

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Valuable Conversations with UCL IIPP Wolfgang Drechsler

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SPEAKERS

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**NOTE: This is an AI generated auto-transcript.*

Justin 00:02

Hello, and welcome to valuable conversations a student produced podcast from the Institute for Innovation and public purpose at University College London. I'm Justin Beiroid.

Nikol 00:12

And I'm Nicole Stoykova.

Justin 00:15

And we are both students pursuing a Master of Public Administration MPa, and innovation, public policy and public value here at IIPP. And if you're not familiar, IIPP was founded by Professor Mariana mazzucato, a leading thinker and economist IIPP is sort of part research institution, part policy consultancy and postgraduate school. And the core idea of pretty much everything IIPP does is to try to revive notions of public value and public purpose and bring them to the center of political economy and policy practice. So just to tell you a little bit about us. I'm from Los Angeles, California. And I'm particularly interested in political economy and technology.

And I was really drawn to IIPP for its unique approach to rethinking capitalism, the state and finding ways to make sure that innovation and technology benefit everyone rather than just a few dudes in California. So, Nicole,

Nikol 01:19

I'm from Bulgaria. Before coming to IPP, I studied English as an undergraduate. And I'm very interested in IPPs work around rethinking public value and the role the humanities have to play in policymaking. I'm quite new to this field to the field of policy in general. So this past year, doing the MPA has been an incredible opportunity for me to learn and to grow.

Justin 01:46

Right. So this podcast is going to be a bunch of conversations between students and people who they admire. So we just mainly are trying to help learn a bit more about some of these really incredible scholars and people who, you know, we might have seen lectures or things on YouTube or read their work, but just to kind of get to know a little bit beyond the surface there. And so with that in mind, today, we are especially excited to welcome Professor Wolfgang Dressler. Wolfgang is an honorary professor at IIPP. And we first got to know him through some of his really entertaining and thought provoking lectures in the NPA. And we're gonna dig deeper into some of his theories, and also learn a little bit more about his life.

Nikol 02:37

Yes, Wolfgang is an absolute wealth of knowledge on many, many topics, but he is most well known for his work on non western public administration. The basic idea is that what we call global public administration today, is actually Western public administration modeled after the Anglo American style of bureaucracy.

Justin 02:57

Yeah, and you'll hear Wolfgang talk a bit more about this. But basically, the idea is that historically, through, you know, imperialism and global capitalism, whatever you want to call it, Western models of public administration, and the way you structure bureaucracy and the government, have really taken over the world and become the dominant forms of PA worldwide. But you know, what Wolfgang is trying to get us to acknowledge is, in fact, there actually a lot of different ways to do it besides just the Western way. And the kind of the two other ones that he focuses the most on are Chinese or Confucian public administration, and Islamic or Ottoman public administration, and to a lesser extent, Buddhist pa in South Asia. And, you know, the thing I think, to keep in mind is that those aren't, you know, the only other three forms, it's just the fact that, especially for the confusion, and the Islamic PA, these are forms of public administration that have existed for hundreds or 1000s

of years, and basically been the way of organizing entire empires. So the idea that those aren't significant historically, or something that we should keep in mind when we think about policy or bureaucracies, is just a little bit weird. And so you know, Wolfgang is really a fascinating person because he tries to uncover some of those things, and figure out what we can learn from them both in the west and and elsewhere.

Nikol 04:33

In his work, Wolfgang emphasizes that there is no one global best public administration, but there are different contexts that have different goals and styles of government. And we're going to talk a little bit about Bulgaria and the case with non western pa later on in this podcast.

Justin 04:50

We're also going to talk a bit about his recent advocacy and writing on civil disobedience by civil servants and In Myanmar after the military coup that happened in February 2021. So that is a really kind of intense part of the discussion but a really important one too. So thank you so much for listening and we hope you enjoy our interview.

Nikol 05:17

Outside of IPP Wolfgang is professor of governance at the Department of innovation and governance at Tallinn University of Technology, as well as Associate at Harvard University's David center. Wolfgang has been advisor to the president of Estonia executive secretary during the German reunification a congressional fellow as well as a senior legislative analyst in the United States Congress. He serves or has served as an advisor, especially in the areas of public management reform and innovation policy as well as E governance for national governments and international organizations, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Council of Europe, sigma World Bank, European Union, Inter American Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme. He has worked in different capacities on the national development plans of for example, Estonia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Peru, Brazil and Norway. His academic focus areas include technology, innovation and governance, non western paradigms of governance, especially Buddhist, Confucian and Islamic in southeast and East Asia, and public management reform generally, he also has a strong background both in heterodox economic theory. And in classical political philosophy. He is author or editor of more than 20 books in journal issues, and well over 100 scholarly articles. Hello, Professor Wolfgang, and welcome to Our Podcast.

Justin 06:55

Hello. Well, thank you so much for being here. Where does this podcast find you right now?

Wolfgang 07:02

Oh, it's my pleasure altogether to be here. And it finds me in Germany in the old university town of Marburg. This is one hour north of Frankfurt Airport.

Justin 07:11

Oh, right, is that where you live? This is

Wolfgang 07:14

where I live a certain part of the year. And it's where I'm originally from. And that's actually where I spend most of the time of the pandemic, because it's a very nice large space, with a lot of possibilities to go outside.

Justin 07:28

But interesting that you ended up back where you where you grew up, during this time during this very bizarre time we've been living through. I wanted to ask real quick, I saw you posted that you did your first in person lecture and since the pandemic started, right?

