

PGI's 2020 Year in Review

Background:

PGI launched the New Synthesis (NS) Initiative ten (10) years ago. It is an international collaborative research effort that brings together ideas from various academic domains and insights from practice. It involves a network of country partners and thought leaders. The initiative is now in its third phase.

The first phase focused on *“what is different about serving and governing in the 21st century compared to prior times. It concluded that there are unique characteristics to serving in the 21st century that require a different way of thinking through the complex issues governments are facing in practice, a broader mental map aligned to the complexity of the issues we are facing as a society and the circular nature of the world we live in. The second phase focused on *“what can be done to ensure that the capacity of government to invent solutions will keep pace with the increasing complexity of the challenges we are facing as a society?”* This phase was enriched by the practical experience of 1000 practitioners. It generated an exploratory cycle to improve the capacity to invent solution to problems that cannot be solved without some form of government intervention and to generate results that would not exist without the use of the levers of the State.*

In 2019, PGI entered the third phase of the NS Initiative. This phase recognizes that several factors are accelerators of change that transform the economic, societal, political, and environmental landscapes. This includes the digital and the info-bio technological revolutions, climate change , high impact catastrophic events emerging from the physical world , as well as issues resulting from imbalances between the economic , social and environmental spheres of life such as rising inequalities, changing social norms , aging population and population migrations , etc. . The third phase is focusing on *what can be done to build the capacity for collective problem solving to build and share a better future together.* This recognizes that governance entails a collective effort and a shared responsibility for results. Government bears the responsibility to ensure that the overall balance of private, public and civic actions serve the overall interest of society.

The Year in review:

2020 was an eventful year. The Covid-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of most international travel and the transformation of other activities into virtual events. Nonetheless,

the year was more productive than expected in the circumstances. Four broad themes capture the main aspects of the work in 2020:

- *Learning from the Covid-19 pandemic* – building the capacity to address high impact events (like pandemic, climate change etc.,) characterized by complexity, exponential velocity and high uncertainty.
- *Public organizations fit for the time* - The power of regional and municipal governments as innovation platforms.
- *Public innovation*—Building the capacity to invent solutions to problems that cannot be solved without some form of government interventions. This includes the critical role of the state to build a society able to adapt to unforeseen shocks and disturbances and prosper in the future
- *Leadership development* -Preparing public servants for the challenges of serving in the 21st century

Several activities during the year contributed to more than one of these themes. They involved research work and in many cases the key findings were discussed in international forums, conferences or events, thus maintaining PGI trademark approach of blending research and practice.

Complexity, Exponential Velocity and Tipping Points: Learning from the COVID pandemic

A crisis on the scale of the Covid-19 pandemic reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the systems we have created as a society. This offers an unprecedented opportunity to learn and to accelerate changes that are needed but would have taken place over a longer period.

PGI researched the relevance of lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic for climate change. This work built on the research work undertaken in 2019. The more recent work was discussed with practitioners in various events in Singapore, Canada, and Denmark.

Relevant Papers:

- *Why is it so difficult to make progress on climate change?* ([PGI website](#))
- *Will technology resolve the Climate Change Crisis?* ([PGI website](#))
- *Pandemic and Climate Change: Complexity, Resilience and Catastrophic Events*([PGI website](#))
- *COVID-19 and Climate Change : A Foretaste of the Public Service in the 21st century* ([Ethos](#) , Singapore Civil Service , Singapore)

- *Four Lessons from COVID* ([Ottawa Citizen](#), Canada)
- *The pandemic shows the true value of government* ([Ottawa Citizen](#), Canada)

Relevant Activities

-The *Singapore Civil Service College* (SCSC) is a long-time partner of PGI and a participant in the New Synthesis Initiative. In January 2020, SCSC organised three roundtables to discuss PGI most recent research work. The paper entitled *Why is it so difficult to make progress on climate change* was the basis for discussion with practitioners from the Ministry of Environment and Water Management, the National Climate Change Secretariat, the Global Center for Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Development, as well as the Prime Minister's Office Strategy group (January 2020). The COVID crisis offers unprecedented opportunities to accelerate the transformation needed to address climate change.

-The *Danish Association of Local Government Executives* made learning from the Covid-19 pandemic the focus of its national conference (August 2020). The Honourable J. Bourgon, President of PGI, delivered the opening address. She discussed how NS helps public sector invent solution to complex, high impact events. Denmark is shaping an ambitious transformation agenda post-COVID-19.

