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POLICY PLANNING SYSTEM IN GEORGIA: EVOLUTION AND ENDOGENOUS CHALLENGES

ABSTRACT: *Policy planning maintains its relevance across public policy, administration, and politics, spanning academia and practical application. The latter represents pivotal elements within the European Union's public administration framework and their significance within the European Neighborhood Policy. Georgia strives to align its institutional and policy design with Sigma-OECD standards and has been harmonizing with the EU acquis since 2014. The article aims to study Georgia's policy planning system, describe its evolution, and identify endogenous challenges using qualitative methods like in-depth interviews and document analyses. Employing the multiple streams theory, the paper examines system changes, presenting new agendas in policy planning and coordination. It highlights key challenges such as aligning stated goals with actual practices, incremental progress within the system, insufficient financial support, inefficiencies in resource utilization, and heavy reliance on political will. Additionally, it addresses the lack of empirical evidence and cultural non-compliance in achieving an evidence-based policy (EBP), results-based management (RBM), and whole-of-government (WOG) approaches.*

KEYWORDS: Public administration reform; Sigma/OECD; Policy development; Policy-making; Government policy.

1. Introduction

Policy planning maintains its relevance across the domains of public policy, administration, and politics, spanning from academia and science to practical application (Prince & Chenier, 1980; Forester, 1993; Harris & Hooper, 2004; Innes & Booher, 2010; Agyeman, 2013; Gaber, 2020; Gerencsér, 2023). It stands as a significant pillar within the EU's methodological framework for public administration and simultaneously, holds importance in the public administration methodology of the European Neighborhood Policy (Hill, 2018).

By the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union (EU) in 2014, Georgia assumed the responsibility of harmonizing policies, including aligning its public administration system with EU acquis. Since 2015, public administration reform (PAR) in Georgia has been launched and has prioritised policy planning and coordination as one of its key directions. The latter underscores the necessity for the state to prioritize synchronization with OECD/Sigma principles to foster effective governance and facilitate closer integration with European public administration standards (Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020, 2015). OECD/Sigma itself encompasses the principles of public administration and a comprehensive framework of standards across six areas, one of which specifically addresses policy development and coordination

(Hill, 2017).

At the onset of the reform efforts, several issues surfaced, including the absence of a cohesive policy planning system, its methodological weakness, and non-compliance with legislation. Additionally, challenges arose concerning budgeting, institutional coordination capacity, as well as monitoring and accountability mechanisms. In response to these problems, the government administration of Georgia introduced a roadmap of policy planning (2015) and guidance in 2016; however, it proved inadequate in addressing the prevailing challenges. Consequently, in 2019, government ordinance N629, along with its annexes and a new guidance, was adopted. This revised system relied on policy transfer (Tabatadze, 2021) which operates on the principles of evidence-based policy (EBP), results-based management (RBM), and the whole-of-government (WOG) approach, to bolster policy efficacy and coherence (Baba, 2012; Othman & Razali, 2018). However, declared goals and practices are often contradictory where the non-governmental organizations permanently point to the problems of implementing the reform (Transparency International Georgia, 2015; IDFI, 2019; 2021; IDFI & GYLA, 2021; Partracker, 2020; 2021).

This article represents an attempt to study and evaluate the policy planning system in Georgia, describe its evolution, and identify endogenous challenges. The first chapter of the work is devoted to the theoretical overview of policy planning and its synthesis with Georgian practice. The second part deals with the research design and methodology, while the third chapter describes the evolution and changes that the system has undergone. The next one deals with endogenous challenges, which are based on empirical methods, and the last part involves a conclusion.

2. Literature review and theoretical aspects

Policy planning is an integral part of public administration. With this in mind, in its theoretical discussion, we rely on the academic literature related to the issue in the field of administrative and political science.

One of the first studies in the field is "The Rise and Fall of Policy Planning and research units: Organizational Perspective" (Prince & Chenier, 1980). According to the authors, organizational units of policy planning have an important role in policy development, and their study is a rather complex topic in which some factors can have significant consequences for policy success. These factors are the issues of the role and skills of officials, the nature of the organization of which the policy planning unit is a part; the Existence of consulting structures inside and outside the organization; quality of initiatives; visibility etc. During reviewing the paper, it is worth noting the fact that even in 1980, the emphasis on internal and external consulting structures is a valuable finding, because the latter leads to the principles of good governance (Graham & Plumptre, 2003), which is the declared goal of the institutional design of public administration in Georgia today (Roadmap of Public

Administration Reform in Georgia 2020, 2015; Government program for a strong, democratic, united Georgia, 2015).

Within these factors, it's essential to underscore the challenge regarding the role of officials in policy planning. The tendency for public bureaucrats and politicians to prioritize their self-interest is a recognized concern among political scientists, suggesting that the risks associated with acting in self-interest may also extend to the realm of policy planning. (Muramatsu & Krauss, 1984; Egeberg, 1995). However, it is a difficult phenomenon in the field of public administration to determine where the border between politics and administration can be drawn or how to ensure the risks of these vicious influences. (Guo, 2019).

An alternative normative view in the field of policy planning is developed in the paper, "Adaptive policies, policy analysis, and policy-making" (Walker, Rahman, & Cave, 2001). According to the article, it is difficult to define a credible scenario of the future and to build a static policy in this direction, which will work well under all possible scenarios. Given this, the authors propose a phenomenon of adaptive policy that is designed not for the best estimate of the optimal future, but for robust and credible features. According to Volcker and Rahman, since policy planning is about the future, even the best model cannot predict the details of the system's behaviour, and thus the classical approach of choosing policies based on the results of the best estimation model is no longer reliable. According to the authors, the consequences of policy choices depend on the actions that occur, but we do not know the expected actions that could change the reality. Thus, the policy decision should be based on the expected actions, because the choices made with today's perspective change over time in the changing reality. The paper sets out an adaptive approach that deals with change in three elements, namely: the analytical approach, the types of policies considered, and the decision-making process.

