

## Senior state officials and the multilevel functioning of the Spanish state

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**Summary:** This paper aims to analyse and understand the position and vision of the senior civil service of the state of cooperation and coordination in a context of strong political decentralisation and great external complexity, which is internal political decentralisation and great external complexity. The selection of the senior civil service as an instrument for understanding the functioning of the state is justified by the functions it performs, its proximity to the decision-making process and comparative research, which highlights its adhesive and lubricating functions in complex political systems. Research has involved defining the relationship between senior civil service and coordination and, with respect to the latter, to establish an operational concept inspired by Metcalfe's work. The results are derived from empirical work consisting of confronting the coordination scale with the perceptions of the Civil State Administrator (the elite generalist corps of the General State Administration in Spain) and interviews with leading academics and members of this collective. The findings suggest, on the one hand, that the organisational and institutional fabric that guarantees the multilevel coordination in Spain is not adequate to the territorial complexity of the Spanish state, and, on the other, the possibility of replicating the study at other levels of internal government and even at the national level.

**Keywords:** Public function; functioning; coordination; cooperation; cooperation; multilevel governance; Civil Administrators of the State

**ENG Abstract:** In this research, the author aims to conduct an intergovernmental analysis on high public function of the Spanish State, based on the premise that senior officials are a critical actor for the governance of societies and they constitute too a good instrument to know basic aspects of the performance of states, such as coordination between levels of government. Institutional and legal aspects have been well documented in recent Spanish intergovernmental research, yet the role of senior officials in the multilevel political situation is less often studied. Within this framework, the main specific objective is to show that senior officials of the Spanish General State Administration (AGE in Spanish) are a relevant actor to explain the multilevel performance in Spain, given their outstanding participation in multilevel coordination and cooperation. The research methodology has incorporated, in addition to the consultation of the published available sources, an empirical work applied on the Cuerpo Superior de Administradores Civiles del Estado (Senior Corps of Civil State Administrators), the only collective of the AGE with a generalist dimension who participates in the formulation and implementation of intergovernmental policies and besides with a significant presence in the cooperation and coordination bodies between levels of government. Results reveal,

first, the relevance to examine high public officials from the approach of the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR). Secondly, the analysis confirms that senior public officials are essential to understand the current performance of the Spanish State and its possibilities for improvement. In this sense, an operational concept of intergovernmental coordination was designed by the researcher from different authors support (e.g., Less Metcalfe or Robert Agranoff) and a scale was established for its qualitative measurement; this concept and scale were successfully (in his opinion) applied in the empirical work. As a finding, it was possible to verify that Spanish model of IGR is today basically cooperative, although it is gaining space quickly a conflictive view of the relations between the State (national level) and ACs, as well as a tendency to separate management. Besides, the improvement of multilevel coordination appeared clearly as a challenge.

**Key words:** Public officials; performance; Metcalfe; Spain; coordination; cooperation, intergovernmental relations; national administration; Senior Public Service; federalism.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper reports on a broader research project that analysed the intergovernmental role of the Spanish senior civil service, taking as a group for the purpose of extracting information the *Cuerpo Superior de Administradores Civiles del Estado* (Senior Corps of Civil State Administrators) (hereinafter ACE), the main group in the service of the Spanish General State Administration with a generalist character and with pre-managerial and managerial functions directly involved in activities with a multilevel projection<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of the senior civil service for intergovernmental purposes had been highlighted by the American scientific literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. McCulloch, 1965, or Weidner, 1960). More recently, other authors have emphasised its functions of access to the political center (Agranoff, 1991), or the adhesive and lubricating capacities for the British political system of the senior civil service (Parry, 2012 and 2004), but the reality is that empirically based studies are the exception and those that focus on intergovernmental or multi-level coordination and attitudes and perceptions of the civil service are practically non-existent (Crespo, 2017).

Within the framework described above, this paper is a contribution that aims to analyse and understand the position and vision of the high public function of the State, through the ACEs, of cooperation and coordination in a context of strong internal political decentralisation and great external complexity, such as the Spanish one.

