tutors in elective subjects and research assignments.

Table 2: Results of the survey on student expectations and their realization (source: own)

Expectations (1=min, 5=max)	Before ACW		Today, post-ACW		Difference now -then
	Average	*SD*	*Average*	*SD*	
Acquisition, improvement of specialist knowledge*	3.70	*0.94*	***4.14**	*0.86*	***0.34**
Better understanding of the fields of public administrative and administrative operations*	3.70	*1.10*	***4.14**	*0.89*	***0.34**
Collaboration with a mentor (tutor) in the preparation of answers	3.81	*1.27*	3.65	*1.49*	****-0.16**
*Reward/benefit in the form of recognition of study requirements***	3.53	*1.36*	3.86	*1.31*	0.33
Additional references for knowledge and employment	3.63	*1.17*	3.86	*1.09*	0.23
High-quality, well-organized work in the ACW*	***4.06**	*1.04*	***4.28**	*1.00*	0.22
Opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and abilities to teachers at the FA	3.44	*1.18*	3.59	*1.10*	0.15
Establishing contacts with future employers*	****2.94**	*1.30*	****2.83**	*1.44*	****-0.11**
General satisfaction with participation in FA projects*	***4.08**	*0.94*	4.11	*1.13*	0.03

*Highest and **lowest values.

Roughly speaking the objectives and motives of FA students in the ACW project are achieved or even exceeded in the sense of development of permanent competences, something which is evident despite the clearly unfavorable labor market in the administration sector, where the students should in theory find employment. In the context of the latter, it is not surprising that the element that received the lowest score was the establishing of contacts with employers, something which is an indirect goal of the ACW project or the FA. We consider that there is still room for the FA to make improvements in this segment, so as to help in particular those students/graduates who show research excellence to find employment more quickly in the field and at the level for which they have studied – since most all the respondents are employed but many of them in a different field or at a lower level. At the same time, however, in our research students highlighted the fact that they had obtained (better or more demanding) employment either indirectly or even directly as a result of their participation in the ACW project. It is also worth pointing out that quite a number of respondents indicated that although they are employed outside the field of PA, in companies, the knowledge they obtained from the ACW project is useful to them in their employer's

dealings with administrative bodies. This finding would appear to deserve further consideration, since it suggests that in the future MPA study programs, their objectives, and the desired competences of graduates should be designed not only for public servants but more broadly.

With regard to the objectives set by the FA as the institution responsible for the ACW project, these correspond to the expectations and motivation factors of students, particularly taking into account the priority of the listed expectations and the difference before and after:
1. the highest level of permanently required competence is characterized by "(better) understanding of PA and administrative operations" – the priority ranking of this expectation and its realization, with a final value (after several years) and 4.14 with respect to the initial 3.70, from the point of view of PA as an interdisciplinary field, exceptionally important;
2. the improvement of professional knowledge and the acquisition of references for knowledge and employment, together with general satisfaction in FA projects, with results in comparison to the relatively low scoring expected formal advantages in studying and among teachers (just 3.4–3.9), indicates that we have managed to attract better students to the ACW project, where it would be desirable to develop differentiated platforms at the FA for less competent students in order to achieve a holistically planned MPA program, and perhaps at the same time introduce a more systemic recognition of study requirements, since under the accredited MPA program practically the only possibility remains the "Research Seminar" as a compulsory subject worth 8 ECTS credits.

The above is also confirmed by the open answers of respondents, where in terms of the results of their work (and not only expectations and benefits), the majority of students indicate that they have obtained above all "better understanding" of the field and competences in research, analysis and written expression. In quite a number of cases (6/71) they have also directly obtained employment. To conclude, in the field of expected benefits, the participation of students has achieved the research and study objectives of the project, and therefore the ACW is a role model for similar forms of inclusion of students from other groups and programs, while in the future specific points should be strengthened even in the case of the ACW project, in particular the attention paid by the FA to the employability of the best graduates.

