

COST Action IS1207: Local Public Sector Reforms: An International Comparison

WG 1 - External (Post-) NPM Reforms

Evaluation studies about local service delivery

Call for papers

I. Excerpts from the Memorandum of Understanding

The aim of the Action is to identify, bundle and compare nationally based knowledge on the respective institutional changes at the local level of government, implementation strategies and the evaluation of (un-)intended consequences of reform effects.

WG 1 is to analyse privatization, contracting out, competition and (re-)municipalization: this reform area refers to the re-allocation of tasks between the local governments and the market or civil society and covers the 'external' dimension of NPM/Post-NPM.

It was stated in the Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of a European Concerted Research Action designated as COST Action IS1207: Local Public Sector Reforms: An International Comparison that none of the available studies assess reform effects from a cross-country comparative perspective, which creates a prominent "evaluation gap" in the current literature on local public sector reforms.

Because of that, the Action has to develop descriptive, analytical and evaluative knowledge. With regard to evaluative part of researches, the Action employs evaluation studies pertaining to institutional reforms and administrative modernization (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004, 2011; Christensen/Laegreid 2001; Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2011: 480; Kuhlmann et al. 2008). In particular, the Action will apply the analytical framework developed in this strand of literature and make a distinction between three 'loops' of evaluation (institutional, performance, and outcome evaluation; see Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2011: 480).

Results will help to single out local reform policies that are potentially transferable, both in terms of content and strategies, to future reform processes. For that, objective 2 of the Action is to advance evidence-based policy making and knowledge utilization for European practitioners. This COST Action will transfer the comparative knowledge gained from the network's activities into practice. A major objective is to yield policy-relevant data and evidence that can be applied in decision-making and future modernization processes. The Action will elaborate specific guidelines, checklists and criteria to be taken into account by policy makers, think tanks and civil servants when designing modernization projects and implementing reform measures. The aim is to provide policy recommendations and decision guidance based on theoretical rigour and sound comparative evidence.

LocRef serves to gather together available information about the reform effects on local government performance in the different countries, thereby contributing to the amplification of *evaluative* knowledge in the research area under scrutiny: What reform effects have resulted from the modernization efforts? What have been the positive/intended and negative/un-intended consequences or side effects of the reforms on performance as well as on relevant stakeholders and the civil society in a wider context? The Action will include input changes (e.g. cost savings), output changes (quantity, quality, effectiveness of services delivered; c.f. Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004: 98; Grossi/Mussari 2008: 22 ff.) as well as the more far-reaching system and cultural changes (behaviour/role perceptions of the administrative staff) that are brought about by local public sector reforms (see Marcou 2010: 23 ff.).

The third analytical step/task of all WGs is evaluation of (intended and un-intended) reform effects. The main question is: what are the effects of these reforms?

The WGs will consider three aspects of reform outcomes: input changes (e.g. cost savings), output changes (quantity, quality and effectiveness of services delivered) as well as the more far-reaching systemic and cultural changes (behaviour/role perceptions of the administrative staff; legitimacy/acceptance of the local government) that are brought about by local public sector reforms.

II. Tasks of the WG1

For fulfilling our scientific task, WG1 will, in the evaluative phase:

- Research and analyse the success of local service delivery reforms, as well as the expectations and effects of governance and administrative reforms on local service delivery changes, i.e. on the costs, quantity, quality of services, effectiveness of services delivered, citizens' satisfaction with services and legitimacy, business environment, behaviour/role perceptions of the administrative staff;
- Identify and analyse unintended and negative effects of local public sector reforms that can make room for, or even trigger off further developments and changes;
- Derive and design policy proposals for successful local service delivery reforms.

III. Papers

In the Action's second phase, papers about the expectations from and positive/intended and negative/unintended consequences, effects, and impacts of local service delivery changes and modernization efforts are to be written, discussed, and published. These evaluative papers may cover the success of local service delivery reforms, effects and

impacts of the local service delivery reforms on performance (operations), outcomes, relevant stakeholders, civil society, and business community. Input, output, and cultural changes are of interest. National reports and papers focused on a particular problem or an issue that falls within the mentioned raster of WG1's tasks in the evaluative phase are welcome. Policy recommendations could be derived from the authors' own research results or on the basis of an analysis of secondary sources.

The chosen papers will be published in a common publication and/or as special issues of the relevant scholarly journals. We will try to continue our cooperation with Palgrave.

Tentative time frame for the preparation of the papers is as follows:

- Title proposals and abstract, by the MC meeting in Dubrovnik, 4-5 May 2015;
- Draft papers, by the WG1 workshop in Istanbul, 22-23 October 2015;
- Final papers, by the MC meeting in 2016;
- Publication of the papers, by October 2016.

The abstracts have to consist of up to 400 words. Please, add up to seven key words.

Draft papers may have up to 6,000 words, bibliography included. The length of the final papers depends on the number of accepted papers and the publishers' rules.