This will begin with a brief analysis of the scarcity of studies linking intergovernmental or multilevel coordination with high-level public administration. This will be followed by a line of work based on an enriched concept of "coordination", inspired by the work of METCALFE (1993, 1994) and which allows for its qualitative measurement based on the perceptions of a key actor, the senior civil service. Subsequently, some results derived from confronting the analytical tools with the Spanish State Administration will be presented, through empirical research deployed on the ACEs. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn, not the least of which is the need to explore the functioning of multilevel public policies, or intergovernmental relations (IGR from now on), through a key actor (the civil service) and its intervention in a key element for the functioning of states, multilevel coordination.

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<sup>1</sup> The empirical work involved answering a questionnaire from 102 of its members and conducting multiple interviews with academics of the stature of Sabino Cassese, Manuel Arenilla and Mariano Baena del Alcázar. The data collection phase was completed in 2016 and we are grateful for the collaboration of the *Asociación Profesional del Cuerpo Superior de Administradores Civiles del Estado* (Senior Corps of Civil State Administrators) and the *Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública de España*. The author would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their suggestions for improvement

## **2. Lack of empirically based academic analysis of the coordination-senior civil service binomial**

The importance given in scientific texts to cooperation and coordination and the scarcity of studies that deal with them monographically, outside of merely normative considerations, is surprising, which is unfortunately in line with what was expressed many years ago by Bañón (1998), who highlighted the great political and intellectual effort dedicated to the great questions of the legal system and the distribution of competences and, however, little was devoted to the management of public policies and the actual functioning of the State, among the basic aspects of which cooperation and coordination take on a singular importance as preferential principles of relationship in an environment that harmonises self-government with shared competences. In this framework, knowledge is required of the way in which the cooperative reality is applied, and this implies questioning those who treasure this knowledge, who, in the words of García Morales (2006: 10), are governments and senior state officials.

In the intergovernmental and political science literature, reference has been made to coordination to express the difficulty of differentiating it from other neighbouring terms (METCALFE, 1994; Crespo, 2017), its importance in cooperation and negotiation formulas and for consensus building in an environment of political influence and exchange that requires a cooperative predisposition of the actors and the participation of bureaucracies (Morata, 1991: 157-160), its general prominence in the framework of governance (Ruano, 2002, citing Le Gales) and as an expression of increased interdependence (METCALFE 1994: 235), or its need to articulate the actions and capacities of diverse actors in a context of networks and interrelation (Agranoff, 1991: 4), which makes it a "necessary work in progress" (Agranoff, 2011: 55). Other authors, such as Marando and Florestano (1999: 399), include coordination within intergovernmental research aimed at problem solving, giving a relative value to hierarchy and a much greater value to joint action. And very early on, Agranoff and Lindsay (1983), contributed some aspects for the analysis of coordination in intergovernmental scenarios, such as the need to know the structural context of IGRs, to assume the political nature of the coordinating task, to recognise that participation in policy networks adds a technical dimension and requires the participation of specialists together with the integration of different perspectives; and, finally, that all actors pragmatically put the emphasis on problem solving. There are also those that address its importance in multilevel structures, starting with political parties (Aja and Colino, 2014).

On the other hand, it must be said that analyses of coordination based on empirical sources are extremely scarce, and even more so with a monographic character and referring to the senior civil service of the State. In Spain, we have some information on coordination from the research led by Arbós (2009), which analyses IGR in the autonomous State from the position of the actors; and at the international level, it is worth highlighting those derived from surveys carried out in the USA in the 20th century, which have been reported by McCulloch (1965) and Weidner (1960). In the latter case, however, several limitations should be borne in mind, not the least of which is that the studies have been carried out more with a view to how civil servants in the American federal states and local administration, or Spanish autonomous administration in the case of the Arbós study, view IGRs than (except for brief considerations) from the federal or national level of government. Also, in both cases, appointed or political civil servants are included along with appointed senior civil servants, which, despite the great proximity and mixture that exists between the two groups in practically all political systems, and especially in the Spanish case, means that the conclusions are not specific to the group of senior professional civil servants. Even so, and due to their interest, these studies were used, as far as possible, to complement or qualify the results of our research.