4.3   The general competence development of the participating students
The second part of the questionnaire related to the research question of whether the students who participated in the ACW project had developed the generic competences defined by the Tuning project as important. The development of the individual is increasingly frequently monitored via the development of competences. Tuning distinguishes generic and subject-specific competences. Generic competences are transferable and prepare all students for their future role in society in terms of employability and citizenship (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2007). The Tuning competences are described as reference points for the development of curricula. They allow flexibility and autonomy in curriculum design. They are also relevant to ongoing professional development, as they are overarching statements and competence will continue to be developed throughout one's career. The Tuning project defined 31 generic competences. For our purposes, 28 of these were included in the research (in view of the nature of the topic studied, i.e. PA, we excluded *Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues*, *Commitment to safety* and *Commitment to the conservation of the environment*), while two more competences that seemed to us to be important in view of the focus and nature of the MPA program were added. These were *Basic general knowledge in the field of study* and *Ability to work in an interdisciplinary group.*

Table 3 shows the results provided by the respondents, namely the extent to which participation in the ACW project helps them develop a particular competence, ranked on a

scale from 1 (the lowest score, corresponding to "Despite participating in the project I did not additionally develop the competence") to 5 (the highest score, corresponding to "By participating in the project I developed the competence to the level that is necessary in order to work successfully in this field"). The respondents gave the highest average score (AM=4.39) to *Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations*, where the standard deviation in the average score for this competence was lowest (0.72). The assessment of the level of development of this competence deviates from the average values of the other competences. From the point of view of the original objective of the ACW project, the result appears to be very important and confirms the correctness and justification of the ACW project from the point of view both of the method, which supports the educational process (the development of competences), and of the practical applicability of the results of the work. The respondents also rated as extremely important the development of competence *Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession* (AM=4.19) and *Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and responsibilities taken* (AM=4.16). On the basis of these results, we may conclude that the respondents connect the success of their own work with expertise in the field studied.

The respondents rated as of roughly similar importance of the level of the element of competences *Basic general knowledge in the field of study, Ability to search for, process and analyze information from a variety of sources, Ability to work on a mostly, Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems, Ability to make reasoned decisions, and Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced, ability to be critical and self-critical* (all arithmetic means between 4.03 and 3.97). This competence is a closely connected to the approach to research work and the ability to break down, analyze and synthesize answers or solutions. All these results correspond completely to the previously defined expectations and their realization.

The respondents believe (see Table 3) that of the competences listed, those that are least developed in the ACW project of those connected to international cooperation or context, which given the nature of the ACW project is entirely understandable (*Appreciation of and respect for diversity and multiculturality* – AM=2.33, *Ability to work in an international context* – AM=2.43, and *Ability to communicate in a second language* – AM=2.33). It is perhaps slightly surprising to see the competence *Spirit of enterprise, ability to take initiative* ranked (only) 24th in terms of level of development. Given the level of the study program, it would be worth devoting more attention in future to encouraging initiative, in the sense of finding and resolving problematic situations, and at the same time promoting the student's own effectiveness in the labor market and spirit of enterprise.

Alongside the competences from the Tuning project, we added two further competences which we believed to be significantly connected to second-cycle studies and the idea of the ACW, namely *Ability to work in interdisciplinary team,* and *Basic general knowledge in the field of study.* Good general knowledge in the interdisciplinary field of PA enables an integrated approach to a problem or solution. The respondents in fact confirm the importance and development of the competence *Basic general knowledge in the field of study* (rank 4, AM= 4.03), but this does not apply to the competence *Ability to work in an interdisciplinary group* (rank 23, AM=3.20), probably as a result of the fact that most communication within the team in the ACW project is by electronic means only.

Table 3: Results of the survey of the development of competences of students (source: own)

Competences	Arithm. mean AM	SD	Ranks						
			Total	Gender		Age (in years)		Length of participation (in months)	
				M	F	up to 26	26 and over	up to 6	6 and over
Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations	4.39	0.72	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession	4.19	0.91	2	2	4	4	2	2	2
Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and responsibilities taken	4.16	1.13	3	6	2	6	4	4	4
Basic general knowledge in the field of study	4.03	1.02	4	10	3	3	7	5	8
Ability to search for, process and analyze information from a variety of sources	4.03	1.02	5	11	5	7	5	3	11
Ability to work autonomously	4.03	1.17	6	4	8	9	6	12	3
Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems	4.00	1.21	7	17	6	8	9	8	6
Ability to make reasoned decisions	4.00	1.13	8	3	10	16	3	7	10
Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced	4.00	1.15	9	5	11	5	10	9	7
Ability to be critical and self-critical	3.97	1.05	10	12	7	11	8	10	5
Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level	3.90	1.11	11	16	9	10	11	6	14
Ability to adapt to and act in new situations	3.90	0.91	12	13	12	2	15	11	9
Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)	3.81	0.98	13	14	13	12	12	13	12
Ability for abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis	3.65	0.91	14	7	14	14	13	14	16
Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language	3.65	1.17	15	8	15	13	17	18	13
Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning	3.65	1.25	16	9	16	15	14	15	15
Ability to work in a team	3.47	1.31	17	20	17	20	16	17	17
Ability to communicate with non-experts of one's field	3.35	1.33	18	23	18	19	19	20	19
Interpersonal and interaction skills	3.23	1.28	19	25	20	22	21	22	22
Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning	3.23	1.61	20	29	19	17	27	24	18
Ability to plan and manage time	3.23	1.12	21	15	24	18	24	23	21
Skills in the use of information and communications technologies	3.23	1.56	22	18	21	21	22	16	25
Ability to work in an interdisciplinary group	3.20	1.24	23	21	22	23	23	19	23
Spirit of enterprise, ability to take initiative	3.19	1.42	24	22	23	24	20	25	20
Ability to design and manage projects	3.16	1.34	25	19	25	26	18	21	26
Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness	2.93	1.44	26	27	26	25	25	26	24
Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals	2.68	1.28	27	24	27	28	26	27	28
Ability to work in an international context	2.43	1.50	28	28	28	27	29	29	27
Ability to communicate in a second language	2.33	1.47	29	26	30	30	28	28	30
Appreciation of and respect for diversity and multiculturality	2.33	1.45	30	30	29	29	30	30	29

