Public administration development in Kosovo and East Timor: Different places, different actors; same policies, same outcomes?

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In 1999 the international community embarked on two major post conflict development exercises. In Europe, international intervention in the former Yugoslavia led to the establishment of UN transitional administration in Kosovo. A few months later, on the other side of the world, the UN was also charged with transitional administration in East Timor after the popular vote for independence from Indonesia. The two places are very different in terms of history, culture, and economic circumstances, but other aspects of the international intervention, including the involvement of the UN and the policies pursued by international actors were very similar. This paper examines the steps taken by the UN and other international organisations to establish a new public administration in these two cases, focusing on public finance institutions and the creation of the civil service, and considers the impacts of the activities of international actors in the immediate post conflict period on the long term outcomes for public administration. More than 15 years later, both countries struggle with problems of low public sector capacity, although some institutions are considered to perform better than others. The paper asks whether these outcomes were inevitable given local institutional and cultural constraints, or whether different actions by international actors could have achieved different results.