## **3. The analytical approach to intergovernmental coordination through the senior civil service**

In any case, it seems indisputable that the aspects linked to coordination, in its different variants, constitute the connective instruments that serve as the basic infrastructure for the deployment of IGR (Crespo, 2017) and that with regard to its practical concretisation the senior civil service can contribute a great deal, which requires an operational redefinition, through a broad concept of coordination, incorporating hierarchical and normative aspects, but also cooperation and collaboration. This is with a view to constructing an analytical instrument to measure and improve the capacities of intergovernmental coordination based on a very relevant actor (the senior civil service) and the relational framework in which it participates, valid for application to the Spanish case and, by extension, to others governed by a principle of strong internal territorial distribution of political power. With good reason, Arbós (2009: 22-23) warned that "it is indispensable to talk to those who have direct experience of intergovernmental relations. These people are the actors who

know them, through their participation in the institutions in which agreements are made or through the role they play in their implementation. Dialogue with them has been of enormous interest...".

In this context, it is important to highlight what is meant by a senior civil service. This has historically been identified with a high level of qualification and professionalisation, as well as with a high position in the political-administrative system. For operational purposes, and following the tradition of studies on bureaucracy in Spain, we have chosen to identify it with the segment of civil servants who form part of the higher civil service (which requires a higher university degree for admission) and who perform strategic functions in the General State Administration, either through their participation in the formulation of policies and/or their implementation, or through their central position in the web of interactions that links politics with society through the Administration.

Among the collectives that form part of the Spanish civil service, the *Cuerpo Superior de Administradores Civiles del Estado* (Senior Corps of Civil State Administrators) stands out as a generalist with pre-directive and directive functions that, in addition to dealing with the tasks of general administration and management of the common resources of the ministries, performs political and technical advisory functions and participates in the implementation of policies of intergovernmental projection, as well as in intergovernmental coordination forums. Empirical work has been applied to this important body and it has been clearly established that its functions have a clear commitment to the multilevel governance of the Spanish State, which is substantiated in its participation in organic and functional spaces of intergovernmental cooperation for, as an example, the elaboration of parliamentary responses, co-elaboration of normative acts, management and implementation of public policies and, significantly, although to a lesser extent, participating in sectorial and bilateral bodies of cooperation/coordination between the State and the Autonomous regions (hereinafter referred to as ACs).

Once the concept of senior civil service has been established, it must be acknowledged that, among senior civil servants, taken as a whole, there are the same divergences towards IGR as among the general population, so that it is not possible to find generalisations for the whole, but it is possible to find some patterns that characterise the different groups (McCulloch, 1965: 128-129), which implies that the analysis must be carried out group by group (Weidner, 1960: 118). In Spain, too, it has been noted more recently that the dynamics followed by IGRs can vary substantially depending on the sectors of activity or public policy, even if they have similar institutional structures (Arbós, 2009: 26). This implies that the analyses must be carried out on a group by group or one by one basis, and among them we differentiate ACE's analysis because of its interest for the General State Administration, due to the considerations expressed at the time, which share those put forward by Arbós (2009: 27) with respect to the professional staff of the central services: highly specialised training, a government and institutional culture that does not exist to the same extent in the autonomous public functions and the reservation of important State functions in terms of leadership, arbitration and discretion in the use of resources. With a good reason, in the empirical research carried out by the author, it was found that the ACEs collaborate decisively with politicians in the drafting of public decisions and their implementation with regional impact, which confirms the possibility of exercising the "decisional veto" and "paralysing veto" with which Professor Baena (1988) characterised the senior civil service.