- The *Canada School of Public Service* is at the forefront of whole-of-government approaches to learning. It recently launched "The CSPS Virtual Coffee Series". The series reach out to public sector leaders across Canada. Its purpose is to expose them to important public policy challenges. Drawing from PGI recent publications, one of the sessions (September 2020) explored "What does it mean to set a society on a sustainable human trajectory". The sessions brought together PGI, Treasury Board Secretariat and McGill University Department of Biology. A recording of the session is available on [CSPS website](#).

Public Organizations Fit for the Time

Public organizations at the local and regional levels are innovation platforms of critical importance to prepare government and society for the challenges of serving and governing in the 21st century. It is at that level that public purposes and people converge in the most meaningful way. It is in interactions with citizens that lays the greatest potential for innovative approaches to co-creation and co-production. Discussion with practitioners in various areas and sectors enrich the NS initiative by exploring how to build the capacity of public organizations for the challenges ahead.

Relevant Papers:

The work done by PGI on the digital revolution in 2019 is relevant to this topic as well as the work undertaken over the years on co-creation, co-production and technology enabled self-organization (See the NS Fieldbook)

Some recent articles are worth noting including:

- *How many long-term beds do we need?* ([Ottawa Citizen](#), Canada)
- *Collaborating in Crisis: Canada's Syrian refugee crisis* ([PGI website](#))
- *Thinking and Governing Differently: Old Ideas, New Discoveries and New Ways of Thinking for Governing* ([PGI website](#))

PGI contributed a chapter to a book recently published by Management Hot House (Denmark). It is an anthology of ideas and practices on citizen engagement and the power of citizens as value creators. The book was published on October by Greenhouse for Management ([Væksthus for ledelse](#))

Relevant Activities:

-The Danish Public Leadership Education Program sponsored by the *University College Copenhagen Leadership Department* organizes an annual event to expose public sector leaders to a diversity of ideas and trends. The purpose is to ensure that the Danish public sector is and remains at the leading edge. The NS framework and the NS exploratory cycle is well known to the Danish public service. A working session in New York City (January 2020) provided an opportunity for a deeper conversation about NS concepts with public sector leaders from Municipalities, the City of Copenhagen, School districts, Job Centers, Directors of Finance, etc. A similar event is planned for the first quarter of 2021.

- *Norway* has a long experience of collaborative and innovative approaches involving municipal authorities, citizens, civil society, and private partners. The paper on "Municipalities 3.0" reflects a commitment to collective problem solving to address complex issues ranging from children at risk or elder care to climate change. The Conference "Future of Municipalities" (June 2020) offered an opportunity to introduce public sector leaders to the NS Initiative. The *Arendal Municipality* has been the main organizer for the past 20 years. The future of municipalities is envisaged as a platform that encourages co-creation and co-production between national partners, public actors, voluntary organizations and private companies. PGI envisages additional activities in the early part of 2021.

-PGI Vice-President Michel Bilodeau gave a keynote address at a conference organised by the *Mouvement d'implication Francophone d'Orléans, Ontario, Canada*. He discussed the emerging trends and consequences of an aging population for the health care and long term care systems. He explored potential avenues for aging at home, the concept of urban village, retirement and pensions, and the organization of labor.

-PGI has a special interest for the health sector in light of the vast experience of PGI Vice-President Michel Bilodeau in this area. The *Health Standards Organization* is working closely with Accreditation Canada to develop standards on the governance of health care organizations. The standards would be used in the certification of health organizations in Canada and abroad. PGI Vice-President Michel Bilodeau is serving as a member of the Governance Working Group. The work that started in 2019 is expected to be completed in early 2021.

Public Innovation

PGI has argued that the focus of the attention should shift from innovation *in government* to *public innovation*. That is the capacity to transform the public space we inhabit as members of society to bring about a more desirable future and prevent known and preventable risks for society. From that perspective, public innovation is a core role of government. Public interventions and public innovation are one and the same. The role of government is to invent solutions to problems that cannot be solved or to generate results that would not exist without some form of government interventions or some use of the levers of the state. This broader mental map opens an expanded range of possibilities to address the complex challenges governments are facing in practice.

Relevant Papers:

Several aspects are relevant to this work. One is to build the capacity of government and societies to invent solutions.