When reviewing the results in terms of gender, age (up to 26 vs. 26 and over, and length of participation in the project (up to 6 months vs. 6 months and over), we find that there are no statistically significant differences between the groups. An ANOVA test however shows that

statistically significant differences (p<0.05) regarding the assessment of factors the fluctuation occur for three competences, if we compare them in terms of gender, namely *Basic general knowledge in the field of study, Ability to search for, process and analyze information from variety of sources,* and *Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems.* Slightly greater discrepancies in terms of rank are observed in the case of three other competences:

- *Ability to adapt to and act in new situations*; younger participants assess it as very important, rank 2),
- *Ability to work autonomously*; those who participated for 6 months or more assess it as much more important (rank 3) than those who participated for less than 6 months (12),
- *Ability to search for, process and analyze information from a variety of sources*; those who participated for up to 6 months estimated as much more important (rank 3) on those who participated for 6 months or more (11).

The results lead us to a consideration of a potential selective approach to students, not of course from the point of view of the difficulty of the tasks allocated or the required knowledge, but from the point of view of the preferences of individual groups. In the case of younger participants, it would be worth devoting even more attention to the development of certain competences, skills or personal characteristics (independence, self-confidence, understanding, etc) which will help them build the figure of an autonomous and professional public official.

4.4   Benefits for students

During the course of participation in the ACW project, above all on the basis of daily e-communication and conversations, the tutors encouraged and also perceived potential benefits for students. In our research, we verified eight advantages (see Table 4) which in the opinion of the tutors the participants should have obtained. The respondents assessed the extent to which individual benefits of the project apply to them personally. We used a scale ranging from 1=*not the case* to 5=*strongly agree.* In the opinion of the respondents, the biggest advantage of participation in the ACW project (AM=4.53) was that through participation in the project they raised their level of knowledge in the fields of administrative law and administrative operations or e-operations (depending on the selected topic of study). Here once again it is interesting that the standard deviation in the average of these scores is the lowest among the eight advantages studied or assessed (SD=0.63). A high average score confirmed not only the results of the assessment of the Department of competences in the WC project, but is a convincing argument that one of the key objectives of the project was achieved, namely raising the level of theoretical knowledge in order to address technical issues (including the most demanding ones) in the studied field in concrete practice. An important realization for the development of the competences of second-cycle graduates or "new" employees is their assessment that as a result of participation in the project they feel more self-confident in the studied field. Self-confidence represents the building block of competence (alongside motivation) that to a large degree contributes to allowing someone who "knows how" to do something to actually perform a task, i.e. "dare" do it.

It is slightly surprising that the respondents rank in last place among the competitive advantages obtained through participation in the ACW project the obtaining, through working practice, of useful information (Web 2.0) and technology skills and knowledge. In view of the fact that in the majority of cases this was their first introduction to and use of wiki/Web 2.0 tools, and that special training was devoted to this, we expected the respondents to give greater importance to this area among the advantages listed. Even so, it is worth mentioning that the average scores given to the advantages are relatively high and the average score is in any case still relatively high (AM=3.94), while even the average score for technology is not low (AM=3.38).