Given the conceptual confusion surrounding the concept of "coordination", to the dissolution of which a very meritorious work has been devoted (Bouckaert, et al. :2010), it can be generally established that it is traditionally associated with hierarchical superiority, in an essentially intra-organisational environment, and that it also incorporates formal or informal, vertical or horizontal, imposed or voluntary dimensions, and is even complemented and sometimes replaced by the concepts of cooperation and collaboration. Given these circumstances, we find it interesting to adopt a revised concept that can be applied to IGRs and that, in addition, allows for a diagnosis of the situation and the proposal of lines of improvement. To this end, it is important to reason in systemic terms and to associate the idea of coordination with an attribution of the specific political system under consideration as a whole, and not as a prerogative of one actor or one level of government. This allows for a rediscovery of the value of the different tasks associated with the interaction between levels of government, introducing informative, communicative, preventive and proactive aspects, as well as acts of supervision and guidance at the strategic level. To this end, we rely on the work of Les Metcalfe (1994) and particularly on his scale for measuring coordination, although giving it an inter-organisational and multilevel reading, in order to construct an enriched concept of coordination, whose systematisation and operationalisation would allow for a qualitative measurement of it, seen from the high public function of the State exemplified by the ACEs.

By intergovernmental coordination we mean the systemic or structural process that allows representatives of different levels of government to meet in order to negotiate decision-making and the implementation and management of public policies, through the use of various techniques (mutual adjustment, direct supervision and different versions of standardisation). Conceiving coordination as a process implies not identifying it with the activity of one body or authority, but understanding it as an attribute of the political system as a whole, which allows for better

lubrication between different levels of government and administration, as well as a more pluralistic integration of affected interests.

The scale that allows for a qualitative measurement of intergovernmental coordination is based on the scale developed, as mentioned above, by Metcalfe for another purpose (to analyse the degree to which national administrations coordinate to address the challenge of policy negotiation in the framework of the European Union), which has been of conceptual help but has also involved a notable effort to adapt it to the object of this work. This has made it possible to establish a scale with 9 levels or steps, ranging from the separate management of policies by actors at different levels of government (minimum level) to the sharing of a joint governance strategy among them (maximum level). Its application to the ACE group offers interesting results, both from an academic and practical perspective, and provides a starting point for further studies, such as, for instance, the senior public functions of the ACs, other senior bodies of the General State Administration, or for replicating the analysis in other countries' administrations.

Metcalfe's scale has the potential to adapt to our concept of coordination, incorporating non-conventional aspects such as cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, the author himself anticipated that "while the scale was designed to examine the differences and similarities between national EC administrations, its application is not limited to a particular context. The basic concepts and the form of the ladder are quite general. It can be applied in any governmental context where there is interdependence and thus a need for organisations to work together. It is obvious that intergovernmental or multilevel management contexts respond to this characteristic and therefore, inspired by Metcalfe's scale, the author of this article has adapted it to Spanish multilevel management in order to specify the level at which coordination between the NSA and the autonomous regional governments moves with respect to public policies. This adaptation offers the following scale<sup>2</sup>:

1. – **Intergovernmental independence.** The administration of the national level of government and that of the meso-governments concerned tend to formulate and manage their policies individually, in accordance with the powers they have over them. This requires a clear division of roles and their acceptance.
2. – **Transmission of information to other levels of government.** Although the administration at each level of government has autonomy over its policy powers, there is an obligation to report and there are formal and informal rules and procedures for this.
3. – **Intergovernmental consultation.** Within the framework of each administration's powers, not only is information on different policies forwarded, but feedback or a reaction from the recipient is expected. This implies a two-way flow of information and that the influence of other administrations is accepted.
4. – **Avoiding intergovernmental divergences.** Preventive mechanisms are developed to bridge differences and inconsistencies between the administration of the national level of government and the administration of the meso-governments.
5. – **The pursuit of intergovernmental agreements.** The administration of the national level of government and the administration of the affected meso-government(s) not only avoid conflict by omission (in a negative way) but work together proactively towards joint and complementary positions. It is not just a matter of resolving conflicts, but of seeking common interests.
6. – **Existence of a system for the arbitration of intergovernmental disputes.** When contradictions are not resolved through voluntary channels, an external mediator, unit or institution intervenes to settle the conflict, with the legitimacy and credibility to do so.
7. – **Definition of multilevel trading parameters.** Limits or parameters have been set, by those with coordinating responsibility, that, while leaving room for the actors to decide, they express the lines that must not be crossed and, in the same way, penalise behaviour that is not consistent with collective action.
8. – **Intergovernmental priority-setting.** These priorities, formulated by whoever has the coordinating capacity in communication with the administrations concerned, constitute a clear frame of reference for resolving differences and, at the same time, providing a system for incentivising and recognising decisions that are consistent with them.
9. – **Intergovernmental government strategy.** Governments and administrations at different territorial levels act as a unified whole in policy formulation and development. It