- *Re-thinking Public Innovation as a Collective Enterprise* (NS Fieldbook)
- *Public Paradigm Shift Gives More Freedom to Employees* ([Mandag Morgen 07](#), Denmark)
- *Re-thinking Public Innovation Beyond innovation in Government* ([Dubai Policy review](#))
- *Governing in the Digital Age: A PGI Working Paper* ([PGI website](#))

Another dimension is whether democratic governing systems also need to reinvent themselves to fulfill the aspirations that led to their creation (equality under the law, freedom, fairness, a good life, etc.). Democratic governing systems are under stress. They have outperformed others

during most of the 20th century, but they are under increasing pressures from external forces and from within. This topic exceeds the capacity of PGI. However, PGI may undertake some work in this area in 2021 if this exploration can be done with other organizations interested in public administration and governance.

- *Governing Liberal Democracies in the 21st Century: The Democratic Idea* (unpublished)
- *Governing differently: Old Ideas for a new world* (unpublished)

Relevant Activities:

-*Singapore* is one of the most advanced digital economies and societies. Its efforts have been deliberate and sustained over many years. The results to date are nothing less than impressive and progress will likely further accelerate. PGI contributed to a roundtable discussion on citizenship and governing in the digital age (January 2020)

- Some countries in the Gulf region have experienced a rapid modernization process. *Oman 2040 Vision* is aimed at spreading awareness about the importance of strategic foresight and finding creative solutions on the challenges that it may face to ensure prosperity, economic growth, and social welfare by 2040. The work to date has focused on global, regional, and national trends in relation to sectoral issues of interest to the Omani society. PGI has followed this work over the last year. Due to the COVID pandemic, the last Forum was cancelled.

-The Danish media group *Altinget & Thinktank Monday Morning* hosted 'The Welfare Innovation Day 2020' in February this year. It brought together 1000 leaders and practitioners from the public, private and civil sectors. The objective was to discuss societal challenges and new solutions. The Honourable J. Bourgon, President of PGI, delivered the opening keynote address. She argued that nothing is more important to the ongoing success of democratic governance than to reconcile in new ways the economic, social, and environmental spheres of life in society. The economic sphere does not operate separately from society. The environmental sphere has been insufficiently integrated in policy decision making. A new balance is needed. She signalled that countries that recognize the importance of the State, have a tradition of collaboration across sectors and a commitment to the active engagement of citizens and communities, are the ones best positioned to modernize the governance of modern democratic societies.

- *The Netherlands* is known around the world for the quality and sophistication of its foresight work and the *Ministry of Infrastructure and Water management* (Rijkswaterstaat) is known for its excellence in water management and engineering. Recently, The Netherlands has made considerable effort for creating and developing a circular economy. Expedition 2050 is a process of creative exploration that brings together a diversity of perspectives and expertise to shape

an ambitious transformation agenda. PGI is grateful for the opportunity to be associated to this process. Additional activities are planned for the beginning of 2021.

Leadership Development

PGI has a special relationship with Centers dedicated to leadership development in the public sector, dating back to the days when the Honorable Jocelyne Bourgon served as President of the Canada School of Public Service.

PGI maintains an ongoing relationship with the Association of Schools of Public administration and the International Institute of Public Administration, and a special relationship with leadership development centers in Canada, Singapore, Finland, Denmark, Oman, Bahrain, Sarawak, France, and the United Kingdom. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some of these activities were disrupted or conducted online.

Relevant Activities:

-PGI developed a one week visit program in Canada for leaders at the most senior level of the *State of Sarawak, Malaysia*. The visit program was cancelled due to the pandemic. PGI is grateful to public service leaders in the Canadian public service who accepted generously to participate in the program and share their expertise with their colleagues from Malaysia.

-PGI regularly participates in the Executive Development Program of the Institute on Governance (Canada). In 2020, PGI participated in the program for three cohorts of public sector leaders.

- PGI is proud of its association with the Canada School of Public Service. CSPA in partnership with the University of Ottawa hosted in March the second edition of the Prime Ministers Series that featured Prime Minister Chrétien (1993-2003). The Honorable J. Bourgon who served as Secretary to Cabinet and Clerk of the Privy Council during the first five years of Mr. Chretien's mandate contributed to the event.

Relevant Paper:

- *Lessons for Current Liberals on Managing Debt and Remaking Government:* [The Globe and Mail](#) has published a summary of a round table with PGI President Jocelyne Bourgon, former Deputy Minister of Finance David Dodge, and former Minister Brian Tobin.