Wolfgang 07:45

Yes, I did. That was a conference actually the international public policy Association, which is the main global Association for Public Policy, specifically, that had a hybrid conference in Barcelona. And I was the only speaker who was actually there for the plenary panel for the first plenary panel on methodology. And so I really had this pleasure of getting up in this Pompeo Fabra auditorium with about 100 people and take the mask off and talk to real people. How weird was that? This was very weird, especially because I was the only one without a mask. So still address people that are fully veiled up. And there was a strange atmosphere as far as this is concerned. And also, you could even feel a little cloud of envy by people who were staying with masks all the time. But it was really nice, especially since it had this feeling, hopefully not a mirage of that it was going back and it was really reminding one how it feels to interact with real life people. Zoom is great, but it's only partial.

Justin 09:00

Yeah, I can imagine being in a room full of people after doing zoom lectures for this long must be exciting but also like, like weird like getting your getting your legs back. Yes. So so if you don't mind, we're very interested in

in talking about non western PA and Myanmar and all these other things. But I wanted to kind of take a step back and ask just a little bit about your life if that's okay. You grew up in in Marburg where you're staying now, right?

Wolfgang 09:32

Well, this was my childhood home, indeed. But I left relatively early. So already for my college degree, I went to the United States, and this is where I then also received my master's degree. And then I came back here for two years to get my PhD. And then again, it was leaving both within Germany and within Europe in the world.

Justin 10:00

Right. So and that's like a university town right like the town is pretty much around. University of Marburg,

Wolfgang 10:07

there is an old cliché saying about the classic German university that said that gutting and has a university, but Marburg is a university. It's a classic University Village, it was one of the small towns, well, middle towns, in the Duchy of the Principality of Hesse. And it was the university town because you know, there is sometimes the tendency to not have the universities in the main cities, but a little bit away so that the politics don't get endangered by rocket students. And so Maverick was always this kind of small university, but it has an academic history, the distinction of being the oldest Protestant university in the world, the oldest without a papal permission, and the old European University always came with a papal bull. And this one founded in 1527, didn't. And what that means is that it's one of the first explicitly practice and government oriented universities, that means it prepared as the first time in Europe explicitly, the people that you needed for governing, or for letting a state run. That means lawyers, doctors, theologians, that would give the kind of theology that you as the prince wanted to hear. And then, you know, generic teachers and everything like that in the liberal arts faculty, but these three, you really need doctors, lawyers, and preachers, if you want to run a European country. So it's quite an interesting place as far as this is concerned. And it remained that until it was taken over by Prussia, it's a quite famous university. Also, because the first Nobel Prize of medicine went here, to me from baring, who got his professorship here and to basically invented or discovered vaccines on a large scale. And this is still so today so that the main German production site and one of the two main in Europe, for Pfizer biotech is right here around the corner at a startup that is now existing since 120 years, and even in changed farms. And that's almost a perfect case study for much of the IIPP work.

Justin 12:25

Oh, wow, that's, that's incredible. Did growing up in that, in that town, make you kind of more likely to or see yourself going into academia? Or when did you kind of get interested in public policy and political science and that kind of stuff.

Wolfgang 12:44

So I am not exactly what you call a first gen scientist. So actually, what is University was founded in 1527. It was by the local prints on the advice of my 13th, great grandfather, Phillip Bernstein, who was one of the reformers of both Christian religion here and of the university system. And my father himself, he was when I was born, professor of political science, and he then became the Lord Mayor, but Lord Mayor in this state of Germany's actually executive function, not to symbolic function, and he was that for 20 years. So the background in public policy and in academia, was something that was always with me that this was the logical thing, if you could manage, that you would actually pursue. And I had planned to do that. During my studies, I was actually thinking of being a corporate lawyer or something like that. But then fate, if you want to call it that, or tradition, or whatever it is, and certainly the culture you grew up with, nudged me into this way. And so I basically wound up in a position including my position at IIPP, that anyone not naive could have predicted at my cradle.

Justin 14:05

Right. Wow, that's, that's really interesting. I suspected that maybe your family was involved in the university. But that's some pretty incredible history there. So what made you want to leave and go to the US to study this stuff?

Wolfgang 14:18

Well, that is there was an issue with the German university system, and that the German university system wasn't really doing so well anymore at that time. Also, if you're having that much history and locality, it does get kind of boring and kind of laugh, and you do want to go away. And certainly in my generation, the logical Western place to go was either the United States or the United Kingdom. And I thought it was a really great opportunity to do that. So when I went to the US, I went to a college I didn't go to university because I already already gone to a university, you know, at that point If there were no pas in Germany, you entered grad school, right away after the high school. And I went to law school right away. And I really had the feeling that this wasn't broad enough, had I liked this quote, I had the feeling that nobody has ever died from enlarging their horizon. And I thought I had studied English literature, in in parallel for fun together with law, I still thought it wasn't enough. And so when I went to the US, I, on purpose went to a small liberal arts college to take as many classes in areas that word my area's as I possibly could. And at that time to do this with a scholarship, the only place you would consider for this the only place where they were automatisms, you know, scholarship programs and agreements and so on, was with the US.

Nikol 15:53

Following that conversation. If you look back at the time, when you are our age, just a fresh graduate, How did life look like for you? And what were the perspectives in front of you and the different life paths? And how did you choose the one that you ended up pursuing?