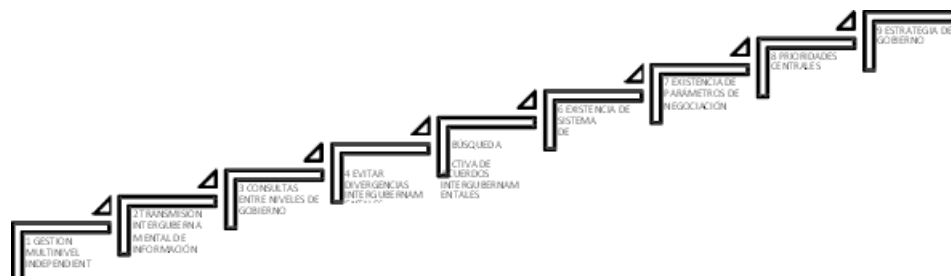
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<sup>2</sup> More information on the conditions for the creation and application of the Metcalfe-inspired coordination measurement scale can be found in Crespo (2017).



presupposes full information, communication and mutual trust between the administrations concerned, who univocally accept the objectives and intergovernmental management. It is the highest level of coordination and its possibility of consolidation is more theoretical than real (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Scale for measuring intergovernmental coordination



Source: Own elaboration adapted from Metcalfe (1994).

#### 4. Some results on multilevel coordination in the Spanish state

Among the results of the study of ACEs' attributes towards multilevel coordination, the following can be highlighted:

1. **It is suggested that the Spanish IGR model responds to a fundamentally cooperative (interdependent) design, but in which the behaviours of the separate model (separate management of public policies) are increasingly gaining ground.**

The literature had already noted that pessimism about IGRs in Spain was unjustified, as the differences with other countries are not so great and, moreover, in recent years they have acquired a high degree of institutionalisation, formalisation and development (Arbós, 2009: 138), and although among the public functions of meso-governments there is greater sympathy towards a greater expansion of these from a functional point of view and a greater fear of federal interventionism, as US research has shown (McCullogh, 1965: 129), it is also true that a certain degree of tolerance is respected for the role of the state in terms of initiative and coordination, regardless of the distribution of competences (Arbós, 2009: 180).

The ACEs highlight various conflictive dimensions of the IGR (see Table 2) in the autonomous State, particularly those derived from the financing of the Devolved Regions (indicated by 89.2% of respondents), the distribution of powers (indicated by 70.6%) and the model of the State and its possible reform (indicated by 63.7%). However, the hierarchical position of the General State Administration vis-à-vis the regional administrations is only cited as a major problematic feature by 11.8 percent of respondents, and cooperation between administrations by 31.4 per cent. Other data also express as problematic the design and functioning of the Senate (74.7% of responses), the excessive autonomous tendency towards separate management (71.3%) and the deficient culture of cooperation and intergovernmental management of political personnel (69%), contrasting the data for the latter with those obtained for professional public personnel (14.9%).

Figure 2. Main problems in the functioning of the autonomous state

Organisational location of multilateral cooperation agencies (e.g. sectoral conferences)	11,5 %
The functioning of multilateral cooperation bodies (e.g. sectoral conferences)	31%
The design and functioning of bilateral cooperation bodies between the State and the ACs.	31%
The Senate's current design and functioning	74,7 %
The culture of intergovernmental cooperation and management among political staff at different levels of government.	69%

The culture of intergovernmental cooperation and management among professional public personnel at different levels of government.	14,9 %
The excessive tendency towards coordination by the national level of government	11,5 %
Excessive tendency towards individual and separate management by the ACs	71,3 %
Others	5,7%

