

three renowned senior researchers leads each WG. In summary, over 150 senior and early stage researchers (ESR) are working in the WGs. There are several instruments to reach the networking goals: yearly general COST LocRef conferences and Working Group meetings, Short Term Scientific Missions (STSMs – short research stays for primarily early stage researchers in partner institutions) and PhD Training Schools. Additionally, the ESR are organized in the LocRef Young Researcher Platform. For more information of LocRef please visit our website: <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locref/>

2 Working Groups (WG)

WGI: External (Post-) New Public Management

Research question and focus

In order to analyse the “(external) reorganisation of the public/municipal sector” WGI focuses on the development of the provision of public utilities and social services in (West) European countries. The scope ranges from the dominance of public/municipal sector-based provision (typically in the 1970s) to the advances of private sector-based provision (since the 1980s) and its recent “reverse” developments and following on to the system transformation after 1990 in (Central East) European countries.

Up until now, WGI has embarked on three main analytical tracks. For one, comprehensive country reports which prepare to focus on the UK, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Italy, Greece, Poland, Croatia, Turkey, Israel and Russia. Secondly, single policy/service reports, partially covering more than one country, which are directed towards water provision, waste management, public transport, hospitals, social housing and elder care. Thirdly, the cross cutting reports which focus on the institutionalization/“corporatization” of public utility provision, on the involvement of the non profit/voluntary/self-help sector in service delivery as well as on the impact of EU policies/legislation/court decisions and of environmental protection on service provision.

In view of the great variance of (comprehensive) country reports, single policy/service reports and cross cuttings reports that have been delivered so far, a crucial and important next step in the WGI collaboration was to move towards and arrive at conceptually reflected and guided cross-country and cross policy comparisons. In this current second half of COST’s four-year run the (often neglected) evaluative question is focused on within two accounts. Initially, the “classical” evaluation issue is tackled upon as to whether different institutional variants in the delivery of utilities and services “make a difference” with regard to service quality, price etc. Secondly, the question is addressed as whether, how and why the different service delivery regimes (public, semi-public, private, non-profit etc.) have an impact on the local government (and local “governance”), in its horizontal as well as in its vertical (intergovernmental, “multi-level”) setting. For this reason, the WGI book publication “Reforming local

service delivery in Europe: from privatization to re-municipalization?” is currently prepared and will (probably) be published in 2016.

Research methods

In addition to the strategic idea of the COST Action promoting the networking and collaboration in the European research community, WGI essentially aims at accumulating and “synergizing” already existing research findings and data bases and thus, by means of “secondary analysis”, draw on otherwise often insulated and linguistically hardly accessible knowledge. For this purpose linking up with other previous or still ongoing research networks, such as GOLD III, ESPON/SeGI, GRALE etc. is mandatory.

WGII: Internal (Post-) New Public Management

Research focus

WGII's research focus lies within the comparison of major internal managerial changes occurred in European local governments as a consequence of Post-NPM reform processes, with the goal to contribute to enhance the European interdisciplinary research and advance comparative evidence-based knowledge in the area of European local government management.

Objectives

The WG will exploit their capacity of exploring soundly and comparatively a wide range of subjects included in the thematic area of “Internal (Post-) NPM Reforms”. Animated by this purpose, the WG II will promote research on two interrelated areas: a) performance measurement, management and new public service strategies, and b) modern HRM, change, innovation and quality. The topics to be investigated in more detail in the first research area are: strategy, mission, policies, internal financial control, strategic management and steering, evaluation, benchmark, participatory evaluation and design of public services, leadership, accountability and transparency. The topics identified in the second research area are: Restructuring, redesign, reengineering, (process) innovation, quality processes, customer focus, co-delivery of public services, e-administration, performance-related pay & HRM, culture (work values and ethics), leadership.

Guiding questions

- a. To what extent have internal (Post-) NPM reforms been implemented at the local level of government and how can possible variations be explained from a cross-country comparative perspective?
- b. What are the major reform drivers and implementation strategies and who are the major stakeholders?

