

Research Outline

Local governments all over Europe are in a period of increased reform activity and intensity, especially since they have been the level of government most seriously affected by the still expanding global financial and economic crisis in some countries. Against this background, it is a cause for concern and also criticism that the analysis of the local level is absent in the current comparative research and literature concerning public sector modernization. LocRef is meant to assess local public sector reforms from a cross-country comparative perspective, which has so far not been done within a broader research network. It includes *New Public Management* (NPM) reforms that were largely triggered by international organizations (OECD, EU) and targeted towards marketization and privatization as well as the more recent '*Post-NPM*' reforms, which were often aimed at correcting the shortcomings of earlier NPM measures (e.g. re-municipalization). In addition, it will focus on the more nationally driven *territorial* and *functional reforms* (municipal amalgamations, decentralization) that have been fuelled, in part, by recent austerity measures and the hopes of national policy makers that such reforms will facilitate economies of scale. Finally, the Action concentrates on *democratic reforms* and new instruments of citizen participation (e.g. referenda, direct election of mayors). The overarching question of the Action is:

Which approaches and effects of local public sector reform can be identified from an international comparative perspective, how can these be explained and what lessons can be drawn for policy making?

About the Action

LocRef is an EU-funded international research network on local public sector reforms with more than 100 senior and early stage researchers in 27 countries. Based on a shared Europe-

an perspective, it brings together researchers and practitioners of all stages of local public sector reforms in order to jointly assess the hitherto scattered and dispersed information bases on local public sector reforms, to generate new comparative knowledge, and develop policy-relevant frameworks for the design of future modernization processes in Europe.

Networking activities of LocRef include inter alia international workshops and conferences, PhD training schools, high level seminars, short term scientific missions (research stays for scholars in partner institutions), joint publications and policy papers. The Action provides an excellent platform for promoting the careers of young and early stage researchers.

Governance Structure and Thematic Working Groups

The Actions' Management Committee (MC) consists of 51 European scholars (up to two representatives per participating country) and is in charge of developing, supervising, and implementing the Action. The MC is supported by four thematic Working Groups (WG) studying various types of local-level reforms from a cross-countries comparative perspective.

WG I: External (Post-) NPM

This WG focuses on NPM-driven externalizations of local services to private or non-profit providers (contracting-out, functional/asset privatization, corporatization, competitive tendering). It also assesses the more recent Post-NPM reforms that are targeted towards re-municipalization and re-integration of previously externalized local functions.

WG II: Internal (Post-) NPM

Concentrating on the NPM-inspired principles of performance orientation and target steering, this WG scrutinizes various strategies of internal re-organization, process re-engineering, new budgeting and accounting systems, and Human Resource-related modernization, e.g. performance related pay.

WG III: Territorial/Functional Re-Scaling

European local governments have been – to varying degrees – subject both to territorial up-scaling (amalgamation) and/or trans-scaling (inter-local cooperation) of sub-national jurisdictions as well as to the re-allocation of responsibilities between levels of government. This WG examines both reform segments, as there is a close relationship between territorial consolidation and functional decentralization. With regard to territorial reforms, it concentrates on amalgamations and inter-local cooperation. Functional reforms include political decentralization, administrative decentralization and de-concentration of tasks.

WG IV: Democratic Renewal

Major attempts of local modernization have been directed at the revival of 'old' as well as to the introduction of 'new', participatory instruments at the local level of government and the inclusion of civil society into local policy making. This WG studies the strengthening of direct democracy (local referenda, direct election/recall of local executives) on the one hand and new forms of participatory and cooperative democracy on the other (citizen forums, consultations, youth/ neighbourhood councils, E-democracy).

All MC/WG members will examine interaction effects of the four core areas of reform and the overall impacts of modernization from a comparative perspective, in order to find out whether the effects of various approaches of local public sector reforms have intensified or cancelled out each other. In joint sessions, they will scrutinize to what extent the reforms analyzed in their core-area have had an (intensifying/weakening) impact on the results in other reform areas.

More Information on:

http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1207

<http://www.uni-potsdam.de/lis-kuhlmann/cost.html>