Wolfgang 16:14

Well, now I really have to watch not to start with too many heavy cliches, but I do think life paths choose you, rather than that you choose the life path. But the thing is that when I grew up, and when I was at this early time, studying a little bit younger than you, this was the time that in Germany, we call the Rhenish of the bond Republic, that means this was still the very end of the Cold War world. And then everything was pretty set, the West had become really cozy. During the Cold War, everything was absolutely clear. There was a stratified society, there were career paths, the future was pretty clear. You would become a lawyer with the railroads or with folks wagon, and you knew that this would schedule your life until there would be a very nice sermon at your funeral, right? So everything would be basically taken care of. And then came the upheaval of the fall of the wall and all of these changes, and everything changed like that. And that broke things up. So but I would altogether say that this was extremely fruitful and extremely nice. Although in this beginning, I was also oriented towards then going beyond Germany and to Europe. And only in a later step, did I globalize, if you will, and look at other parts of the world as well?

Nikol 17:46

And is it around that time that you started to first doubt the mainstream narratives of Political Science and economy and PA, and all of that that later came into your life?

Wolfgang 17:57

No, I doubted the mainstream from the beginning on, as I was actually saying, now, in Barcelona, if you have a concept of mainstream, you think already beyond the mainstream, once you realize that there is such a thing, right? This is a cheap adaptation of a Kantian phrase. Yeah, and the, the mainstream of how to look at things. That was something both in substance and a methodology that I had already very early. So my father was more a left political scientist as, for me, this kind of critical understanding of human living together and production and so on, that was, in a way the norm, but it was not the mainstream because it wasn't a societal mainstream, if you will. And my interest in philosophy and of the specific kind of philosophy that I have that is often designated with the word Heidelberg. This is, by the way, the same philosophy that our deputy director Professor Anna Cattell shares as well. This is something that makes you question simple 19th century positivism,

if I can be polemical, and so you're getting nudged into this kind of heterodoxy already. It was then, quite later, 1020 years later, that this also, for me, expanded into looking at the world in a more global perspective, that means saying that even this heterodoxy is still Western, and is still very much tied to our culture. And only then and when looking at possible alternatives. Did I look beyond these borders?

Justin 19:45

How early on was it that you kind of turned your focus that what we call Public Administration scholarship is actually Western public administration? And when did you start to think about that and realize that things were kind of different historically in different parts of the world?

Wolfgang 20:03

I would say this is this is not that long ago, from my perspective, but I'm a bit older, it's about 20 years. And it really happened in such a way. Indeed. So it's really good that you brought me there when talking about my heterodoxy, if you will. Because yeah, it really got prompted by a dissatisfaction with a paradigm that we got presented. And so I was basically unhappy with what was sold as the mainstream and also as the main heterodoxy, if you will, this was all way too simple, and way too fast. And so I was from this perspective, then saying, hey, there should be stuff that deals with other systems with alternatives, this cannot be all, this is just a choice. And it either happened this way, or somebody has been pushing into this direction, which, for instance, in economics clearly is the case, right? That it's in the interest of people to limit the discourse to specific forms of inquiry. And for me, it was always substance add methodology, because I think it's really important that you can't divide the two, you know, one of my core phrases, this method is never neutral. And that is something that is really important in this context, I think. And I really started looking at non western public administration, when looking for solid alternatives to the global Western slash northern paradigm. So this was, I didn't start with, you know, being in Asia, and saying, hey, they have this system here as well. But it's basically a western idea to look for a death zone, comprehensiveness that I can understand what is happening here. And once you start looking into this, you do find a lot. And it this is what is, you know, I'm always saying, not only does it open new horizons abroad, but it also makes you reflect on what you're doing yourself in such a better way.

Justin 22:13

Right. That's, that's so interesting. And I have a lot of, we have a lot of follow ups on this topic. But I guess just to take a step back for people that haven't had enrichment lectures as we have, could you just give a few minute rundown on kind of your theory of non western PA and, and how you've expanded and started looking at the ottoman and Confucian Chinese models?

Yes. So of course, I'm extremely happy to do so this is why I have the job that I have, right. So I can talk about this forever would be hyper bowl, but close, close. So the idea is that, in so many social sciences, we know that there are things that are the same just because of human beings being the same and relating in a similar way. But on the other hand, that we have very distinguished and distinct cultures, in time and in space that are simply different, and that work in a different way. And in public administration, public policy, this is particularly weak. But in other areas of the social sciences, it's also weak. That means what is stressed is one mainstream theory. And one outcome of how the public sector should be organized towards switch all other global traditions need to move. And the great insight then is if you say, there is no such thing as a global, good, modern, progressive, public administration, there can't be because there are different legitimate forms of government, that all will have their different shapes and logics goals and also mechanisms we know that organization follows where you are the context, the task, and so on and so on. And then what could they be. And once I know this, I get a better understanding of the choices that the West made or that was made for the West. In pa it's sensible to talk about East West as well as North South because there are very powerful if you will, global south countries with very strong traditions that however, are clearly not Western. So the global south Global North dichotomy is the first one, but in this area, it's good to add the classic east west one, obviously, the rise of China is the very, very first example of why this is so and if you do that, you then start looking at what these Other examples could be and of course, we had great administration's in the past great systems in the past Mesopotamia or Egypt, my favorite example, that wouldn't be pyramids, if they wouldn't have had a high quality public administration, because these are, you know, state built constructions, and somebody must have managed that. But this doesn't exist any more today. And if you look for the argument that there is such a thing as non western PA, you do look for systems that are very sophisticated, that are not about small island republics, but large empires that can compete possibly with the West, you look for traditions with a carrier country today with successful presence, and not only the past with a take up of eovernance. Yeah, which is so important today. So if you look at this, then I think you almost invariably come to two non Western traditions, and that is the Confucian or classical Chinese Far Eastern, it is good to say Confucian because that includes more interesting countries than just China. And of course, the Islamic one, because Islam is what we construct as the other in the West. Yeah, also, this is the other that is also here. And so to understand, it truly, is really so important. The third tradition that is competitive on another level, is the Buddhist tradition, which is more important for policy and for administrative goals, simply because if you look at the change of values, and the change of policy goals that we've been through in the last five to 10 years, this actually tallies more with a Buddhist tradition, such as carbon neutral, if you will, to just put it very quickly. And such as anything Friday's for future stand for, then it does even with the Western tradition. So there you have less the mechanics, less the organization, but more the goals in a in a way that has already been discussed. And that is what makes it interesting. And so by every administration today is hybrid, the West was really, really powerful and successful for 250 years, very roughly between 1750 and 2000, it was very clear that this was how you had to win, even if the other systems were nice. They didn't have as big steel boats with big cannons on them. And so in that sense, it wasn't sustainable, but with a questioning of what the West did, and if you will success, also looking at the success and sustainability of the planet. This has changed as well as because of a decline of the West and the Western system and an ascendancy of Eastern or south eastern systems. And so if it is so that there are hybrid systems, why should we be so boring, and look at examples where everybody is the same, rather than putting the emphasis on solutions that work in one place,