- c. What reform effects have resulted from the internal modernization efforts? In particular, the issues of fragmentation caused by internal NPM reforms and new instruments of strategic control/steering will be addressed.

Moreover:

- d. How do the external NPM reforms influence the outcomes of the internal NPM, democratic and territorial/functional reforms?
- e. To what extent do the internal NPM reforms shape the outcomes of the external, democratic and territorial/functional reforms?

Analytic dimensions

The WGII will approach the area of INTERNAL (Post-) NPM Reforms in the following analytical steps/tasks:

- Investigation of actual institutional changes and explanation of (varying) degrees of reform implementation from a comparative perspective;
- Scrutiny of reform drivers/causes, promoters/stakeholders and implementation strategies;
- Evaluation of (intended and un-intended) reform effects

Results & next steps

The main expected result is to produce new and useful knowledge in a field that was largely unexplored: comparative European local government management. The main material output of WGII will be books, articles for academic refereed journals and papers to be presented in international conferences. As an intermediate step, country reports are written by the WG members to each represented country. Currently book chapters for the Action level publication are prepared and there is a long term publication strategy with the aim of a WGII book or a special issue with the topics of performance budgeting, restructuring and reorganization of local governments, cost cutting policies and rationalization, strategic planning etc.

WGIII: Territorial/Functional Re-Scaling

Research focus/objectives

The focus lies within the territorial and functional reforms in Europe, eventually using the theoretical framework of action-centred institutionalism. We comparatively analyse framing, strategies and outcomes of these reforms.

Guiding questions

- The “why-question”: Public debate and new ideas, arguments for and against re-scaling, perceptions of desirable and/or feasible changes, chance events and windows of opportunity (or barriers and blockades).
- The “how-question”: Content of reform package, implementation process and achievement of reforms within a concrete “reform arena”.
- The “what-question”: Implying a description and an evaluation of the reform outcome and its possible impacts on immediate and surrounding contexts.

Methods, results & next steps

WGIII uses qualitative and quantitative methods. Transnational networking through COST makes it possible to take advantage of national literature, databanks and primary research that could not be accessible due to language barriers. Furthermore, WGIII members introduce own research results, with the possibility of discussing case studies involving examples of territorial or/and functional re-scaling. Subsequently, each member/country team prepared a report on “the state of the art of national research”. Each WGIII member delivered a short description of re-scaling reforms for their or multiple countries following a pre-defined pattern. Furthermore, each WGIII member answered an extensive questionnaire on territorial reforms that was prepared by a sub-group (leader, co-leaders of WGIII, and COST Chair). Finally, WGIII will consider the possibility of preparing a questionnaire on territorial/functional reforms that will be circulated by WGIII members to citizens and/or decision makers of the involved countries of the Action, taking advantage of sampling and implying statistical methods. Like the other WGs, WGIII is contributing to the Action level volume published in 2016. Additionally, a comparative book on territorial and functional reforms is envisaged.

WG IV: Democratic Renewal

Research objectives:

The research objectives of WGIV are primarily to

1. chart, explore and evaluate democratic reforms across Europe instigated since 2000 in two specific fields at the local level:
 - a. Political structures and processes related to representative (and direct) democracy
 - b. Civic and public engagement and developments in participative democracy
2. contextualise reforms into their national and international setting
3. assess the extent and effect of democratic reforms mentioned above on local democracy
4. examine the motivating policy and goals for the reforms identified and understand the political objectives
5. identify the source of reform
6. present an inventory of the most important institutional and procedural / process reforms

Methods and data collection

The WG makes full use of the international nature of the COST network to access literature and any appropriate existing data-sources across the countries and languages of the network. The WG takes the same, international (multi-linguistic) approach to primary research, explores the possibility of international primary research projects, and consider the development of appropriate international teams and funding organisations. In addition, WG members will be encouraged to enhance the research with their own nationally based and funded projects on themes related to democratic renewal. Selected case studies will be identified from among the WG members and developed to provide an on-going framework for the continuing research. The range of methods employed by the WG will be further developed in discussions between group members.

