

## Editorial Note

### 1. Background and Objective of the Current Volume

The Local Autonomy College, operating under Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), is a leading institution for research and training in public administration, both within Japan and across the broader Asian region. It also hosts the Local Government Center of the Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration (EROPA) in Tokyo, positioning itself as a key research hub alongside similar centers in China, India, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The Tokyo center is committed to advancing knowledge and fostering innovation in public administration, with particular emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region.

Every three years, the EROPA Local Government Center in Tokyo undertakes an academic initiative by publishing the *Comparative Public Administration* book series. The forthcoming 14th volume, scheduled for release in 2025, will be dedicated to the theme: “Addressing Different Challenges of Local Government in Asia: Enhancing Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Equity (TAPE) in the Age of Technological Advancements.” Previous volumes have explored critical topics such as democracy, development, depopulation, and civil society within the context of local governance.

The upcoming volume aims to examine four pivotal governance challenges faced by local governments in Asia—Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Equity (TAPE)—in light of rapid technological advancement. Transparency is essential for building public trust and encouraging civic engagement; accountability ensures that government actions remain aligned with citizens’ needs; participation is exercised through democratic mechanisms such as elections; and equity involves the fair distribution of resources and opportunities. In an era increasingly defined by emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), upholding these principles are more critical than ever. The volume will investigate how local governments can preserve these values while adapting to technological transformations, with an emphasis on the Asian context. By framing the discourse through the acronym “TAPE,” the volume seeks to enhance its accessibility and appeal to a broader readership interested in the dynamics of governance, technology, and regional public administration.

The editorial board of the EROPA Local Government Center at Japan's Local Autonomy College has invited a diverse group of competent authors to contribute scholarly articles to this volume. Contributors chose to address one or more of the TAPE principles within the context of their own countries, or offer a comprehensive analysis covering all four. The approach to these challenges—especially in relation to emerging technologies—is left to the authors’ discretion.

## 2. Contour of Volume 14 of the *Comparative Public Administration* Book Series

Following a rigorous and extensive selection process, the editorial committee unanimously nominated Professor Dr. Sabine Kuhlmann of the University of Potsdam, Germany, to serve as a lead author for this volume.

Professor Kuhlmann is a full professor of public administration and public policy at the University of Potsdam. She also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *International Review of Administrative Sciences* (IRAS), the flagship journal of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS). In recognition of her outstanding contributions to the field, she was appointed to Germany's National Regulatory Control Council in 2021 and elected as Fellow of the U.S. National Academy of Public Administration in September 2024.

For this volume, Professor Kuhlmann contributed a compelling chapter titled “European Local Governments Facing the Crisis: Pandemic Governance in a Multilevel System.” Her analysis focuses on the COVID-19 responses of five European countries—France, the United Kingdom (England), Sweden, Poland, and Germany—within the framework of multilevel governance. The chapter offers conceptual insights into the roles and responsibilities of local governments during crisis management, emphasizing their varying capacities and responses.

Professor Kuhlmann argues that although crises such as pandemics are global phenomena, comprehensive, theory-informed comparative studies on disaster governance remain scarce. She points out that despite the global reach of the COVID-19 pandemic, serious comparative research on governance responses is still limited. Important questions—such as how local self-government shaped crisis responses, whether municipalities demonstrated resilience or powerlessness, and what factors explain cross-country variation—remain largely unanswered due to insufficient empirical evidence. She also highlights the lack of comparative studies on coordination between local and higher levels of government, which hampers efforts to identify and understand national differences and their root causes.

## 3. China

In addition to the European case, the current volume features seven case studies from Asian countries, all of which are long-standing members of the Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration (EROPA). The contribution from China comes from Professor Zhu Xufeng, one of the country’s most esteemed scholars in public policy and currently Dean of the School of Public Policy and Management at Tsinghua University.