but not in the other is specially if I may finish with this, because of the last two years in the stream that has been prompted originally by Black Lives Matter. And that has tended into a presence of decolonization that was really so important. During the last two years that we have discussed for decades before, but not this kind of urgency, this is something that got additionally propelled to center stage. In other words, to look at good examples of how to manage the public sector and border areas, in a non western non Anglo American way, seems to be is I would say a value in its own right, because it allows to see the possibility of other options, then the global Western ones, which too often are actually Anglo American, which includes the casting.

Nikol 29:26

I just wanted to say as a response to your wonderful explanation, that your work has been very valuable to me exactly, because it's kind of pushed me to rethink the culture and the narratives I was born into here in Bulgaria. And I wanted before I get to my questions to maybe give our listeners a quick introduction to Bulgarian history or what I know of it very briefly. So this small eastern European country that I was born into, we have been our own country. For around 600 years when the Ottomans came in the 14th century, and invaded us, and pretty much also most of eastern Europe, and then we were under Ottoman rule for 500 years until the end of the 19th century, when we were liberated with the help of the Russians. For a brief moment, afterwards, we were a monarchy with a German King until the Russians came again. And from 1944 to 1989, Bulgaria was under a communist regime. And we are since then a democracy. And in 2007, we joined the EU. But I just wanted to take a very quick second and reflect that our history in many ways defined our ideology, our whole culture, our national identity, public administration, and all of it kind of was born as a rejection of the Islamic PA, at least in my eyes, and a pursuit of the global western model, because this is what we hear, perceive as progressive. And in one of your lectures during term one, when I first heard you talk about non western PA, I actually asked you a question about how Bulgaria can reconcile Islamically legacies and Western pa in order to achieve a more effective PA system. And you responded that this is not really a possibility. And rather than thinking about that, we need to think about what kind of Western PA system to adopt, adopt. And that kind of led me to think, more in depth about it in an assignment in my second term, and I wanted to go back to it because it was so interesting to me. And to ask you, what do you think about it today? Is it really possible to initiate a public discourse about reconciling Western and non western pa in Bulgaria?

Wolfgang 31:43

This is one of the large questions that touch a specific aspect about which is, you know, I've also written and that's Islamic pa in Europe. So once again, Islam is the other deconstructed other. For many Europeans, there are important European thinkers who say that Europe defines itself as being not Islamic. If I phrase it that way, you can, however, already see the problems that are starting extremely quickly, you have this kind of other ring that leads to, for most of us more problems than than answers now. But the story is that, or just let me put it like this, we have actually four Muslim majority countries within Europe. And if you say that this is not part of Europe, what does that mean for these countries? Bulgaria has, most people, I would say, it's fair to say, most people outside of Bulgaria don't have a very good idea about Bulgaria, about its heritage and also about its