Results & next steps

WGIV has so far conducted a country-by-country review of democratic renewal initiatives identified in objective 1, above. The members are continuously identifying primary research projects and constructing research teams with the aim of producing research-funding proposals. Additionally, joint author papers have been written. The WG members are currently working on the Action level volume chapters as well as they prepare a WG volume “Political Leaders and Institutional Innovation in European Cities” (working title).

3 Events and Instruments

PhD Training Schools & PhD Platform

Local governments all over Europe are in a period of intense reform activity, not least of all because in some countries they have been the level of government most seriously affected by the still expanding global financial and economic crisis. They are simultaneously faced by a variety of – partly contradictory – reform pressures, often aimed at conflicting reform objectives (e.g. efficiency vs. participation). Against this background, LocRef PhD-Training Schools are meant to discuss reforms, experiments and changes in local democracy and local public sector institutions.

The courses are intended to provide training in theories and methods to be applied in the study of local public sector reforms and democracy, especially in comparative perspectives. The Training Schools will focus on the various reform topics according to the four reform areas that also the Working Groups reflects. Those are democratic reforms and new instruments of citizen participation (e.g. referenda, direct election of mayors). Further, they concentrate on New Public Management (NPM) reforms that were targeted towards marketization, privatization and ‘corporatization’ as well as the more recent ‘Post-NPM’ reforms, which were often aimed at correcting the shortcomings of earlier NPM measures. Finally they will include 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.

'LocRef' and its partners (EURA/EUROLOC, POL-LOC) conduct a Training School every year. A call for application is regularly published at the Actions website Training School section: http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locref/?page_id=7 (see events for past and future venues). Applicants who successfully apply are not only allowed to participate, furthermore they receive a grant that covers most of their expenses.

All Early Stage Researchers (PhD students or PhDs with less than 8 years of work experience) in the 31 member countries interested in local public sector reforms can be a member of the LocRef PhD Platform. Members are regularly informed of announcements and calls.

Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSM)

A Short-Term Scientific Mission (STSM) is scientific research stay from a 'LocRef' scientist in a COST 'Locref' partner institution. The aim of a STSM is to contribute to the scientific objectives of the COST Action. These exchange visits requires to last from at least 10 working days up to three months (90 days). They are aimed at strengthening the existing networks by allowing scientists to go to an institution or research centre in another COST member state institution to foster collaboration, learn a new method or use working instruments not available in the home institution, to conduct empirical research or to prepare joint publications. They are particularly intended for Early Stage Researchers. Researchers from different disciplines as well as PhD students are invited to apply for an STSM. Successful applicants receive a STSM grant off up to 2.500 €. You can find the current call including a description of the application process here: http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locref/?page_id=549

Conferences and WG Meetings

The various meeting types are the main networking instruments of 'LocRef'. There is at least one joint MC and WG meeting in conference format a year, of course open for any participant interested in the topic of local public sector reforms. Additionally, every WG meets at least once a year. The 'LocRef' management, who is in charge in (co-)organizing those meetings, tries to connect the meetings with other conferences or symposiums in field of public administration (e.g. EGPA, ICCP, SPMS) in order to generate synergies. There are close ties especially with EGPA. 'LocRef' members regularly participates not only at the annual EGPA conference (there are close links to Permanent Study Group V on "Regional and Local Government") but also at the various dialogues (MED; TED; TAD). If you want to have access to the papers/presentations of the past events (see also the list below), please send a mail to Christian Schwab (chschwab@uni-potsdam.de) to get access to the download section of the Action website. The draft agenda/schedule as well as practicalities to the next meetings are available without registration: http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locref/?page_id=66