Changeable reality is unpredictable, and even the best models and well-planned policies may not work in practice. This was vividly illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as an entirely unpredictable risk. From today's point of view, the pandemic has become a very real risk and may be taken into account in the policy planning process, although years ago during the planning of the policy, no one would have included the risks arising from the pandemic in the policy document - this is a classic example of unpredictable risk. And since there are unpredictable risks that we cannot identify in the analysis, they may indeed hinder the success of the policies.

If we consider the framework of SWOT analysis (Gurl, 2017), which is one of the most straightforward analytical models in the policy planning process, we observe that its final component involves analysing threats. If we can anticipate such dangers, then the risks become identifiable, although the process of risk identification follows a logical sequence. However, as previously discussed, events like the emergence and spread of COVID-19 defy any logical anticipation. This is proof of the changing reality, but the central questions that we can ask according to this paper are: How to plan an adaptive policy or to identify the risks that

the changing environment brings? And/or how to measure and what can we call strong and reliable features? The answers to these questions remain elusive in this paper. For instance, if the state exhibits authoritarian tendencies based on a synthetic analysis of various indices or societal sentiments that lean heavily conservative, implementing a successful liberal political course or strategy becomes challenging. Yet, elucidating how to formulate adaptive policies to address an unpredictable environment demands further explanation and investigation.

Various approaches and tools are used in policy planning, including the Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA), which evaluates the social, economic, and environmental impacts of policies, plans, programs, or projects (Lee & Kirkpatrick 2000; 2001). SIA incorporates sustainable development principles and uses mathematical or computer-based models, requiring specific knowledge, significant effort, and finances (Boulanger & Bréchet, 2005).

Another tool is the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), common in OECD countries (Carvalho, Marques, & Netto, 2017). RIA faces challenges such as developing government skills to evaluate costs and benefits, extending consultation procedures, prioritizing major impacts, ensuring government-wide support, and preventing regulatory capture by special interest groups. Despite these challenges, RIA enhances transparency and accountability in regulatory policy-making (Kirkpatrick & Parker, 2004).

In Georgian academic literature, policy planning and coordination are often discussed alongside RIA (Nasrashvili, 2018; Barbariani, 2019). According to Georgian legislation, RIA is a systematic approach to evidence-based policy development and a key regulatory quality assurance mechanism, while RIA is primarily for legislative initiatives to improve regulation quality, policy planning and coordination (PAR) cover broader aspects, including the development of policy documents, concepts, strategies, and action plans, where RIA outcomes can also be applied (Government of Georgia Ordinance No. 35, Articles 1, 2 and 3, 2020). Both RIA and PAR aim for evidence-based policymaking and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals, but RIA focuses on legislative initiatives and impact assessments, while PAR encompasses broader policy development. The policy planning and coordination system in Georgia is based on the synthesis of 3 models. These are Whole of Government (WOG), Evidence-Based Policy (EBP), and Results-Based Management (RBM).

EBP uses empirical evidence to inform policies but faces challenges such as budget constraints, devaluation of local knowledge, and potential political manipulation (Costa, 2023; Pawson, 2006; Parsons, 2001). In Georgia, the lack of data complicates EBP implementation, requiring strong governmental will (Khuroshvili, 2021).

RBM, emphasizing performance measurement and evaluation, has been prominent since the 2000s (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Its implementation in Georgia faces challenges due to fragile public administration, cultural shifts, and technical hurdles (Mayne, 2007). Effective RBM requires aligning values, system knowledge,

and stakeholder participation. However, the lack of robust meritocratic mechanisms in Georgia's public administration poses a significant barrier (Perrin, 2006)

The whole-of-government approach (WOG) emerged from critiques of New Public Management (NPM) reforms and the need for better coordination within the public sector. Initially termed "Joined-up government" (JUG), WOG developed in countries like the UK, Australia, and New Zealand to address fragmentation under NPM (Boston & Eichbaum, 2005). Crises such as natural disasters and terrorism further underscored the need for a unified government approach. WOG involves public agencies collaborating across portfolio boundaries through inter-agency, intergovernmental, and inter-sectoral cooperation.

However, WOG faces challenges, including accountability issues, potential fragmentation, and resistance from civil servants (Hunt, 2005). Concerns about fragmentation, accountability, and departmentalism highlight the need for genuine cooperation and accountability rather than mere reporting (Hood, 2002; Pollitt, 2003). Despite these challenges, successful WOG practices have proven effective in areas like e-government development and pandemic management. Transitioning to WOG requires significant time, resources, and cultural change, posing particular challenges for centralized systems like Georgia's (Hunt, 2005).

The OECD was the policy actor which has been actively engaged in strengthening public governance systems since 1992, and its collaboration with the European Union intensified over time as both institutions recognized that effective governance is a cornerstone of sustainable development, economic growth, and democratic consolidation. The EU gradually aligned its approach to public administration reform—especially within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)—with OECD-SIGMA standards, methodologies, and benchmarks. This strategic partnership led to the institutionalization of a rules-based approach, particularly in countries aspiring to closer integration with the EU (Salama & Picalarga, 2024).