ethnic setup. So if you ask your average, to use an old cliché man on the Clapham bus in London, of how many Muslims you have in Bulgaria, what kind of answer would you get probably would get a startled expression that this is even a question. Yeah. So the this struggle for national independence in the 19th century against the Ottoman Empire is the foundation myth of almost all southeastern European nation states. So it is actually instrumental for this. And that means that you have, as I sometimes flippantly say, the same kind of statues of rather sturdy man with a big mustache, or defer cap and the sword in the middle of the village, in all of these countries, that you can almost interchange this, and this is the local hero who fought against the Ottomans. But if you look at history, in fact, many, many farmers or poor people, peasants, if you use the old term actually converted to Islam voluntarily because it was for them, the better setup, many of the local aristocrats actually were particularly conservative adherence of the Sultan, who didn't even want reforms, because that gave them more of an income and more power over their own peasantry than they had before. And so, this narrative seriously needs to be questioned. It's very difficult to talk about the qualities of the Ottoman Empire, but for the Ottoman side, Bulgaria was not even periphery, it was part of the core empire. And if you look at where Istanbul is that how quickly with a boat or overland from some places in Bulgaria, you are actually at the Hippodrome that that shows you that this is not entirely The absurd. And if we then make an objective analysis of when Bulgaria for economic policy or infrastructure or something like that was administered the best, it comes out pretty well for the ultimate legacy, and not so well for various Western imposed king or local dynasties through, you know, brought up their own rule of the ruins of the Byzantine Empire, and so on and so on. The problem is, if this is the exact opposite of the foundation narrative, it will make people very, very upset. There is a tradition in South Eastern Europe, but not only there of defining nations ethnically homogeneously, and to be quite wary of empires, multi ethnic communities, and so on and so on. But of course, already, when I say that multi ethnic empire that sounded really old fashioned 30 years ago, today, it really doesn't anymore, because reality keeps knocking at our door. In Bulgaria, there is a there is actually a famous case that scholars were actually looking at Ottoman administration and saying, it wasn't so bad. And the scholars who did an exhibition like that actually received death threats. And this was slightly before social media. But you can imagine what happens on Bulgarian social media, if you say, one of our best systems was Ottoman rule. Now it can't be it must be this is not who we are, this is not what we do. And this is what I mean, it would take, I wouldn't say at all, it's impossible, and I would actually find it desirable. But the acknowledgement of the high qualities of ultimate administration, including in Bulgaria, in itself, needs such a level of abstraction. And if you will, neutrality, that it's very difficult and a highly ideologized environment to achieve. It is in fact, even difficult for the Muslim majority countries and Europe, to acknowledge the qualities of the Ottoman Empire, the ones that define themselves as Christian, it's absolutely not the case. Although, as you know, my examples always are the last stoning in Europe was often Muslim by Christians, the last mass murder in Europe was by Orthodox Christians, against Muslims, and so on and so on. This is the reality of the legacy. And one that might, that one might look at the Ottoman administration was quite neutral, quite professional. It's very different than the Western system. But it has a lot of very, very good, very interesting solutions from which one can not so much learn without that background, but look at and draw lessons from. But that is why I think this is such an important topic as well. Because just even from this small perspective, it gives you a perspective of how things really were and it undermined some of the myths that are the most pernicious in also European living together. So it has this positive side. That said, I think it would be wrong to sell Ottoman governance and ultimately administration as kind of, you know, super liberal, Copenhagen, Shangri La, kind of fuzzy, friendly, Teletubbies kind of environment. It was not this is not how the Ottomans were. But the point the term you use here instead of the

Hendon era, the black legend, meaning it wasn't that great, but not half as bad, not even a quarter as bad as it is made out in the stories that are told in order to establish the regimes that took over them. And that are partially in power now.

Nikol 39:06

Yes, exactly. Thank you so much. I think this is really making me question everything that I've been taught, you know, in school, and in my early years and everything you're brought up with here, but I also wanted to ask you a slightly different question. Every time I hear speak about this, I always wonder what about communism? You always sort of speak about Islamic and Chinese pa but would you say that communist PA is a thing is a different? Does it have its own characteristic?

Wolfgang 39:42

So this is a very interesting topic, but I think that it depends on who you ask. So there are different legitimate ways of how to conceptualize that. What I would say is that communism is a particularly specifically Western way of how to think about things. So this for me, communism, socialism, Marxism and so on. This is a Western theory. This is where it comes from. There is a couple of theorists, as we all know, that have expanded Marxist analysis to the global south and so on. But basically, this is a this is a Western theory. And it's important to look at that, because if you look at some countries that are still today, at least, allegedly premised on this, the question is, how much is this and how much is the older legacy? But there are very interesting thoughts. There are very interesting themes. What has been very interesting is, for instance, both Marx's own analysis of bureaucracy, and then later the bureaucracy analysis of the Frankfurt School, which are very anti bureaucratic. And on the other hand, remembering Max Weber's point that there is no ideological system that is so prone to super bureaucratization as Soviet socialism, communism, because the entire system is built on bureaucratic rules. And Faber predicted famously, that in the Soviet Union bureaucrats would be even as powerful if more so than communist apparatchiks. And that there might be actually, the reason why the entire empire would somehow collapse is because there would be the wrong bureaucrats in charge. So there are cases to me to be made in very different ways. But I would basically agree with that. I see this basically as one of the Western traditions, and the logic of Soviet administration is largely Western, it wasn't very successful. It isn't today, and there are various ways of how you can get out of this. But there is a large parallel ality here, it meets very nicely the theory of techno economic paradigm shifts of Professor Carlota Perez, one of our very good colleagues here at IIPP. And in my case for many, many years before that, who also talks about uncanny parallels to industrial development and innovation between the Soviet empire and if you will, the Western one, the Washington Consensus, so that it even down to architecture lives, leads to very similar results in not not entirely so and the differences are also important, but the basic typology at given points in time look very similar.

Justin 42:55

Obviously, we could do an entire hour just on any one of these topics. And I highly encourage people to go check out Wolfgang's writing and and YouTube videos and things like that. One thing I just wanted to make sure we we jump into is some of your recent work on Myanmar. And I read your your new paper from May Myanmar's civil civil service responsible disobedience during the 21 military coup. And it really is just a tragic situation of what's happened in Myanmar. And I thought you had a really interesting take on it Do you want to tell us a little bit about