Table 4: Results of the survey on estimated benefits – values and ranks (source: own)

	AM	SD	Ranks	Gender		Age (in years)		Participation (in months)	
			Total	M	F	up to 26	26 and over	up to 6	6 and over
Through participation in the project I have raised my level of specialist knowledge in administrative law or/and administrative/ e-operations	4.53	*0.63*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
As a result of participation in the project, I feel more self-confident in the field	4.23	*1.04*	2	4	2	2	3	2	2
Through participation in the project I have acquired skills in problem-solving (complex real-life situations) and expression that I can apply in practice	4.03	*1.13*	3	6	3	5	2	5	3
The knowledge and skills acquired through the ACW project help me in my work	3.93	*1.23*	4	3	5	6	4	3	6
Through participation in the project I have gained other knowledge that I can apply in practice (e.g. organisation of administration, legislative procedure, English)	3.90	*1.03*	5	5	4	4	5	4	5
I have used (or am still using) the knowledge gained to good effect in my (further) studies	3.90	*1.27*	6	2	6	3	6	6	4
The method of work learnt in the ACW project is useful to me in terms of research method (making specific hypotheses and verifying them) in my practical work	3.59	*1.27*	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Through participation I have gained useful IT (Web 2.0) and communication skills and knowledge	3.38	*1.24*	8	8	8	8	8	8	8

AS regards the ranks, there are no significant differences between the groups in terms of gender, age or length of participation. The only slight divergence is the assessment that respondents have been able to use the knowledge acquired in the WC project to good effect (or still doing so) in their (further) studies (men, rank 2; participants younger than 26, rank 3).

The results of the assessments of the development of competences and the benefits of participating ACW project confirm the justification of the project. Furthermore, they connect in a very direct manner the expectations of concrete practice with regard to the knowledge of graduates, the expectations of the faculty with regard to learning outcomes and the achievement of competences, and, above all with regard to the students who, through their work, in addition to everything else, have obtained confirmation and the confidence of knowing that they possess knowledge which the market needs and values. This is something that is often very necessary in practice.

4.5   Analysis of students' research competences

Because when including MPA students in the ACW project we proceeded from the research-based nature of the work on the project, or the application of theoretical knowledge from the study program to real problems from PA, we conducted a special analysis of the development of competences connected to research in PA. From the results of the survey in this part (see Table 5), it is evident that the responses of the students are very uniform, precisely in those elements were respondents indicated the highest average values, which means that the latter are particularly significant. Taking into account the specific nature of research in PA, as defined in introduction, with an emphasis on the interdisciplinarity of the field and its integration in society through the necessary addressing the real problems, the ACW as a research platform achieves the set objectives of building competences of this type in the graduates of second-cycle study programs. We can claim this in particular on the basis of the high value achieved in the case of statement No 4 (4.44/5) in connection with Nos 5 and 6 (4.36 in 4.21/5), which relate to the reality of the problems addressed and the related challenge, motivation and responsibility in work.

The next important conclusion with regard to the results is the finding that the research and interactive dimensions of the work of the students in the ACW project are significant, in particular with regard to the connection between the objectives and competences pursued by the MPA study program (see values at Nos 1–3). But when research is conducted or research work is incorporated into the education process, it is necessary to direct the work of students in a coordinated manner from the point of view of (1) content and (2) methodology. In terms of content, above all through the further development of interdisciplinary insight into the issues and, in terms of methodology, as one of the respondents put it, in the sense of "*placing greater emphasis on the method of analysis of the problems themselves, because if you are unable to identify what the actual problem is and separate the essential from the inessential, then the solution is generalized and not usable.*" At the same time we find that the research approach, in the sense of a transition from creators of the ACW website in the role of students to the role of users (see values at No 7) only remains with graduates to a limited extent, since despite the inevitable role of each one of us as parties to administrative procedures, it is conditioned by interest in the field, in as much as graduates find employment in PA and interest themselves in problem-solving (also) in an official capacity (the divergence is indicated here by the relatively high SD).

Table 5: Results of the survey on the importance of the ACW as a research-based study form (source: own)

Elements / Research value (1=min, 5=max)	Average	SD
While working on the ACW project or later I recognized the research-based method of work in this project	3.75	1.27
The research-based nature of the ACW corresponded to the objectives of the study program in which I was enrolled	4.00	1.19
My mentor (tutor) provided me with suitable guidance and assistance in the research-based method of work	***4.46**	****1.00**
Thanks to the real-life dilemmas which we addressed in the ACW project, I learned more than I would have otherwise	***4.44**	****1.00**
As a result of addressing real-life dilemmas, I realized that my job is a (more) responsible one	4.36	1.03
During the project I was motivated by the awareness that my work or the collective work of participants will be useful in real life (a "real" project, not a fictitious or merely textbook one)	4.21	1.13
After completing work on the project/completing my studies I became a user of the ACW (as an official or a party involved in a procedure)	***3.61*	**1.42*

*Highest and **lowest values.

