

**Local Public Sector Reforms in Times of Crisis:  
National Trajectories and International Comparisons  
(eds. Sabine Kuhlmann and Geert Bouckaert)**

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## Preface

*Geert Bouckaert (Belgium) and Sabine Kuhlmann (Germany)*

In many European countries, the provision of public services, enacting the laws for their implementation, and the execution of administrative functions is largely, if not predominantly, carried out by local governments. The approximately 91,200 municipalities and 1100 second-tier local governments in the EU-27, covering some 50 percent of overall public employment and local government activities, represent a significant share (about 16 percent) of the entire gross domestic product of all EU member states as well as of the total of public expenditure (about 34 percent). From a political and democratic perspective, local self-government fulfills an important stabilizing and legitimizing function within the overall national government systems and in the supranational setting as well. They offer the opportunity for citizens to be directly involved in political decision making and ensure spatial proximity for political problem solving. Eurobarometer surveys show that citizens' trust in local and regional public institutions is significantly higher than in national parliaments and governments. In the effective functioning and the acceptance of a constitutional democratic government in European countries, therefore, local self-government plays a crucial role. However, in the current comparative research about public sector modernization the local level has hitherto remained largely understudied. This is all the more a cause for concern as local governments are the most seriously hit by fiscal and economic crises, austerity policies, and pressures for reform in many countries. Reform intensity and activity can thus be assessed as particularly high at the local level and local authorities in Europe are in a continuous process of institutional change and modernization.

This book provides comparative analyses and accounts of local public sector reforms in a wide range of countries (including Eastern and Western as well as Northern and Southern European systems) and reform measures (including territorial, functional and NPM/post-NPM reforms as well as democratic renewal and participatory innovations). Based on the research of the COST Action 'Local Public Sector Reforms: an International Comparison – LocRef' (IS1207), the volume is intended to address the abovementioned deficits by means of a strictly comparative approach using multinational teams of co-authors for each chapter. It exploits the expertise of about 60 internationally renowned scholars coming from 30 European countries, an outstanding source of knowledge that has not hitherto been integrated and synthesized in a book publication on this topic.

This comprehensive comparative project would not have been feasible without the support of many colleagues and friends. The main resource for bringing scholars together, sharing knowledge, and bundling nationally scattered research has been LocRef, which we have the honor to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair. LocRef is funded by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) and supported by the EU Framework program Horizon 2020. We are most fortunate to benefit from this unique opportunity for comparative research and collaboration with about 200 senior and early stage researchers in our field coming from 31 countries and more than 50 renowned institutes in Europe. We owe many thanks to this excellent group of colleagues, who – in their various (mostly overlapping) roles as working group chairs/members, authors, commenters, discussants, conference organizers, coordinators and so on – have joined forces for a common research and publication strategy. Among this

group, we would especially mention Christian Schwab who does an extraordinary job as Academic Coordinator of LocRef. Our thanks also go to the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) for providing the opportunity of generating synergies between LocRef and the Permanent Study Groups of EGPA. We are also grateful for the stimulating comments received from the reviewers of the book manuscript and for the interest of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) and more specifically of two editors of this IIAS sponsored Palgrave series (Taco Brandsen and Robert Fouchet) in our publication project. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the research staff in Potsdam, particularly to Ina Radtke and Constanze Arnold, for their enormous support in coordinating the project, editing the text and preparing the final manuscript for publication. Any remaining weaknesses of the text remain, of course, the responsibility of the editors.