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine began modernizing their public administration systems in line with this OECD-EU framework. In the case of Georgia, this alignment became particularly evident after the signing of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement in 2014, which marked a formal commitment to adopt Europeanised governance standards. The OECD-SIGMA Principles of Public Administration were subsequently embedded in EU evaluation and assistance mechanisms targeted at Georgian reforms. Among the six thematic areas defined by SIGMA, policy development and coordination remained a consistent priority through the latest assessments conducted in 2023 (OECD).

The period between 2014 and 2020 represented a critical "window of opportunity" in which the EU’s transformative influence was at its peak. This momentum was driven by the EU’s intensified conditionality mechanisms, technical and financial support instruments, and Georgia's own strong pro-European political agenda. However, after 2020, this momentum started to slow due to increasing euroscepticism of the govern-

ment, internal political polarization, and institutional fatigue. Despite this deceleration, the European Council's 2022 decision to grant Georgia the European perspective reactivated domestic discourse and interest in reform processes, albeit under increasingly complex circumstances (Khuroshvili, Safaryan, & Taşkın, 2024).

Empirical studies on policy planning and coordination in Georgia are limited, but existing works highlight several challenges. These include the lack of legal oversight, inadequate personnel training, and the need for clear policy planning regulations (Glurjidze, 2020). Non-governmental and international organizations play a significant role in supporting policy development through financial contributions, yet challenges like incomplete reforms and issues with task fulfilment by state agencies persist (Tughushi, 2021).

In the EU's Eastern Partnership context, Muhhina (2018) notes the EU's strong support for Public Administration Reform (PAR) in its Eastern and Southern neighbourhood states, including Georgia. This support, encompassing policy planning and coordination, presents hurdles in Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia, as part of the associated trio, is obligated by the Association Agreement (AA) to align its public administration with the EU's (Muhhina, 2020). Despite Georgia's legal commitment to good governance principles, there are contradictions between established principles and actual practices (Muhhina, 2020). Stakeholders stress the importance of European integration and meeting EU criteria while grappling with challenges like clientelism, which obstructs PAR efforts and administrative capacity development. This issue echoed in prior works (Dolidze, 2015; Abashidze, 2016; Khuroshvili, 2021), underscores the complexity of Georgia's alignment with international standards. Nevertheless, Georgia's declared inclination toward international policies reflects a pro-European integration stance crucial for its aspirations.

Georgia, in particular, continues to struggle with systemic issues related to administrative and political culture, which often diverge from the bureaucratic traditions required for successful implementation of reforms. This lack of systemic readiness, political momory and inconsistent political will are major impediments to effective policy planning and coordination, even within the structured framework provided by the OECD-SIGMA principles (Khuroshvili, 2024). These internal hindrances—referred to by Luli (2023) as part of the "political memory" of authoritarian systems—create barriers to sustainable reform and slow down the Europeanization of public administration.

Moldova, while also following the OECD-EU framework, faced specific obstacles in its reform journey. One of the major challenges was the inadequacy of its policy development and evaluation capacities (Șaptefrați & Graur, 2019). In addition, the country experienced a range of technical and coordination-related issues in policy planning: a misalignment between national policies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), difficulties in accessing data, low data quality, weak intersectoral communication, and a lack of metadata on data collection methods (Onofrei, Oprea, & Cigu, 2025). These limitations hindered evidence-based policy-making and contributed to a fragmented reform process.

Ukraine's reform trajectory was also shaped by the EU-OECD SIGMA collaboration. A turning point occurred when Ukraine began cooperating with EU representatives and SIGMA expert groups, which led to initial progress in transforming its public administration. Before this engagement, reform efforts were largely stagnant due to the reluctance of political elites to reduce government influence over the public service system (Samokhvalov & Strelkov, 2021). However, the progress made during the initial phase of cooperation was severely impacted by the destabilizing effects of martial law and the Russian invasion. The ongoing war has imposed considerable strain on administrative capacities and has complicated the implementation of reforms, particularly those requiring systemic and institutional continuity (Karpa, Akimov, & Kitsak, 2022).

3. Research design and methodology

The research aims to study the policy planning system in Georgia, describe its evolution, and identify endogenous challenges. Given the study's purpose, the research objectives are formulated as follows: to study central academic literature in the existing field; to analyze and evaluate the design of policy planning and coordination, as well as the implementation of a given policy; to identify problems in the administration of the same matter and review policy failures; to describe evolution processes during the Public Administration Reform; to study government decrees, ordinances, action plans, laws, and policy documents related to public administration reform; and to conduct in-depth interviews with experts and decision-makers to enhance the empirical field of the research.

Based on the purpose and objectives of the research, research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the central endogenous challenges of the policy planning system in Georgia?
2. What factors determine the central endogenous challenges of the policy planning system in Georgia?

This study relies on qualitative methods of social science research, namely in-depth interviews and document analysis. In the case of the document analysis method, the research is based on thematic and content analysis. The mentioned method included review, analysis and evaluation of state policy action plans, government ordinances, laws and reports.

Considering the chosen methods, distinctions were made between the smallest (word) and largest (phrase in interviews, clause in document analysis) units of analysis. Additionally, main codes (e.g., planning, failures, finances, deficiencies, etc.) and thematic categories (e.g., planning system, coordination system, planning challenges, policy failures, etc.) were identified.

Within the framework of the research, a non-probability, purposive sampling type was used. In the case of document analysis, the legal and political document, report, action plan and annexe covering the issue of

policy planning and coordination in Georgia were selected. As for the in-depth interviews, in this sense, the sampling was based on the issue of specialization in the field of experts, and in the second case on the relevance and availability of decision-makers. The research enlisted the participation of 7 experts from the fields of political and administrative science, along with 3 interdisciplinary experts and 2 former high-ranking government officials. These experts possessed academic degrees and demonstrated competence through their scientific, practical, and research activities.