Wolfgang 43:35

because this is a topic that's very close to my heart, not only academically but also, if you will, moving almost towards activism. So what happened in Myanmar, is that you had to take over off the military that minded a slow and gradual democratisation, that by no means was perfect and certainly not equitable towards the different peoples of Myanmar. That needs to be said, but that nonetheless reflected a relatively close popular will. And then you have truly isolated cultish military that has exploited the country for its own benefits since decades, taken over and being supported by outside forces, so that there was no and is no intervention other than pronouncements. And that for instance, now where the third wave of COVID is impacting Myanmar has led to the military denying oxygen wherever possible, and actually shooting at people being in line to to get oxygen for the dying relatives. I mean, this is this is really images from hell. And it's meant this way, this is really how it is the what you basically have is a military takeover. by people who have their own country described as terrorists, so that that the official military of the country is seen as terrorists, and that's the case. But why this, if we go beyond that, and we don't need to go beyond that, because that is a tragic story happening, as we speak enough to know about this. And I think it's woefully underreported in the media. But from the things we've been talking about, there are a couple of interesting perspective so interesting that even in this horror scenario they are worth making. And that is that in a country like that, what we see is a very large civil disobedience movement. That means that people just do not go to work in very large centers, and in very important sectors of the economy and society, including the civil service, including the bureaucrats. And nobody had counted on that because everybody thought, the bureaucrats in Myanmar, they're so close to the military, to the regime, they're not risking anything. But even in ministries with very lucrative jobs, you have large two digit percentages of people who will not go to work, and to risk being shot, who are being kicked out of the houses, many actually being tortured to death for this, that means caught on the street, put into the military prison, and then given back to basically sewn up corpses to their families. This is this is the situation that you have. And what is really important is that in global Western PA, we have always said that there is a responsibility of civil servants to behave ethically. But once you get an unethical takeover of the government, well, then you can't demand from people to be heroes. And the great comparison that famously had aren't discussed is, of course, Nazi Germany, you are going to work for the Nazis, because well, you have children to feed and you don't want to be it was just fueling orders, exactly. Although it's only a paraphrase, a famous German, constitutional lawyer, by the name of Otto Meyer once said, Constitution fades away administration remains. So whatever the Constitution is, the bureaucrats stay the same. And that is something that for many critical of public administration, and management is one of these negative sides of the bureaucracy as such. So what we see in Myanmar now is the opposite. That means we see an a giant group of people who are basically becoming heroes, and they don't need to be but they're risking their lives. They're risking indeed, being tortured to death. And still, they don't do

it. And they resist and they fight at everybody, or not everybody, but many Western experts say, well, but this will be a failed state. And what about the health? And what about, you know, we need to and know, the local people say, No, now we need to fight. And there is a huge price, we are aware of that price, and we are willing to pay it. And if you don't pay attention to Myanmar, if this is too far for you, if this is something that wasn't on your radar, you're missing this. So what we have here is both Myanmar specificity, a lot of moral ambiguity. But on the other hand, also this effect that nobody has, I mean, you can't demand from anyone to become a hero. But what is fascinating is that a large segment of the civil servants in Myanmar do, they do. So this is an amazing feat. And something that has really struck me and also, you know, really touched my heart, as well as that it was very interesting from a public administration and management perspective and the entire idea of the Civil Service ethos. So that I always say, these Myanmar civil servants, they have so many great excuses of why they could say, well, that's why we have to work for the military, you understand this is how it is it needs to go on we need to and yet they don't make this excuse, they say no, we are not doing this. So, this is an example of why it is important and really worthwhile to look at examples like this and you can only access that if you really focus on it, if you do some fieldwork, if you go there and so on and so on. And if you consciously if you will broaden your horizon, so that such phenomena are within what you can absorb and recognize.

Justin 50:03

Right? Yeah, that is just such an incredible story of how brave people are. And, you know, like you said, there's so many somewhat valid excuses, you know, like, like, the head of the Ministry of Education, you know, isn't necessarily the ones shooting people, you know what I mean? Like they they are not the ones committing war crimes per se. So it might be easy for someone in that position to say, I'll just keep doing my job. But the only way that you could possibly resist something, this totalitarian is by this mass disobedience. And I'm just curious, you know, you said that this is kind of compared to your usual work bordering on activism. And I'm wondering what you're trying to kind of do have you been? Have you been opening up your, your address book and trying to do some activism or like, or is there something that that we can do?

Wolfgang 51:00

I wouldn't say that. Yeah, I think I phrased it this way. But it was a little bit wrong, because in the area in which I am, there is always an activist part two scholarship. And the reason for that is actually a classic Western one that comes out of the Plato, Aristotle, framing of what we now would call social scientists, sciences, namely that we do want to understand, but we also want to improve. And if you don't have the emphasis, impetus to improve the question is how much can you understand how much of scientific objectivity is actually real? Yeah, and how much of that is not constructed in order to once again, steer the discourse in a direction that is rather convenient for those who are profiting from the system that we already have? You may as well call that, by the way, neoclassical economics. Right. I mean, that is that is the point here. Eric granites work on this one has been just tremendous, for instance, also one of our great colleagues that I PP, but as far as Myanmar is concerned, this is I do believe that writing towards a certain goal, and trying to inform people of what's going on where this kind of impetus actually may have an effect, because at the end, your stuff is read by people who make

decisions, I think we see that IIPP All the time that so much of the IIPP work has a direct impact on policy, on various levels, that you talk directly to the people that you talk to the decision makers, that you shift the discourse that you show what really matters, of course, I have done things like that as to support friends in Myanmar, quite simply materially, who have lost their jobs. So I have no incomes anymore who have been kicked out as far as that that worked. But there, I'm, I'm not a big fan of Twitter and the Twitter sphere. But in this case, I have rather massively supported the good guys on Twitter, even down to simple things like this. In order to push this, even when you get tired, because you need to be a little bit on the TV, as far as this is concerned. You try to talk to a decision maker to try to think of who's really making the decisions and then phrasing your things, phrases in your publications in such a way, the article you refer to in public money and management, public money and management, which is very good classical academic journal, is as you can tell already, from the title, not one that is famous for its emotionality. And you may notice that the way this article was put there is also with a little bit of weariness of whether I wasn't too too much with it with my heart, but that you then push this in this direction for my understanding of social science scholarship. That's not an aberration, losing an objectivity, but it is actually what responsible scholarship is actually about.

Justin 54:23

Right. Well, I will definitely be continuing to follow your work on that. And just yeah, I hope that things improve. I hope that this civil disobedience has a has an impact.