At the outset of his paper, Professor Zhu notes that much of the existing analysis of Chinese administrative policy has been framed through the lens of centralization. He argues that the predominant influence of the central government has often overshadowed the study of local governance dynamics. His paper focuses on two major areas: the diffusion of policy innovation and policy experimentation. He asserts that previous research has typically examined these themes within the context of a highly centralized

governmental structure, where strong vertical control by central authorities dominates policy direction. This has long characterized China's governance model.

However, Professor Zhu's analysis shifts attention to more decentralized settings, where local governments are playing an increasingly significant role in both policy formulation and implementation. His study on the diffusion of policy innovation highlights how vertical mandates from the central government coexist with horizontal competition among local governments—both serving as key drivers of innovation. Similarly, his research on experimentalist governance demonstrates how interactive relationships between central and local authorities facilitate the development and evaluation of new policies. He emphasizes the growing importance of local feedback in shaping and refining national policy directions.

#### **4. Indonesia**

Prof. Agus Pramusinto of Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, is the third author of this volume. He earned both his M.A. (1997) and Ph.D. (2005) from the Asia Pacific School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University. Prof. Pramusinto served as Chair of the Indonesian Civil Service Commission for four years, concluding his term in 2022. In his contribution to this volume, Prof. Pramusinto examines Indonesia's decentralization policies in the digital era. He notes that public demands for local government authority date back to colonial times, though significant decentralization only began in 1999 under President B.J. Habibie. This reform introduced greater regional autonomy, improved revenue distribution, and more democratic local elections.

Prof. Pramusinto witnesses that in recent years, local leaders in many countries have adopted digital technologies to enhance public services, with the aim of increasing transparency and accountability. However, corruption continues to persist—largely due to the high costs of local elections and the enduring “gift-giving culture” prevalent in many developing economies. In some instances, he notes that both devolution and delegation of administrative powers to local governments have expanded the influence of “money politics.” This phenomenon, a key dimension of realpolitik, unfortunately remains a persistent feature of political life in parts of Asia.

#### **5. Japan**

The Japan section of this volume has been prepared by a distinguished group of public officials. The lead author, Mr. Ogawa Yamato, is a member of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC). Until 2026, however, he is serving as a faculty member at a private university, where he teaches public administration. Upon completing his academic tenure, he is expected to return to the MIC. The second author, Mr. Masaki Yusuke, is also a central government official and currently serves as the Chief Digital Officer for the City of Kobe. Once his term in Kobe concludes, he will likewise return to the MIC to continue his national-level responsibilities. In contrast to these national officials, Mr. Abe Yasuhiro serves in local government as a member of the Chiba City administration. His career has been rooted in the local public sector, where he is expected to remain until retirement.

Together, these authors have collaborated to produce an engaging manuscript. The

primary objective of their joint work is to explore and clarify the theoretical implications of the core concept of “TAPE,” namely transparency, accountability, participation, and equity. Mr. Ogawa serves as the principal investigator for the study, while Mr. Masaki and Mr. Abe provide insights from their respective affiliations with Kobe and Chiba. With populations of over half a million each, both Chiba and Kobe are among Japan’s twenty Designated Cities—a special administrative classification that grants these municipalities authority over a broad range of functions typically managed at the prefectoral level.

In Kobe, Mr. Masaki has worked to make administrative data more accessible through an initiative called the “Kobe Data Lounge.” This project promotes better understanding of various aspects of city management by allowing citizens and officials alike to view and interpret data at a glance. Notably, Kobe became the first city in Japan to implement a comprehensive AI ordinance in March 2024, marking a significant advancement in rule development. Additionally, the city introduced “D-Agree,” an AI-facilitated online platform for consensus-building, following a successful demonstration experiment in April 2023.

Chiba City has also been a pioneer in digital participation. In September 2014, it became the first city in Japan to launch “Chiba Repo,” a system that allows residents to report local issues via ICT tools, thereby facilitating rational and efficient problem-solving. Regarding equity, Chiba introduced Japan’s first push-type System Notification Service, “For You,” in January 2021. This service delivers tailored notifications based on individual eligibility, ensuring more equitable access to information and services. Both Kobe and Chiba, as government-designated cities with similarly large populations, are vigorously advancing digitalization across all policy areas in alignment with Japan’s “Smart City” vision.