Besides the empirical methodology, the research uses the analytical model "Multiple streams framework" (Kingdon, 1995). The given framework explains Policy design change and its determinant factors of the planning system within the scope of the research. According to the Multiple Streams Theory, policy change occurs when these three streams — the problem, policy, and political streams — come together in a "policy window." A policy window emerges when a particular issue captures widespread attention, viable solutions are within reach, and there's a willingness among political actors to take action. It represents a unique moment when various streams of problems, policies, and alternatives converge. This convergence is often catalyzed by a specific event or circumstance; otherwise, these streams might operate independently. During such windows, decision-makers become more open to innovative ideas, leading to the adoption of potential solutions to address the issues outlined in the problem stream, driven by political expediency (Kingdon, 1995). With this model, we can explain the case in which an unpredictable policy window opened in 2018, leading to the inception of government ordinance N 629 and subsequently paving the way for novel policy design and an altered agenda in the realms of planning and coordination. What opened this unpredictable window was the SIGMA report.

While the study's empirical part could have been enriched by interviewing civil servants, resource constraints and concerns about the data's generalizability rendered such interviews infeasible. This stands as a limitation of the study.

The study adhered to the five ethical principles outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA) (Smith, 2003), including obtaining informed consent from respondents. Interviews were conducted in neutral settings to avoid influencing responses. Respondent anonymity was ensured through appropriate coding, and all documents were sourced in compliance with Georgian legislation and intellectual property protection principles.

4. The evolution since 2013 and the window of opportunity for new policy design

The evolution of policy planning and coordination in Georgia traces back to 2013, coinciding with an examination of the structural and functional aspects of government administration by OECD/SIGMA. This

pivotal moment was catalyzed by a shift in the governance system, as the government of Georgia placed the establishment of a parliamentary republic at the forefront of the political agenda. The weakening of the presidential system has increased the power of the government and, therefore, of the prime minister. This, in itself, required the functional strengthening of the government administration. Taking this into account, based on the recommendation of OCED/SIGMA, according to the new government regulation, on November 19, 2014, the Department of Policy Analysis and Strategic Planning was established (Ordinance of the Government of Georgia N 626, 2014), whose responsibility was extended to the planning, monitoring and priority analysis of the government's work process, coordination and on multisectoral cooperation.

Later, on August 19, 2015, strategic documents for the implementation of public administration were approved - "Georgian Public Administration Reform Guide 2020" and "Policy Planning System Reform Strategy 2015-2017" (Decree of the Government of Georgia N427, 2015), although these documents were publicly available from May of the same year. The Guide of Public Administration Reform of Georgia 2020 (2015) is a document in which the state for the first time emphasized the importance of policy planning and coordination (policy development and co-ordination) and the challenges faced in the previous period. It is worth noting the fact that the guide was prepared by the government administration and it is important to note here that the challenges identified in the same guide represent a kind of recognition of the problems in the field of policy planning and coordination on the part of the state itself.

According to the Georgian Public Administration Guide 2020, there were 6 main problems in the field of policy planning and coordination:

1. Defective legal framework;
2. Lack of a unified policy planning system and methodological guidelines;
3. Weak connection between policy planning and legislation development;
4. Weak connection between policy planning and budgeting process;
5. Weak institutional capacity for policy development and coordination;
6. Weak monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems (Public Administration Reform Guide 2020, pp. 9-10, 2015).

Although this guide only devotes 1 paragraph to the overview of each problem, it is still possible to draw attention to several important points. First of all, it should be noted that it emphasizes the quality problem of the documents developed before 2015. For example, out of 39 documents studied, only 5 presented performance indicators. This indicates that the documents that existed before raised important questions in the direction of the achievement of the results and the measurability of the latter.

Up until this point, there was no specific regulation or standard within the state to oversee the development

of policy documents, ensure methodological consistency, address strategic coherence, or manage issues related to renewal and periodicity. Only 7 out of 21 studied strategies referenced the legal framework. Budgeting was inconsistent with the basic data and direction document, evident in 30% of medium and long-term planning documents, and 80% of short-term planning documents. Consequently, the Government of Georgia aimed to develop a unified system focused on result-oriented management, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation, and improving coordination of government activities (Georgian Public Administration Guide, p. 7, 2015).

The policy planning and coordination system was based on the "Principles of Public Administration" by Sigma/OECD, and the experiences of Latvia and Lithuania, studied during a 2014 visit by the Department of Policy Analysis, Planning and Coordination (Policy Planning System Reform Strategy, 2015). Key issues included the lack of a unified approach to developing planning documents, subpar quality of planning documents, and the absence of a guidance document for state institutions (Policy Planning System Reform Strategy, p. 13, 2015).

Initially, the 2016 model lacked focus on the whole-of-government (WOG) approach and evidence-based policy (EBP) in policy planning and coordination. The reform guide mentioned EBP only in the context of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). EBP practices later emerged with the reapproval of updated resolution N 629 in the 2019 Guide to Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation. The 2016 handbook included the National Development Strategy, Government Program, and Multi-/Sectoral Strategies, detailing policy documents and action plans (Policy Planning Guide, pp. 12-15, 2016).

The 2016 manual established document evaluation and quality management standards, although WOG was only implicitly mentioned. Policy documents had to align with the country's development strategy, government program, annual action plan, international obligations, and the EU association agreement. However, policy planning assessment criteria lacked specificity, causing ambiguity in evaluating methodology, situation analysis, and financial expediency. There were no clear indicators for measurement or guidelines for ensuring evidence reliability and quality. Public consultation processes were vague, raising questions about their effectiveness. Evaluation of policy implementation allowed agencies to opt-out or conduct assessments without external expertise, potentially leading to biased results.