Wolfgang 54:40

I think if I may say that here that some people who have already said what if the revolution fails, but what I personally find very callous is that when people risked their lives in a revolution to second guessed that and said yeah, but they're gonna fail and not even giving them time and planning for the time after the revolution. So I think what you said is exactly right. It's really important right now in Myanmar to say, well, maybe at some point, we need to see how to accommodate this as we needed to do in many similar cases. But I think for everyone who agrees and to sits in a well protected armchair, the duty is at least not to stab the revolutionaries in the back.

Justin 55:30

I want to ask you a few things about you do a lot of advising for different governments and different people around the world and consultancy. And there are kind of two questions I had on that. One is, and you remarked on this in one of your lectures, is that, you know, you care so deeply about decolonizing, the curriculum and about centering non western perspectives. And there was one comment you made that particularly blew my mind that you said, sometimes you'll go to countries where they're being taught Western PA, and you're like, in your own country, there's this whole history. And that must be a weird experience. And I'm just curious, you know, you're you're a white German guy from Harvard, you know? Like, no offense, but like, how do you how do

you and I asked this as a white American guy, you know, how do you see your role in that way? And how do you recognize

Wolfgang 56:24

that? Well, I really liked this additional giant off from hard, you know, the worst,

Justin 56:33

you have to throw it in

Wolfgang 56:35

the shade. If you have a hovered sealed somewhere, it gives that although, you know, I couldn't almost I could almost give it back, but I won't. So need to be I think one of the things we have learned, if we didn't know it before, is that of positionality. But as almost any decolonizing theorist, starting with very early ones over Edward site, and so on, will tell you what is not an option, if you have recognized the problem is to say, Oh, I'm a white man. So I'll be just quiet and let others do the fight. But if you realize the problem, you need to go in. And if this means that you have to take a backseat, and that you occasionally have to be quiet. And that you need to always question what you're saying, it is such a difficult thing for so many not to fall into the white savior mode. Oh, I know everything how it should be. Nevermind the locals, you know, I am much more correct than you are. I'm much more more aware, too, not use other words. This is a huge challenge. And it occasionally hurts because we like to speak and you know, to shut up is difficult. But it's worth it, it's really worth it. Also, for yourself. Yeah. And for realizing of who you are. Anything that has to do with structural racism is something where the recognition starts exactly this way. And it's never gonna be perfect, I believe. But that cannot serve as an excuse to not engage with these topics, especially and now it comes, especially if there is a desire. So I think that one of my principles has been that I only give advice when really asked, but if you are asked two or three times that you still say, No, I'm not saying that because you know, of this. That is not okay, either. That is not okay, either. If you have something of substance to contribute, that people in the global south and I will now use this word want to know, then you just do that. It's also a little bit of a compensation thing, because the reason that many non western societies and states have not looked at their own traditions is that because of colonization, and because of the leadership in the science field of the Anglo American West, this hasn't really been possible. So if when I say that if I'm invited, for instance, to teach Confucian public administration, because nobody in Confucian countries can do that anymore, I do that, but you do need to know that you can only do it so long as some local takes over. Yeah. So because that is that is the key you need to look at. I do think that it is mostly this is a wicked problem, the international liberal edifice towards which We or most of us, certainly IIPP Want to go. And on the other hand, leaving it to the specifics in what has been constructed as the periphery to develop their own traditions. But if this is so my conclusion has always been that to ask the people in these places that have been suffering from colonialism, that must be the number one thing. And if they tell you something that goes against

your own really good values, which you're so proud of, then I think the tendency should be to put these values on the back seat, not to forget them, but to put them on the back seat and to listen to what the local people are telling you and what they want from you. And if you put it this way, it works rather well. The tendency, sometimes it's there, as you say, to say, okay, you know, well, let me put it like this, I was asked by the Prime Minister for South Asian state, what my advice would be, in general, to policy reform in this country. And I was a little bit flippant, but I said, my main advice is not to peep not to listen to people who look like me. People who look like me have just such an awful track record of together. And I didn't even mean that as a joke. There is a lot of truth in this. There's more truth than not into this. But then if there is a follow up, he said, No, no, no, I totally disagree with that. And if I then would have said, No Prime Minister, I know that better than you you should listen to or not, then again, you know, that what you're doing. So this kind of this kind of balance is a daily struggle, in advice from this perspective in this region. And yet, it's a struggle you need to face at the end, once again, where when push comes to shove, I think the key is to take yourself back and be a bit quiet and listen to what people telling.

Nikol 1:02:09

That's really thank you. Yes, to me, as well, it's really interesting to hear about your experience, advising, I had one question out of curiosity. Was there ever a time when your advice was met with resistance? And how did you get around that? Did you try to get around it? And another kind of follow up question to that is, was there ever a time when you gave the wrong advice?