Past Events

Meeting Name	Meeting Type	Venue	Date	No. of Participants
1st General Meeting of the COST Action LocRef (Kick-off Meeting)	Management Committee	Brussels, Generali Tower, BE	28.03.2013	50
2nd General Meeting of the COST Action LocRef	Management Committee & Working Groups	University of Edinburgh, UK	11./12.09.2013	70
Working Group I Meeting	Working Group	University of Edinburgh, UK	10.09.2013	25
Joint Working Group II and III Meeting	Working Group	University of Edinburgh, UK	10.09.2013	30
Working Group IV Meeting	Working Group	University of Edinburgh, UK	10.09.2013	15
1st COST 'LocRef' PhD Training School - "Studying Reforms, Experiments and Change in Local Democracy and Local Public Sector Institutions: Theories, Methods, Trends"	Training School	University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, FR	30.09.-02.10.2013	50
Working Group IV Meeting	Working Group	University Cluj Napoca, RO	07.02.2014	15
3rd General Meeting of the COST Action - Conference "Local Public Sector Reforms in Times of Crisis: National Trajectories and International Comparisons"	Conference, Management Committee and Working Group Meeting	University of Potsdam, DE	15./16. 05. 2014	130
Working Group III Meeting	Working Group	German University for Administrative Sciences Speyer, DE	11.09.2014	25
2nd COST 'LocRef' PhD Training School - "Re-building Trust in Local Governments: Re-thinking Politics, Management and Governance in the Post-NPM Era"	Training School	University of Siena, IT	29.09.-02.10.2014	35
Working Group IV Meeting	Working Group	De Montfort University Leicester, UK	27.11.2014	15
Working Group II Meeting	Working Group	University of Tromsø, NO	03.12.2014	20
Working Group I Meeting	Working Group	University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, FR	15./16.01.2015	35
LocRef-POLLEADER' Meeting	Survey Meeting	University of Florence, IT	23.02.2015	20

Upcoming Events

Meeting Name	Meeting Type	Venue	Date	Exp. no. of Participants
4th General Meeting of the COST Action - Conference "Local Government at a Glance"	Conference, Management Committee and Working Group Meeting	Center for Advanced Academic Studies, Dubrovnik, HR	05./06.05.2015	100
Public sector modernisation between NPM-driven shifts and post-NPM changes (panel organized in cooperation with the COST Action 'LocRef' within the ICCP Conference	Conference Panel	Bocconi University Milan, IT	01.-03.07.2015	35
3rd COST 'LocRef' PhD Training School - "Innovation in Local Government"	Training School	The Anargyriou and Korgialienion School of Spetses, GR	13.-17.09.2017	35
SPSM: Strategic Public Management Symposium (in Cooperation with the COST Action 'LocRef')	Other	Marmara University Istanbul, TR	20.-21.10.2015	130
Join Working Group Meeting of all Working Groups (WGI, II, III, IV)	Working Group	Marmara University Istanbul, TR	22.-23.10.2015	80
5th General Meeting of the COST Action - Conference "tba"	Conference, Management Committee and Working Group Meeting	Center of Competence for Public Management, CH	30.03.-02.04.2016	100
Working Group Meetings Period 4	Working Group Meetings	tba	tba	N.N.
6th General Meeting of the COST Action - Concluding Conference "tba"	Concluding Conference	Brussels, BE	March 2017	N.N.

4 Projects' Overview

Beside the 'LocRef' instruments, events and internal publication projects within and across Working Groups (joint articles, planned special issues), there are several projects within 'LocRef' worth mentioning.

POLLEADER-COST Survey Project

The POLLEADER-COST project (Political Leaders in European Cities) is a survey project coordinated by the University of Florence and carried out in 29 European Countries. The project deals with the career, the interpretation of the role of a European mayor and on the mayors' choices in local policies. In this context, a questionnaire will be sent to all mayors in charge in municipalities over 10.000 inhabitants in the participating 29 European countries. The implementation of the survey started in 2014 and will continue in 2015. The survey results will be evaluated within cross-country research groups from 2015 on. The project is based on a first round of the survey 'Political Leaders in European Cities', that was developed more than ten years ago. You can access the survey questionnaire via the download section: http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locref/?page_id=233

Local Authority Index (LAI)

The aim of this research project is to create a Local Authority Index (LAI), which can be used to analyze and report changes in the degree of decentralization of countries within the European Union. Variables used to construct the Local Authorities' Self Rule Index are institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy, borrowing autonomy, organisational autonomy and self-rule. Project leader is Prof. Dr. Andreas Ladner from the IDHEAP at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) in close cooperation with Prof. Dr. Harald Baldersheim from the University of Oslo (Norway).