Public consultations were conducted through two approaches: the Quick Results Approach (QRA) and the integrated approach. While the QRA involved surveys, workshops, campaigns, and conferences, the integrated approach utilized sectoral advisory councils, focus groups, and regular workshops. However, experts noted confusion regarding whether interviews are considered part of the QRA methodology, as conducting interviews requires more time, resources, and analysis compared to focus groups. This challenges the notion that surveys are aligned with a fast-results-oriented approach.

In 2015, a significant decision was made to implement comprehensive management, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation in the state. This decision, rooted in the reform strategy for the political system, aimed at comprehensive solutions. Task N5 of this strategy, focused on strengthening the institutional capacity of policy, saw initial figures at 30%, reaching 70% by 2015, with a target of 100% by 2016. Efforts included allocating policy analysis and planning staff in ministries and conducting training cycles, but true institutional strengthening requires more than mere training mechanisms. The strategy's ambiguity concerning the functional unit responsible for policy processes reflects a gap between ambitious plans and achievable outcomes. Notably, respondents noted that "the department mentioned in the Ministry is not functioning until today and quality of conducted pieces of training and its methodology is ambivalence" (Respondents: 2, 4, and 9), suggesting that the declared institutional strengthening goal for 2017 remained unachieved. Various external evaluations supported by UNDP also highlighted deficiencies, indicating that policy units in ministries may lack impact on actual policy development processes. (Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020 Implementation Review, p.35, 2020)

It is important to highlight that out of 22 activities of this strategy, 14 were financed by donor organizations, the source of financing for 7 was unknown and only 1 was financed by the state itself. And the latter was the already reviewed task N5. Also, funding from the state budget has not been extended to: improving the legislative base, establishing a unified system of policy planning, ensuring the connection between policy planning and the development of legislation, ensuring the connection between policy planning and the budgeting process, implementing result-based management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems (Policy Planning System Reform Strategy 2015-2017, Action Plan Tasks: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, 2015).

Taking all of this into consideration, in 2018, SIGMA evaluated the trajectory of policy planning and coordination using its 12 principles of public administration. Georgia scored 105 out of 297 points (35.35%) (SIGMA, 2018), which can be described as low. In this direction, principle 10, which refers to evidence-based policymaking, and principle 11, which includes issues of policy planning and harmonization of legislation, as well as the involvement and coordination of community activism, were particularly problematic.

The compliance of the tenth principle is evaluated with 3 points out of 28 (10.7%). Experts noted that: "When the shreds of evidence are not there even now, and even more so then, how should you plan policy based on evidence?"; "Evidence-based policy culture took a long time. In some areas, there was data where state statistic organisation worked, but in problem areas, there was no data at all"; "Officials immediately had a problem understanding the evidence, some only knew the Google search engine and were surprised when we provided different databases"; "This is by far the biggest challenge in policy planning and coordination that remains unsolved" (Respondents: 3, 5, 1, 2)

In the first part of the 11th principle (policy courses and legislation are developed inclusively, which

allows active participation of the public), Georgia is evaluated with 0 points out of 41, and in the second part (inter-ministerial consultations) with 5 points out of 21 (23.8). In this regard, experts noted that: "the legislation has been developed, but not inclusively"; "Public consultations in the public sector think it is to publish a document on the website, where we don't even know if anyone will see it"; "We don't have a culture of public consultations, this requires serious work and the interest of each community group"; (Respondents: 5, 8, 1)

The evaluation of principles 3, 8, and 9, each scoring below 25%, presented notable challenges. Principle 3 refers to harmonized medium-term policy planning, alignment of the entire governance/government clear objectives with the government's financial situation and sectoral political courses alignment with government/governance objectives and the medium-term budgetary framework is evaluated with 8 points out of 33 (24.24%).

Principle 8 concerning Georgia, which refers to the organizational structure, procedure and staffing of ministries that ensure policy development and legal implementation are consistent with government goals, is rated 3 out of 12 points (25%). The interviewed respondents were also critical of the mentioned issue: "In the ministries, individual people were separated for these issues and they were retrained"; "Recruitment has always been problematic because, based on our culture, it is very difficult for us to maintain neutrality, and you know, patronage and clientelism are established"; "When there is any serious systemic change, it is very important to communicate it correctly to the people working there, especially if it concerns a change in the organizational structure"; "Policy development and implementation do not exist without the government's will, an official may want to do something, but if there is no real will, he is powerless and there is no point in recruiting or retraining" (Respondents: 4, 5, 6, 9,).

Principle 9, which refers to the procedures and institutional design of European integration, which is an integral part of the policy-making process and ensures the systematic and timely transfer of EU legislation, is evaluated with 4 points out of 17 (23.5%).

In the assessment of Sigma, the most successful was the alignment with the 12th and 7th principles of the Georgian Republic. In the first case, the 12th principle is evaluated with 19 out of 26 points (73%). The latter applies

Legislation for consistency and technical soundness, its use in ministries and legislation for public access. The mentioned was also evaluated positively by the experts: "Legislative issues have been resolved for years"; "I think that we have no problem in the given direction neither in the old nor in the new design"; "Legislative documents are available on the website, although consolidated versions are sometimes not available" (Respondents: 1, 3, 10).