Wolfgang 1:02:38

Oh, definitely. It is not the western or eastern tradition to make long lists of your failures. We're not there yet. Sure, there is. And actually, the this is exactly the thing, you're asking two different things. And of course, I have done more advice, probably in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia than anywhere else, because this was from the talent bases for such a long time. One of my main areas, but this is exactly it, if people resist your advice, maybe there right. So the question is, how much should you push? And it's, it's very difficult if I'm exactly sure that I'm right to be quiet. That's not my style. And, and it takes a lot of work. But I think it's it's worth reflecting on that. It's sometimes so that your advice is rejected. And then you later look at that and said, Well, that's good, that people didn't listen to you. But I completely screwed up as far as the innovation policy of Kazakhstan is concerned, where it was the the head expert once they gave it to the UN UNDP, actually, and to the World Bank to have, you know, balanced thing and our team was the one who did it for the UNDP. And the way I approach the Kazakh apparatchiks at that time. If I look at it now, I really did a lot of mistakes. I was I was way too unorthodox, I did humor, people who have an extremely high opinion of themselves, and still coming from the Soviet legacy, by the way, and these kinds of people are taken over old Soviet deputy ministers, this kind of stuff. And I was saying, you weren't really successful. So you have to do this. And I wasn't able to say, so you have to do this because they were already so upset about being told that they were not successful. That didn't work. Things like that. happened quite all the time. Eastern German university reformed something I've been involved in in the German Federal president's office, the native Sorbian education, I worked so hard on

that I completely failed on this one, for instance. And there are a couple of projects now, actually now one where I will have a zoom talk tomorrow. But this one I will actually not mention, because if I see here that I'm close to failing, and it's so sad, because the locals are doing the wrong stuff. If they hear the podcast that will actually work against me, in order to nudge them to what I think they're all tradition, and their own USP actually is.

Justin 1:05:44

So So would you say the key is to try to be kind of level headed and acknowledge when you did mess up in the past, rather than always being afraid that you might make a mistake? It's like, do your best and then after, if you see an error,

Wolfgang 1:05:59

just, that's true about life itself as well, right? I mean, it's generally good stuff. But again, here, we have different traditions, there are societies, cultures, political cases, and so on, and so on, that appreciate when you put yourself down, and there are others who say, Oh, if he says himself, he's a loser. He obviously is, let's not listen to him at all. And that is what you certainly get the one of the key questions that kind of sounds along is what if you give, or if you have to give advice to regimes that you basically don't appreciate and hear. But that's so in all the development discourse, how much do you work with people who you judge is problematic? What NW PA and decolonization add to this is? How much should you put yourself into judgment of what regimes are okay, and whatnot? And how much do you need to humor what actually exists, but I have to admit that it very quickly leads to problems to wicked problems, in fact, and that's something you need to deal with on an almost daily level.

Justin 1:07:16

Right. That's really, really good advice. Thank you so much. I think just one more question I wanted to ask, tell us, can you tell us that a little short version of the story of how you got involved in IIPP. And I guess what you think about IIPP, in general, you know, I just wanted to follow up by saying that. A lot of the things that you were talking about how early in your career, you already realized that like, the mainstream narrative of kind of economics and poli sci were pretty didn't line up with the way you saw the world. And those kinds of things are a big part of why I ended up here rather than somewhere else. But I'm curious, how did you get involved and how do you see it's, how do you seen it now

Wolfgang 1:08:00

EPP I honestly believe is one of the if not the biggest success story that we've seen of, if you will mainstream takeover by heterodox thinking and policy advice. One of the biggest successes of Mariana mazzucato, who has really had a lot of successes was to position thoughts frameworks, reinterpretations of value and of what the public should do at the home of the or the holes of the dragon. Yeah, that people are reconsidering of what they should be doing and that you can, both intellectually but especially I would say, as far as policy advice, push the world into a better direction, that is really something that she deserves so much credit for. And that has, I think, led, I know, I now sound like a comms person, which I'm not. But this is really the truth that has made it possible to get some of the very, very best master's students in the world together in a program. One of the best Association one of the most curious and open and engaged groups that I've ever seen, I can only compare it to two or three more institutions worldwide. Because the best students have recognized that this is a possibility where he can pursue such a thing, not in a cheap, mainstream way and yet have a huge potential of impact because if you get an MPA from IIPP, it's not the automatic ticket to success, but it's very close. And so

Justin 1:09:57

I thought that's what it was.

Wolfgang 1:10:00

still need to work. And I really liked that. But I do think that for anyone with such a background, IPP is one of the most fascinating places to be at all, this is where you want to be. And that's what you also see if you go outside, if you say I'm at IIPP. This is, especially amongst insiders, a label or a CEO, that makes people listen to you more carefully, or actually listen to you at all, perhaps. So it gives you a platform for doing the right thing. That is just amazing. I think if you look at its short duration, and add it's relatively small size, the power and the impact have really, really been amazing. But I have to say, if I would have been your age, I would think that I would have, if I wanted an MPA, I would have looked at the Kennedy School, I would have looked at Lee Kuan Yew school, but in the end, I would have tried to get into IIPP. And my own direct connection with this was that the Deputy Director Reiner Cutler is not only my students since his BA days, but he was actually my first PhD. And so we really, he was my first PhD, and we go back for a very, very long time. And we've been working closely together ever since then. And this was, of course, a very direct connection, because as far as organization, smooth running, orientation, academisation, and so on, and so on. I do think it's fair to say, especially as far as the MPA program is concerned, considerable credit goes to Reiner as well. And to this, you have to add all kinds of cross lines, including once again, that I'm a friend of Carlota Perez since a very long time, and that we have worked together even since her first book. I mean, work together as too much for that. But I had the privilege to feed back on that and discuss this with her in the Knesset state. And so, for me, the IIPP was always a institution to which also it reflects variance, no answers, I almost automatically belonged. And then when the chance open, that I would actually join as an honorary professor. That was just really great news. And it has been really great ever since.

Justin 1:12:44

You so much for sharing your wisdom. And yeah,

Wolfgang 1:12:48

it was my pleasure entirely. As I said, I love to talk about these things. It's really enjoyable. And I think this kind of podcast is a great initiative. It tells you something about the setup of this MPA class that you get this kind of initiatives and, you know, it really comes from the students and this is what you need for a truly vibrant, academic and activist place. So thank you very much for having me. Thank you