## 6. The Republic of Korea

The Korean case study is conducted by two scholars from Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul: Professor Minhyo Cho and her Ph.D. student, Minjung Kim. Their research explores the innovation process underlying the implementation of digital fiscal and tax administration systems in South Korea’s local governments. It also evaluates the impact of these systems on the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of public administration.

The study finds that the integration of digital technologies has become a crucial approach for streamlining local governance and enhancing fiscal transparency. The authors attribute the successful implementation of the Local Fiscal Information System (FIS) and the Taxation Information System (TIS) to government-led legislative initiatives and a collaborative governance model involving public institutions, private sector actors, and end users. By digitizing administrative procedures, these systems have significantly improved the operational efficiency and transparency of local fiscal and tax administration. Notable features—such as electronic tax notifications and simplified authentication processes for online services, enabled through partnerships with private companies—have enhanced the convenience and accessibility of tax-related services.

Despite these advances, challenges remain. These include improving digital accessibility for older populations and addressing design flaws in digital platforms to promote

broader user engagement. Such limitations highlight the need for continued development to ensure the long-term sustainability and inclusivity of digital fiscal systems. Overall, the study concludes that while digital transformation has delivered considerable benefits to local governance in South Korea, sustained innovation and robust support mechanisms are vital for maintaining and expanding these gains.

## 7. Malaysia

This chapter is a significant contribution organized by a renowned female professor in Malaysia, Prof. Loo-See Beh. She is a faculty member at the School of Business and Technology, International Medical University (IMU), Kuala Lumpur. Her paper, titled “Local Government and Smart City Development in Malaysia,” offers a comprehensive examination of the country’s evolving local governance and technological landscape.

The chapter delves into the multifaceted challenges surrounding decentralization, elections, trust, transparency, accountability, open government data, and the enhancement of service quality. Prof. Beh analyzes these issues through the lens of a research study she conducted between late 2023 and early 2024. The paper primarily focuses on the implementation of Malaysia’s newly established “Smart City Framework”—particularly in Putrajaya, the nation’s administrative capital, as well as in other cities still in the early phases of adoption.

Prof. Beh argues that, as the government addresses these challenges, the Malaysian public sector continues to respond to citizens’ increasing expectations for improved service delivery and the expansion of urban green spaces. These efforts aim to foster greater livability, sustainability, and public trust. According to the author, achieving these goals requires strong collaboration and meaningful engagement among a diverse range of stakeholders. Such cooperation is essential to create an environment conducive to consensus-building around inclusive and transparent priorities and solutions.

At the heart of this endeavor is the need to strengthen key enablers that support national development and long-term sustainability. Addressing the intertwined issues of trust and governance is critical to driving progress in innovation, digital transformation, and competitiveness across federal, state, and local government entities—as well as among citizens. The paper emphasizes that smart city development is not merely a physical undertaking but rather a comprehensive approach to fostering sustainable and inclusive growth.

## 8. Nepal

Mr. Shiva Hari Adhikari, a faculty member at the Nepal Administrative Staff College, exemplifies a research approach common among Southeast Asian academics. In his contribution, he analyzes Nepal’s political landscape using a historical-descriptive method. Although not highly empirical or statistical, his analysis remains engaging, logically argued, and clearly structured. From the editor’s perspective, the article could have gained further recognition as one of the most objective and scientifically grounded pieces in the volume had it incorporated more empirical data and quantitative analysis.

Mr. Adhikari begins by highlighting Nepal’s ongoing efforts to make political participation more inclusive and accessible. The government has taken steps to encourage

historically marginalized groups—such as women and ethnic minorities—to engage in the political process. However, the author argues that converting participatory intentions into tangible policies and programs remains a significant challenge. Several barriers impede this transformation, chief among them the limited technical capacity within governance institutions, which constrains the development of diverse, evidence-based policymaking. Additionally, the presidential model at the local level can blur lines of authority, leading to confusion and inefficiencies in governance.

