

**THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISE**

*Role and Governance in the Implementation  
of Innovative Strategic Policies and Economic Development*

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**Conclusion**

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We have come to the end of an interesting conference day and I would like to try to give a brief review of the day and sketch in some of my own thoughts about the future of public enterprises.

This morning started with overviews of research results and publications of the scientific work of CIRIEC during the recent past. Major issues and insights on the activities of public enterprises were then discussed in three round tables. These - animated and sometimes controversial - discussions were attended by technically qualified and experienced personalities from public enterprises, from the public administration, from interest groups and from international organisations who brought along their own expertise.

I do not wish to attempt any summary of the discussion contributions at this point; time does not permit. However, the committees of CIRIEC will deal with the presented arguments in depth later.

I do however wish to address a number of important points that are of great significance for the current discussion on public enterprises from a scientific viewpoint and for practice. These points also give indications regarding possible future developments of the activities of public enterprises.

First, to recall, some facts and conclusions from the findings of our international studies, involving more than 50 experts and in which public enterprises from several continents were examined.

- There is a considerable variety of public enterprises: this observation applies for the big, mostly networking enterprises (utilities), which are often also successfully active in several countries and for the numerous regionally and locally active enterprises providing the classical local general-interest services.
- There are great differences in the governance and institutional embedding of public enterprises in the economy, politics and the civil society. No dominant uniform country-specific or sectoral organisational model can be identified for the provision of general-interest services. Here again, variety determines the picture of reality. That is no accident but actually the result of the respective political culture and history of the individual countries.
- It can generally be said that public enterprises in most cases perform their tasks in line with demand and proficiently; the customer satisfaction revealed in surveys with general-interest services is generally remarkably high. On the whole this is a good reference for the activity of public enterprises.

- In a longer-term perspective it can be noted that public enterprises have basically adapted, innovatively and successfully, to changes in their legal and economic environment, to technological developments, to new service requirements and even to the effects of the economic crisis since 2008.

We cannot take these empirical findings and say with any certainty whether there will be more or fewer public enterprises 10 or 20 years from now. We may however assume that there will most likely be throughout the world in the coming decades many enterprises held in public ownership or that provide national economic and socially important general-interest services under public control.

In future there will certainly be, on the one hand, large-scale nationally and internationally active infrastructure enterprises (utilities) and, on the other hand, a multitude of medium-sized and smaller enterprises providing at regional and municipal services at national level.

In the past there was, and there still is now, an important social mission and a responsibility for politics to secure for enterprises that are assigned such public tasks appropriate legal, economic and organisational parameters and to further develop these frameworks in a proactive and innovative manner.

In future the public enterprises must also be in a position to assert themselves in their markets so as to be able to react flexibly to new challenges and to be able to fulfil their public service contract - their public mission - successfully and in a socially appropriate manner over the long term.

CIRIEC International and its scientific commissions in any case see their task as making a solid contribution to the overcoming of these major challenges through current research work, publications and workshops.

On that point I would also like to name, in key words, some of the themes that merit closer investigation in future research projects:

- Alternative forms of governance in public enterprises and tried and tested organisational models for securing the general interest in markets open to competition with public and private service-providers;
- Possibilities of evaluation of the macroeconomic and social benefit of reforms in enterprises providing public services;
- Examination of the costs to the national economy of reforms and regulatory measures; reforms tie up resources;
- Further development of the quality management of public services.

I think that CIRIEC and its scientific bodies have made the right choice to focus their occupation with public enterprises and public services not only on Europe, but also to observe and to investigate public enterprise activities in countries in other continents.

That has already been done in the past, and CIRIEC will also press ahead in this overall perspective with renewed vigour in the future and further extend its large international scientific network of experts.

All of us – and the discussion in the various panels today has shown as much – can learn much for the future from practical experiences and from the thorough scientific research on the activities of public enterprises in different geographical, cultural, economic and social settings: more particularly concerning the role, the strengths and the problems of provision of general-interest services by publicly controlled enterprises. With the available expertise of the involved researchers and practitioners from different countries we can now recognise new challenges in good time and build solid bases for approaches to social innovations and promising development strategies and thus incite critical discussion.

It is precisely with regard to this task that CIRIEC International, together with the national sections and with the worldwide scientific network of CIRIEC, has an important function that will surely gain increased significance in the future.

Today's conference, with the presentation of the research results from the past ten years and the discussion of current works, verifies the strengths of CIRIEC's international network. As former president of the International Scientific Commission "Public services/Public enterprises", it is therefore a great pleasure for me to emphasise that, also with today's very well-attended joint conference by CIRIEC and the two French ministries, an important contribution can be made towards the dissemination of empirical discoveries about public enterprises and towards critical discussion of experiences and the economic policy conclusions.

On behalf of CIRIEC, I offer my thanks that arrangements were made to enable us to hold this conference here in Bercy, in the "Centre Pierre Mendès-France".

We also take it as high recognition of the scientific work of CIRIEC and we thank both ministries, the Ministry for Finance and the Ministry for the Economy, for their support for our combined conference.

My gratitude also goes out to CIRIEC-France for the preparation and the perfect organisation of this successful event.

In closing I would like to thank all participants in this conference, especially the speakers, the members of the round tables and the abundant input from the floor. Thank you for your interesting contributions and for your interest in our joint theme of the future of public enterprises.