The observed countries in this study are all 28 EU member states together with the four EFTA countries (Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein). Additionally, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Georgia and Ukraine will also be included. The years to be covered are 1990 to 2014. The project is conducted in close cooperation with the COST Action IS1207 Local Public Sector Reform led by Prof. Dr. Sabine Kuhlmann (University of Potsdam) and Prof. Dr. Geert Bouckaert (KU Leuven). The experts taking part in the Action not only guarantee the quality of the data but also a further use of the data in scientific research.

Relying on the COST Local Public Sector Reforms Network (COST Action IS1207), researchers will work with country group coordinators. The country group coordinators are responsible for the coding of the different countries assigned to their group. In most cases, they will be able to do it on their own, in some cases they may have to rely on country experts. Two experts from the COST Action serve as external inspector for the country profiles and the coding of the countries. A final meeting with a presentation of the results will be organized in the framework of a future COST meeting.

Publication Projects

The planned 'LocRef' publications, which will be published with Palgrave in 2016, will contribute to enhancing the conceptual and empirical foundations as well as the methodological rigour of comparative public administration and governance research. Results will help to single out local reform policies that are potentially transferable, both in terms of content and strategies, to future reform processes. The planned 'LocRef' books will be coordinated by the Action Chair (Sabine Kuhlmann) and Vice-Chair (Geert Bouckaert) in close collaboration with the Working Group Leaders who are responsible for WG-related publications. The objective of the 'LocRef' books is to present a broad appraisal of local public sector reforms in Europe using the expertise of high-ranking scholars and officials as well as junior researchers in the field coming from various European countries and beyond. The planned publications will provide country-specific and cross-countries comparative knowledge about local public management reforms, territorial and functional re-organization and democratic innovation that has hitherto not been synthesized or that has remained undiscovered due to problems

of linguistic and institutional accessibility. The large sample size of countries will offer the possibility to search for the causes of variations in reform. The envisaged books are also intended to gather available information about the reform effects in the different countries and from a cross-countries comparative perspective, thereby contributing to the amplification of evaluative knowledge in the research area under scrutiny.

Planned volumes:

Volume I “Local Public Sector Reforms in Times of Crisis: National Trajectories and International Comparisons”, eds. Sabine Kuhlmann and Geert Bouckaert (to be published in 2016).

Volume II “Reforming local service delivery in Europe: from privatization to re-municipalization?” (working title) , eds. Hellmut Wollmann, Gérard Marcou, Ivan Kopric (to be published in 2016).

Volume III “Political Leaders and Institutional Innovation in European Cities” (working title), eds./date: tba

5 Short Notes

Name: COST Action IS1207 “Local Public Sector Reforms: An International Comparison (LocRef)”

Duration: 28.03.2013 – 27.03.2017

Chairs: Prof. Dr. Sabine Kuhlmann (chair, DE) and Prof. Dr. Geert Bouckaert (vice chair, BE)

Academic coordination and administration: Christian Schwab, M.A., Mag. rer. publ. (DE)

STSM Coordinator and Equal Opportunity Commissioner: Prof. Dr. Trui Steen (NL)

Young Researchers Representative: Dr. Daniel Klimovsky (SK)

Financial Rapporteur: Prof. Dr. Angel Iglesias Alonso (ES) and Dr. Anamarija Musa (HR)

Member Countries: 31 (AT, BE, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IL, IS, IT, LT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, SW, TR, UK)

Number of MC members: 58

Number of participating institutions: 48

Number of senior researchers: 166

Number of early stage researchers: 149

Year 2 budget: 183.000 €

Estimated total budget: 700.000 €

LocRef project website: <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locref/>

LocRef website at COST: http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/Actions/IS1207

COST Association: <http://www.cost.eu/>

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