A notable strength of Adhikari's article is its attention to Nepal's geographic diversity. While this may appear peripheral, it is crucial for understanding the administrative, financial, and developmental fragmentation that continues to affect the country. He notes deep-rooted institutional divisions, particularly at the local level, though he also observes a growing recognition within the government of the importance of community engagement and responsive governance—signaling a gradual shift toward participatory democracy.

In conclusion, while Adhikari offers a well-grounded historical overview of Nepal's political development, a more comprehensive analysis would benefit from greater empirical depth and broader consideration of both internal dynamics and external pressures shaping the country's democratic trajectory.

To build on Adhikari's analysis, several factors merit further attention. First is federal restructuring. Since the adoption of the 2015 Constitution, Nepal's transition to federalism has opened avenues for decentralization, though implementation remains uneven. Second, the country's ethnic and cultural diversity presents ongoing challenges for inclusive governance, with insufficient policies risking deeper societal divisions. In addition, youth and civil society—though often underrepresented—are increasingly active in promoting accountability and democratic reform. Political instability also plays a significant role in this mountainous nation; frequent government turnover and a politicized bureaucracy hinder administrative consistency. Lastly, Nepal's geopolitical position between China and India continues to influence its governance and reform agenda. In sum, while Adhikari provides a strong historical account, a fuller analysis should address how Nepal's internal complexities and external pressures shape its democratic trajectory.

## **9. Philippines**

Prof. Lizan E. Perante-Calina has contributed an article titled “Digital Governance: Local Governments’ Transformation Journey Towards Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Equity (TAPE)” to a recent issue of *Comparative Public Administration*. She currently serves as the Dean of the Graduate School of Public and Development Management at the Development Academy of the Philippines. Additionally, she is the President of both the Philippine Society for Public Administration and the Philippine Futures Thinking Society. These roles underscore her prominence as one of the most distinguished scholars and practitioners in the field of public administration in the Philippines.

According to Prof. Perante-Calina, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, local governments in the Philippines have faced a range of pressing and previ-

ously unforeseen challenges. The spread of the highly contagious and deadly virus has confronted local government units (LGUs) with complex medical and governance issues that offer no immediate or simple solutions. Addressing these challenges may require years of rigorous scientific research and adaptive policymaking before effective interventions can be fully realized.

Moreover, as Prof. Perante-Calina emphasizes, the pandemic has highlighted a new set of governance imperatives, encapsulated in the acronym “TAPE” — Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Equity. These principles have become essential across all levels of government and are now central to governance reform discourse. However, addressing these evolving challenges requires the integration of new digital technologies. While this shift is urgent, it is hampered by the need for increased financial investment and a more digitally skilled workforce.

Prof. Perante-Calina also strongly advocates for mainstreaming evidence-based policymaking, particularly through empirical surveys—a practice not traditionally emphasized in local governance. She argues that this approach should become a cornerstone of future reforms to ensure more responsive and effective local governance systems.

## 10. Concluding Remarks

At the onset of this project, the editorial board sent a total of ten invitations to ERO-PA members to contribute articles addressing various aspects of “TAPE.” Unfortunately, we did not receive a submission from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. We deeply regret Vietnam’s absence in this volume and sincerely hope for their participation in the 15th volume of *Comparative Public Administration*, which is scheduled to be published in three years.

On behalf of the President of the Local Autonomy College and the editorial board, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the authors who contributed to the 14th volume of *Comparative Public Administration*. Each author dedicated considerable time and effort to produce articles with strong theoretical foundations and insightful analysis of their respective countries’ political environments. The final volumes will be distributed to various countries at the end of November 2025. Should there be a shortage of copies, the Local Autonomy College is prepared to send additional copies by air.

Finally, as Editor-in-Chief, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Prof. Maria Fe Villamejor-Mendoza for her editorial support. Despite her busy schedule as a professor of public administration, she devoted significant time and energy to reviewing and refining the drafts, providing invaluable assistance in strengthening both their content and argumentation. I am deeply thankful for her contributions to the editing process. All participating authors likewise extend their heartfelt gratitude for her tireless work and dedication.

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