Regarding the seventh principle, SIGMA assessed Georgia's case with a score of 18 out of 24 points (75%). This principle entails parliamentary oversight of government policymaking. Various opinions emerged

among the interviewed participants: "We wanted the parliament to be involved in verifying the policy, but they did not bother to do so"; "Here it is unclear what it means that the parliament observes and checks the policy because as we know, government documents do not pass under the filter of the parliament"; "If we take the general involvement of the parliament in these issues and the RIA, then we have a positive trend, but the assessment with the RIA is rarely carried out recently" (Respondents: 3, 5, 9, 10).

Since 2015, another significant concern in the realm of policy planning and coordination has been the budgetary issue. According to the Public Administration Reform Action Plan of Georgia, the total budget for 2015-2016 was 108,592,571 GEL, of which only 439,950 GEL was allocated to policy planning and coordination, or 0.4%. The remaining 99.6% of the budget was allocated to PAR management and coordination, civil service and human resources management, accountability, public financial management, service delivery and local government direction. Taking this into account, we can conclude that in the same years, when only 0.4% of the reform budget was allocated to this direction, it was a non-priority. From this point of view, the interviewed respondents noted that: "I did not know this data, it is an incredible number of 0.4%, what are we talking about? Does this show that the government does not have the will in this regard?"; "Allocating such a meagre amount of money to this direction automatically means that it had less chance of success"; "Let's not forget that policy planning and coordination is related to everything, that's why those numbers were not enough, that's why a very low evaluation from Sigma came, and this depends on political will" (Respondents: 5, 6, 9).

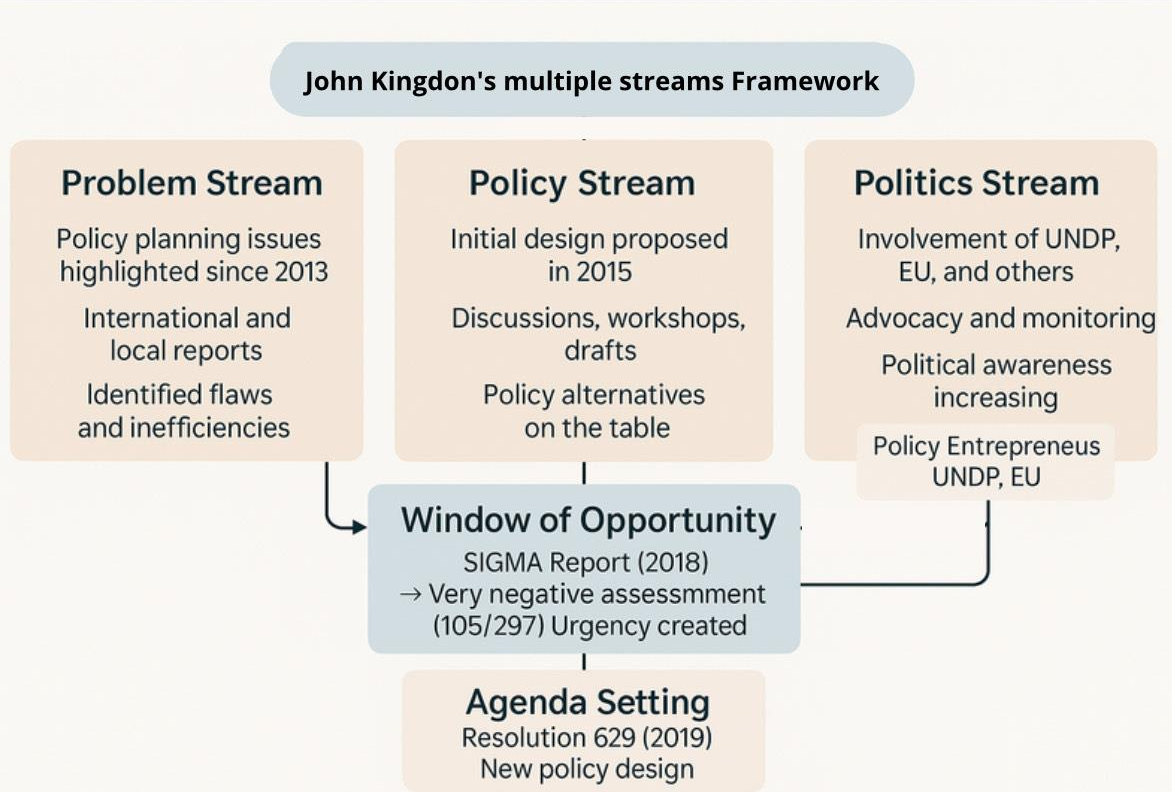
Finally, it must be said that the ongoing evaluation of SIGMA had one important outcome, which was to "open an unpredictable window of policy opportunities" and therefore create a new design and agenda for 2019 in the field of policy planning and coordination.

According to John Kingdon's theory of multiple streams (Kingdon, 1995), we can elucidate this phenomenon. As outlined in the framework, three streams—problem, alternatives, and policy—unfold in time and space, with the involvement of policy-making actors following suit. A distinctive feature of the theory is the convergence of these streams, creating a window of opportunity within which policy changes and a political agenda take shape.

In the case of policy planning and coordination, the flow of the problem has existed since 2013, which has been repeatedly highlighted by international and local organizations. At the level of alternatives, its initial design was created in 2015, and at the level of the policy flow, it was accompanied by discussions, workshops and some steps. At the level of entrepreneurial actors, UNDP, the European Union and other organizations were involved, monitoring the process and making applications, although the real change did not take place until 2019. Former decision-makers mentioned during the interview process that the need to create a new design came when "SIGMA's assessment arrived, which was very negative", and "we faced the challenge that

we had to change a lot: (Respondents 7 and 12). Accordingly, SIGMA's assessment of 105 points out of 297, and the latter, which was an unpredictable fact, opened a window of opportunity and we received the updated Resolution 629, the relevant manual and 11 annexes and thus significantly changed the agenda in the field of policy planning and coordination (see GRAPH No 2.)

