

WG III TERRITORIAL AND FUNCTIONAL RESCALING: WG IV DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

NEXT STEPS ON SUBMUNICIPAL UNITS

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First ideas to establish a joint working group on Sub-municipal units (neighborhood councils, sub local units, sub municipal councils) were discussed during the COST meetings in Edinburg and Potsdam. During the COST Dubrovnik meeting, WG III and WG IV have decided to further research Sub-Municipal Units (SMUs) and to focus at this stage on big/metropolitan cities. One final aim is to make a special journal issue on this topic and to initiate further research. To this end, we agreed to work in two steps. First of all, the upcoming COST meeting in Istanbul will be used to present and discuss case studies of SMUs in big European cities. On the basis of the information thus gathered and shared, we will then decide upon the themes and methods for cross-country comparison and research.

A possible further goal and a possible way of working is by creating an on-line survey to be sent to political and/or administrative SMU officials and/or sub-municipal councillors. This method can be developed similar to and/or together with POLLEADER initiatives and actors.

So far, several WG III and WG IV members have expressed their interest in case studying SMUs. A preliminary list includes the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Netherland, Spain, and Slovenia More interested WG members could be invited.

With a view on our Istanbul meeting, it is useful to list up a series of guiding questions to case study SMUs in big European cities.

Creating SMUs: reform background and purpose

- Why have SMUs been created in big city/metropolitan areas?
 - o Possible reform triggers include bringing decision-making closer to the citizen, adapting to the specific needs of a territory, decentralizing tasks that are otherwise within municipal jurisdiction, compensation after territorial reform
 - o Was the implementation of SMUs more a compensation within territorial reforms and processes of amalgamation?
- When have these SMUs been created? Were other scale reforms at stake? Was it part of a territorial reform?
 - o Repeatedly, upscaling local government drastically has triggered decisions and/or debate to down-scale again as well – has this been the case?
- Have these big city SMUs been initiated by central and/or local government?
 - o Can central government enforce a big city to create SMUs? Under what conditions?

SMUs: structures and processes, facts and figures

- How many SMUs operate on the big city/metropolitan level? What is their population size?
- What powers do big city SMUs dispose of? What is their legal structure? What services do they provide? Are these SMU's new amalgamated structures or smaller old communities?
 - o What administrative functions do they perform?
 - o Do they perform general or sector-specific tasks? What is their predominant policy field (local traffic etc.)
- How large is the city SMUs' budget? What are their main expenses? How do they accumulate their income?
- What is the political and administrative structure?
 - o How many SMU administrators are in place? How are they appointed or elected? How does the SMU administration operate?
 - o How are SMU politicians elected? How many of them? For how long? What about the electoral turnout? Are SMUs elected together with the council city government in election? What electoral system is used? What is (party lists, personal vote)
 - o What is the influence of the local political parties in the SMUs?

- Are the elected members targeted for political contacts and suggestions by the citizen and are these the predominant transmitters for sub local interest? Are these representatives of the SMU seen as a competitive institution for the local councilors and local administration? Are the politicians and administrators more suspicious about sub local powers (“little kingdoms”)
- What autonomy do SMUs have vis-à-vis city government? Do they vary (in powers, budget, functioning, etc.) on the local scale? Have they varied in time?
- Are SMUs more a consultative body or do they have binding decisions?
- What are their rights at the municipal level (council and administration)? Are they allowed to make proposals, to speak in front of the council, committees?
- Are the SMU regarded as stepping stones for a political career of their members?

Other Themes for cross-country research

- Types of SMUs (big city, small town)? Similar factors explaining their cross-country prevalence?
- Their functional and/or democratic pros and cons?
- Embeddedness in (sub)local networks and evolutions?
 - The SMU’s quest for more autonomy and competencies vis-à-vis local government: problem-led or opportunity-led?
 - Understanding their role and stake in sub-municipal governance e.g. with the rise of the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the Special Assessment Districts (SADs)
 - Their urban renewal and contribution to (amongst others) a more inclusive or entrepreneurial city?
 - Is there democratic renewal and are new participatory instruments (participatory budgeting etc.) implemented within the SMU?
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