Source: Own elaboration

## 2. Coordination and cooperation are greater at the technical and professional domains than at the political level.

In this, the perception of ACEs follows the patterns identified in previous studies, which specify that at the technical level (and thus among senior specialised officials) there is a strong tendency towards cooperation, while as issues become politicised (or political personnel are involved) conflict emerges more frequently. Thus, the results for the US level suggest that there is less esteem for IGRs and less support for oversight by another level of government if the officials are elected (political), while cooperation increases substantially when only senior technical officials are involved (McCullogh, 1965: 136), which is confirmed for ACEs, together with the fact that officials who have more contact with other levels of government have more positive attitudes towards intergovernmental cooperation than those who have little or no contact. Indeed, the empirical work carried out showed that the ACEs, in the exercise of their functions, have a clear commitment to the multilevel governance of the Spanish State, which is substantiated by their participation in organic and functional areas of intergovernmental cooperation.

It was also verified by the fieldwork carried out that, although there is a lot of "noise" in the political management or negotiation of issues, and a high degree of conflict, the general problems of contact are often overlaid by the professional technical alliances of senior officials and managers that allow things to move forward and agreements to be reached. This is what Arbós (2009: 292) refers to when he explains that "conflict in the various sectors, despite different political affiliations, is normally compensated for by technical and professional alliances". To this end, the answers we received in the empirical work are of interest when we asked about the roles played by the ACEs, concluding that among them, those linked to technical and legal competence predominate, but also with respect to the basic values of public service (neutrality and impartiality), without disregarding creative aspects (the role of ideators and formulators) together with those that facilitate interaction between actors (facilitators and mediators) (see Table 3). Some officials stated:

"In general, the level of cooperation is very high.

"Cooperation at the technical level is perfect. At the political level, it is terrible, although it depends on the personality of the individual politician.

"There are informal networks that are reaching relevant agreements. For example, the inter-administrative network on the quality of services.

"In matters of shared competence, e.g. cartography, cooperation between public managers is at a maximum".

However, other ACEs expressed critical views, either by supporting a stronger central state position in negotiations and conflicts or, on fewer occasions, by accusing the state administration of not being interested in what happens in the ACs:

"I believe that the emphasis should be on the principle of coordination, not cooperation, which oozes good intentions but little in the way of action".

"In case of conflict, the opinion of the state should prevail".

"We peripheral officials have endured the implementation of state policies dictated by those who do not know the local reality and have no intention of knowing it".

Figure 3. Roles that are realised in the professional practice of the ACEs

ROLES	%
The technical role of experts exercising an expertise	89,2
The role of interest sponsorship	5,9
The role of the broker, who negotiates for different interests	15,7

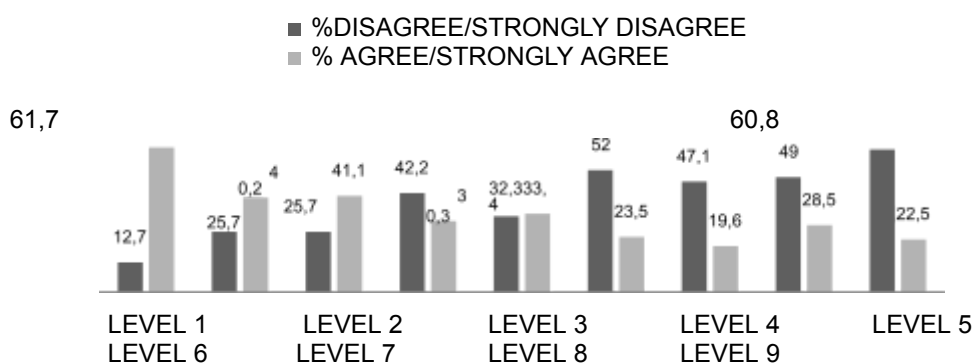
The role of facilitators, who mediate between group interests	52
The partisan role, which advocates a clear political position	2,9
The role of ideators and formulators of new programmes	71,6
The role of guarantor of state impartiality	87,3
The role of legal expert	68,6
The role of civic defender protecting the rights of the collective	42,2
Other	1

Source: Own elaboration based on Aberbach Putnam and Rockman (1981).

### 3. The basic level of coordination that has been built into the functioning of the levels of government in Spain is considered insufficient for the needs of a strongly politically decentralised state.