GRAPH No 2. John Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework



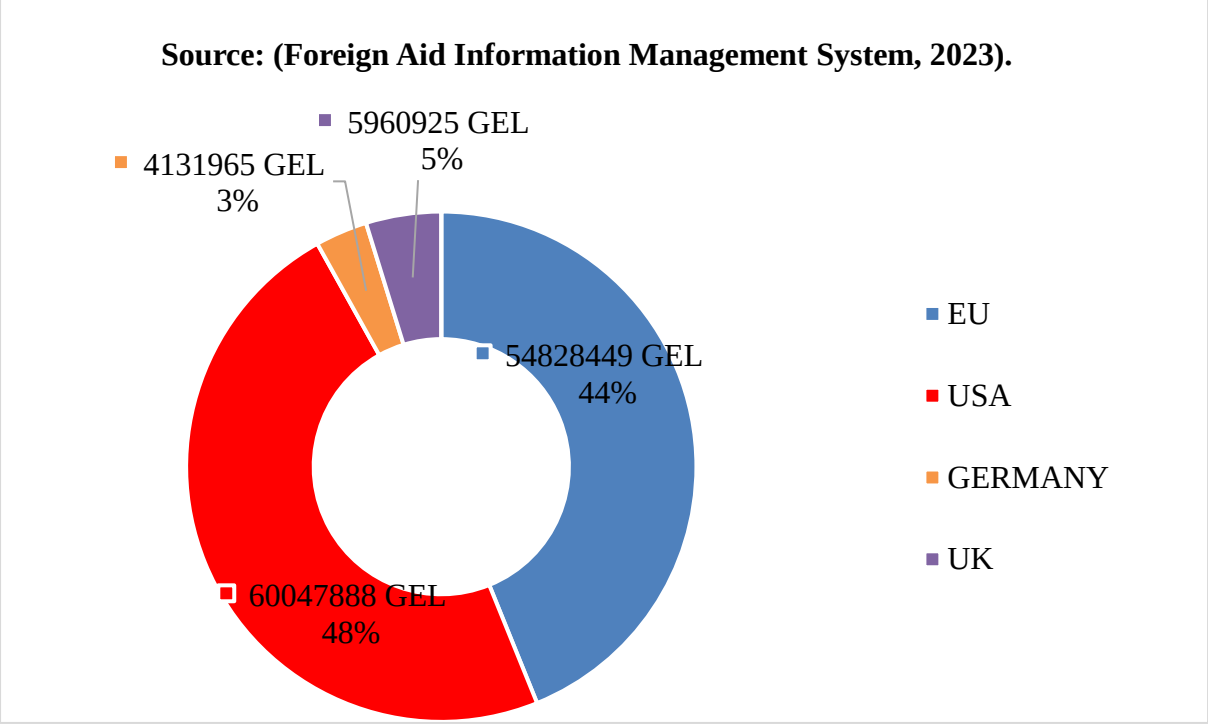
5. Endogenous challenges: Finances, political will and incremental outcomes

Financial support for the reform and issues of relations with donors are important issues. Respondents highlighted that "ministries bear the responsibility to enhance aspects when they receive funding from donors, yet these efforts often halt once the funds are secured and the program persists. Consequently, the success of policies often hinges on the relationship with donors." Also, "this success is contingent upon reporting obligations and the fulfilment of commitments to donors" (Respodents 5 and 1).

When it comes to financings since the initial period of the reform, the European Union allocated 43,771,875 GEL to Georgia in the direction of public administration reform support (budgetary aid) in 2016-

2020, and 11,056,574 GEL was allocated for the support of the reform guide along with the mentioned 43.7 million GEL by the mentioned organization. USAID and, accordingly, the assistance of the United States of America in the direction of the public administration program, allocated 60,047,888 GEL. Countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain are active and have been involved in the direction of donors. The Eastern Partnership Regional Fund (Germany) has allocated 4,131,965 GEL for the reform of public administration, which is a program for 2020-2024. The United Kingdom of Great Britain donated 3,410,925 GEL for the second phase of public administration reform promotion in 2021-2022. British aid continues for the 2022-2025 program, the funding of which amounts to 2,550,000 GEL. In total, these amounts, reflected in the EAIMS database, amount to 124,969,227 GEL (see graph 1). It should be noted here that the financing of up to 125 million GEL from the donors means that the public administration system of Georgia is important for international actors. Naturally, this system does not reflect the funds that non-governmental and research organizations receive from outside the country for the development, monitoring and evaluation of the reform. This implies that much more money has been allocated and spent in the direction of public administration development in the state by donors in general than the 125 million GEL reflected in the eAIMS system.

GRAPH No 2. The funding share reflected in the eAIMS system for public administration by donors.



Despite the mentioned amounts, 60,872 GEL were spent on policy planning and coordination in 2019, and 200,045 GEL in 2020. (2019-2020 Annual Action Plan Implementation Monitoring Report, 2019; 2019-2020 Action Plan Implementation Monitoring Annual Report, 2020)

Also, based on the annexes of the 2015-2020 guide, the amount allocated was 0.4% of the total, which can be assessed as very low and explained by the fact that "there is no real will in this direction to fundamentally change something", "one thing They write in the documents and the second is reality, which means that the real priority is not planning" (Respondents 5 and 12).