Materia and form must, however, match each other, in other words for the addressing of legal and broader PA problems, the use of a combination of normative and empirical methods, as in the ACW project, is appropriate. The ACW thus does not represent one more

additional form which repeats an existing type of teaching, but offers added value as a new type of study. Real-life situations which students (especially postgraduate students) are required to address and which are not fictitious "textbook" examples, are therefore of key importance in the development of competences in and for PA. Or in the words of one of the respondents: "*The ACW project is extremely useful, I recommend it to all students […] because it involves real-life cases where you feel responsible and important*." It emerges from the open answers given by respondents that it is for this very reason that students have developed (permanent) competences and, last but not least, obtained references for employment, if not actual employment.

The great majority of respondents highlighted the overall usefulness of contents and methods of work like those in the ACW project, often not only in direct connection with the field of employment, but also for their own personal needs and development or, as one of the respondents states, participation in projects like the ACW "*provides the necessary self-confidence*" for addressing both professional tasks and personal problems. From the point of view of the development of study programs for the field of PA, it is the view of quite a number of respondents in this research study, as those responsible for the ACW, that it is advisable to devote special attention – including in the theoretical parts of the program – not only to a multidisciplinary approach (e.g. the sum of legal, IT, organizational and other aspects of the functioning of PA; cf. Hajnal, 2003: 255, Barnes, 2008: 51, Kovač et al., 2012: 33), but also to a (more) interdisciplinary approach (cf. van der Krogt & Reichard, 2012: 2) which leads to the development of an autonomous administrative science.

5   CONCLUSIONS

As a case study of the development of the competences of postgraduate PA students through research work, in our opinion ACW shows the enormous potential of problem-based learning or the development of combined competences of (postgraduate) students in the field of PA, taking into account the integrated nature of PA as a social system which is not only a working organisation but also a pillar of public governance. The results of the analysis carried out of the objectives and achievements of the ACW show this project as a genuine networking platform which, among other things, connects theory (the faculty and researchers, or norms) and practice (administrative authorities and parties as participants in administrative relationships and graduates as jobseekers, or the implementation of norms). Moreover ACW builds various specialist fields in PA and, thus, the competences of students into an interdisciplinary research-based approach to problem-solving. Last but not least, the ACW connects the faculty and – via cooperation and the verification of solutions – the relevant Ministry, which means that the State recognizes the importance and trusts the abilities of students and teachers at the Faculty.

From the point of view of student participation or the teaching method and PA, it is apparent from analysis of the results of the survey among participating students that most important component of this form of work is that students get the opportunity to tackle real-life problems in administration. This aspect establishes added value in the educational sense and, in terms of connections with employers and through the use of ACW solutions on the part of all groups of participants in administrative relationships (citizens, officials, etc.), positions the faculty in the social system as a mediator between theory and practice in PA. It is clear from the research that such an approach in the teaching process directly develops precisely those competences, in relation to understanding the breath and complexity of PA issues, which international schemes such as Tuning and EAPAA consider most important, whether in study programs or in working practice.

In terms of the further development both of the ACW and of research initiatives for students enrolled in the (post-)graduate programs of the Faculty of Administration, the opportunities and at the same time the needs are great. In methodological terms, we would like to develop

an even higher degree of independence, interdisciplinarity and interactivity among the participating students, or in other words differentiate the offer with regard to the needs and interests of (sub-)groups of students. The outline concept of problem-based learning is transferable to other areas of work of the faculty and beyond. Similarly, in view of the globalization of society and the PA, it would be logical to adapt at least selected contents for work with foreign students, and strengthen the connection with non-governmental organizations and, in particular, employers, since their needs determine the labor market and the destiny of graduates – and thus also of the FA. In terms of research, it would also be desirable to build on our findings through a comparison of the competences acquired by all students enrolled in the MPA program and those acquired by participants in the ACW project. This would give us an additional controlled insight and analytical basis in terms of the connection between the method and results of teaching in terms of the competence profile of graduates. Despite opportunities for additional improvements, we may conclude that the results of inclusion of MPA students in the ACW project can serve as a role model for providers of MPA study programs in the wider European context.

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