The responses to the scale for measuring intergovernmental coordination (see Graph 4) suggest that the 3 basic steps have been consolidated (sharing of functions, transmission of information and consultation between levels of government), and the following two are in the process of being consolidated: the existence of preventive mechanisms to avoid divergences and proactive mechanisms to seek agreement. However, from step 6 onwards, and coinciding with the most strategic aspects, is where the aspects that pose an ambitious agenda for improvement are to be found. Indeed, the responses of respondents and interviewees hint at the need to intervene in the system of arbitration of intergovernmental differences, as well as in the setting of negotiation parameters and intergovernmental priorities within the framework of a national governance strategy. To this end, and having carried out specific empirical work on the subject, we believe that the quantity and quality of the data we have used to arrive at the above result is superior to that established in previous research. In fact, with respect to the Spanish case, and tacitly using Metcalfe's scheme, albeit synthesised into three levels or degrees of coordination (low, medium and high), we find that Arbós (2009: 295-8) specifies that there is a minimum degree of coordination as there is an exchange of information between the ACs and the state in the various sectors, although he warns that in the event of conflict this information may be of poor quality; also that a medium degree of coordination would be reached when there is integration of technical aspects and communication of action strategies by the ACs in policies, which essentially occurs if there are incentives to cooperate; And finally, as regards the high degree of coordination, which is expressed in terms of joint decision-making, it was found that this is still the initiative of the State and not of the ACs, and when it does materialise, the necessary monitoring and evaluation of policies is not carried out.

Figure 4. Measuring intergovernmental coordination in Spain as seen by ACEs



Source: Own elaboration

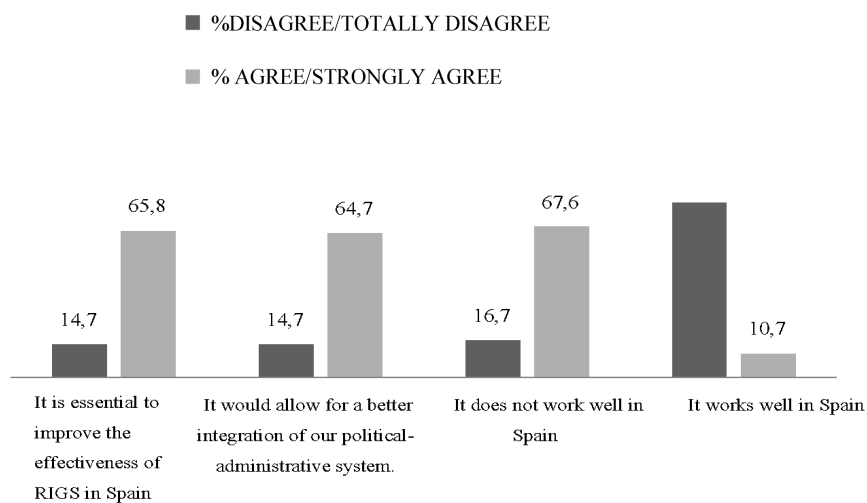
### 4. Inter-administrative mobility of senior civil servants would have a beneficial effect on coordination and cooperation between levels of government.

In an attempt to try to improve the relationship between levels of government, information was sought from the ACEs on their perception of the issue from the perspective of the senior civil service and, in particular, whether inter-organisational mobility would have a beneficial effect on inter-governmental coordination. In the formulation we had considered the explicitness of the surveys referenced by McCullogh, which expressed that those senior civil servants with a greater degree of contact with other levels of government, or who had worked in one of them



other than the current one previously, were more likely to see IGRs as cooperative, which would entail values tending to favour coordination (e.g. McCulloch, 1965: 135). Weidner (1960: 119) also pointed out that more relevant than age, years of seniority and place of residence was whether senior civil servants had a positive perception of IGRs, the typology of their training and whether they had previously worked at other levels of government. In our empirical work, the ACEs endorsed the importance of mobility of senior civil servants between public administrations as an aspect that could generate a more integrated current functioning for the Spanish state. Respondents agreed that such mobility is essential to improve the effectiveness of RIGS in Spain and that it would allow for a better integration of our political-administrative system. However, 78.5% of them expressed disagreement with its functioning and only 3.9% indicated that it should not change. The interviews revealed that the regional authorities have little sympathy for inter-administrative mobility and the paradox that, despite the fact that it is permitted by law, administrative practices have tended to close it down. In addition to modifying these bad practices, some ways of improving mobility are pointed out, such as, for example, the temporary exchange of civil servants, or favouring the occupation of appropriate posts in the different administrations for those originating from other administrations.