It should be noted that according to the reports published by IDFI, one of the most important challenges in government administration was the lack of financial resources, which was their argument to explain the non-fulfilment of goals and objectives in the field of policy planning and coordination. However, the donor aid provided for in this regard amounted to 2,205,841 GEL, while the state budget provided for 11,400 GEL, which was not fully utilized. It should be said here that according to the same report, it was not specified why the administration could not absorb the given funds when 30% of the donor funds stipulated in the action plan of their plan remained unusable (IDFI, 2021).

About the same issue, it was noted that: "The fact that funds remain unutilized is not new, there are simply projects and programs whose implementation is a political priority and whose implementation is not a priority for the government"; "If there were no donor aid, allocating money from the budget is not a difficult procedure when there is a real will to do something"; "The money is always there. If a relevant representative of any ministry or someone from the administration comes to the donor and tells them that they really want to do something, no one will refuse" (Respondents: 5, 9, 2). These facts indicate that the political will of the government determines the success of the direction of policy planning and coordination, which is an independent variable of the mentioned paper.

Ensuring alignment between declared goals and actual practice poses a significant challenge, The government administration perceives this reality from a different perspective. According to the 2019-2020 annual reports on action plan implementation monitoring, the state cites several achievements. These include an increase in the number of civil servants trained in policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation courses, with the number reaching 227 and growing annually. Additionally, the completion of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) module for legislative acts by the first group of civil servants is noted and the expansion of training modules from 9 to 12.

These achievements reflect incremental changes, as they do not fully address the overarching goals declared by the state, such as developing a comprehensive policy planning and coordination system. The scale of training activities suggests very little progress and we couldn't recognise this as a state-level activity to solve the problem.

The strategy also highlights the persistent issue of low-quality policy documents submitted for government approval. Despite improvements in average scores over the years (2019: 62.75; 2020: 81.6; 2021: 85.9), questions arise regarding the discrepancy between document scores and training outcomes. The shortage of competent personnel remains a challenge, leading to reliance on external resources for policy document preparation.

Furthermore, fragmented engagement mechanisms within agencies underscore the need for a more cohesive Whole-of-Government (WOG) approach. Access to reliable and updated statistical data is identified as a significant challenge, threatening evidence-based policy development and raising doubts about the effectiveness of the existing EBP model.

These findings suggest a dual problem: shortcomings in both policy planning and coordination design and policy implementation. Despite efforts dating back to 2015 and increased emphasis on WOG, Results-Based Management (RBM), and Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) in 2019, similar challenges persist in the updated 2023 strategy. This indicates a disparity between the state's ambitious goals and the incremental progress achieved.

6. Conclusion

The research aimed to study the policy planning system in Georgia, describe its evolution, and identify endogenous challenges. Considering the research questions, objectives, methodology, and design, the study involved conducting in-depth interviews and analyzing policy documents, state strategies, laws, and government decrees. After analyzing, processing and interpreting the obtained data, it became possible to study the endogenous challenges of the state policy planning system and its determining factors. The paper relied on the theory of multiple streams of the theoretical framework, according to which it was possible to analyze and identify the factors that led to a change in policy design and, therefore, a new agenda in the field of policy planning and coordination.

The central challenges highlighted encompass both the difficulty in aligning declared goals with actual practice and the discrepancy between achievements and overarching objectives. Despite increases in the number of civil servants trained in policy-related courses and the completion of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) modules, these achievements represent incremental changes rather than comprehensive solutions. Persistent issues with low-quality policy documents, shortages of competent personnel, and fragmented engagement mechanisms within agencies further complicate policy planning and coordination efforts. Additionally, limited access to reliable statistical data poses a significant challenge to evidence-based policy development.

Efforts to address these challenges through strategies like Whole-of-Government (WOG), Results-Based Management (RBM), and Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) have been made, but similar issues persist, highlighting a gap between ambitious goals and actual progress. Financial support from donors is crucial for reform initiatives; however, effectively utilizing these resources and maintaining fruitful donor relations remain intricate tasks. Despite significant donor funding, financial allocation from state budgets for policy planning and coordination often falls short, indicating a lack of prioritization within governmental agendas. Furthermore, efficiently absorbing donor funds remains an ongoing challenge, reflecting inefficiencies in implementation capacities. The success of policy endeavours is intricately tied to political will and prioritization, where governmental commitment plays a pivotal role in driving reform efforts forward. Despite incremental progress in areas such as civil servant training and policy document improvement, overarching objectives such as developing comprehensive policy planning systems remain largely unfulfilled.

In addition, the 2023-2026 public administration strategy created by the Government of Georgia recognizes some of the challenges that the mentioned study also revealed - and this is explained by incremental practice, where the results are proportional to the status quo +1. Along with this, based on the data obtained from the interviewed experts and former decision-makers, it was determined that the will of the government is one of the most important factors and determinants in the success or failure of the policy from the perspective of Georgia. In this direction, the government's lack of will is confirmed in the financial part, when initially 0.4% of the reform budget was allocated to this direction, and later this amount did not exceed 201,000 GEL, which turned out to be insufficient for the success of the reform direction. Also, the effort in terms of activities and policies that the government administration puts into the formation of the system is insufficient.

The novelty of this article lies in its status as one of the first empirical investigations into the policy planning system in Georgia. It seeks to address design and implementation challenges that have hitherto received limited attention in academic literature on the subject.

The findings and conclusions presented herein serve multiple purposes. Primarily, the study offers a valuable reference point for scholars and practitioners interested in the practical dimensions of policy planning and coordination. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader academic discourse and may stimulate further research both within Georgia and in comparative contexts.

Lastly, given its focus on practical deficiencies, including shortcomings in central policy planning documents, systemic inefficiencies, and implementation failures, the article may also prove useful to policymakers and decision-makers seeking to reform and enhance the effectiveness of policy design and execution.

Statement

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