Figure 5. Inter-administrative mobility in Spain



Source: Own elaboration

In view of the richness and consistency of the above data, we can conclude that by studying the position and perceptions of the senior civil service, in this case exemplified by the ACEs, useful lessons can be drawn for diagnosing, understanding and improving cooperation and coordination in states.

## 5. Conclusions

The senior civil service or strategic civil service is seen as a good instrument to investigate the functioning (in terms of coordination and cooperation) of complex and fragmented political-administrative systems subject to different degrees of multilevel governance. This has been confirmed for the Spanish case through research conducted by the author and recently completed, which incorporated an empirical analysis of the Spanish civil service. Within this framework, it has been concluded that:

1. The civil service is a critical actor in IGR in Spain and an analysis of intergovernmental coordination can be carried out from there. This analysis provided us with an operational concept of intergovernmental coordination (the systemic or structural process whereby representatives of different levels of government come together to negotiate decision-making and the implementation and management of public policies, using a

variety of techniques - mutual adjustment, direct monitoring and different versions of standardisation) and a scale of measurement inspired by the concept of intergovernmental coordination (the systemic or structural process whereby representatives of different levels of government come together to negotiate decision-making and the implementation and management of public policies, using a variety of techniques - mutual adjustment, direct monitoring and the different versions of standardisation), the evidence to conclude that, according to the ECAs, we are still faced today with a fundamentally cooperative model of IGR, in which a conflictive vision of relations between the State and the devolved regions is gaining ground, as well as a tendency towards separate management, and in which coordination is clearly a matter for improvement.

2. From an intergovernmental point of view, the group studied interprets its expectations of action in terms of technical and legal competence, but also with respect to the basic values of public service (neutrality and impartiality), without neglecting creative aspects (the role of ideators and formulators) as well as those that facilitate interaction (facilitators and mediators), the latter aspects being of particular interest for multilevel coordination.
3. On the other hand, the responses to the scale of measurement of intergovernmental coordination suggest that the 3 basic steps have been consolidated (sharing of functions, transmission of information and consultation between levels of government), and the following two are in the process of being consolidated: the existence of preventive mechanisms to avoid divergences and proactive mechanisms to seek agreement. However, it is from step 6 onwards, and coinciding with the most strategic aspects, that we find the aspects that pose an ambitious agenda for improvement. Indeed, the responses of respondents and interviewees hint at the need to intervene in the system of arbitration of intergovernmental differences, as well as in the establishment of negotiation parameters and intergovernmental priorities within the framework of a national governance strategy. This aspect suggests that the organisational and institutional fabric that operates as the infrastructure for the necessary coordination and multilevel cooperation in Spain is not in tune with the complexity of the strong internal distribution of power that has taken place since the restoration of democracy in said country. Addressing this challenge could improve the functioning of the Spanish state and, at the same time, mitigate the rupturist positions of some of the ACs and curb the neocentralist impulses of some forces and groups at the state level.
4. Finally, despite the interest of the empirical work applied to the Senior Corps of Civil State Administrators, a pre-managerial and managerial collective with generalist and intergovernmental functions in the framework of the State's senior civil service that collaborates both in shaping political decisions and in managing their implementation through public policies, it must be acknowledged that it is a qualified but limited sample. Future research into the attitudes and perceptions of other important state bodies, or comparable bodies in the ACs, and international comparative studies would be desirable. Further analysis, synthesis, verification and comparison would be necessary and welcome. To this end, it is hoped that the operational and measurable concept of coordination, based on Metcalfe's work and the results obtained, will be useful as an investigative and heuristic tool.

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