



PSG V “Regional and Local Government” Call for Papers 2016

Between cost cutting and better services for the citizens: Organizational reforms and cutback management at the local level of government

Sabine Kuhlmann, University of Potsdam, Germany (sabine.kuhlmann@uni-potsdam.de)

Martin Laffin, Queen Mary University of London, UK (m.laffin@qmul.ac.uk)

Ellen Wayenberg, University of Ghent, Belgium (ellen.wayenberg@ugent.be)

The tension between effective service delivery for citizens and cost cutting tends to be much more pressing than at other levels of government. Indeed central and federal, and provincial, governments are often keen to seek greater savings from local governments than from their own activities. Thus it is no surprise that, in many countries, local authorities are the level of government most intensely affected by reform activities, and the higher levels of government tend to let local governments sort out unresolved tensions between maintain service quality and cost reductions. The fiscal crisis and austerity policies have driven local cutback strategies, cost reductions and transformed traditional budgeting procedures. The impact of such strategies is most pronounced in local governments in Southern Europe and in the UK, but local governments in other Continental and Eastern European countries have also experienced similar strategies, if less acutely. Yet citizens’ demands for an ever increasing quality of local service delivery, a greater customer-orientation in public services, and more effective policy solutions have challenged traditional local organizational structures and modes of coordination. Moreover, local decision-makers also face increasing pressures to cope with complex policy issues in uncertain situations and under ambiguous conditions (so called ‘wicked problems’). They are expected to resolve these complex problems in direct contact with the citizens and in interaction with a variety of actors at the “street level”. These demands and pressures, in combination with some Post-NPM initiatives aimed at correcting NPM-driven institutional fragmentation have prompted new organizational reform strategies directed at re-integrating organizational structures, bundling institutional units and joining up different parts of the local public sector (so called “joined-up government”).

Against this background, the EGPA PSG V on Regional and Local government calls for papers on the following theme “Between cost cutting and better services for the citizens: organizational reforms and cutback management at the local level of government”. Papers can either take an explanatory approach (e.g. “what explains recent local reform strategies of cost cutting and internal re-organization?”) or a more evaluative perspective (e.g. “do organizational reforms contribute to better services/ policy solutions for the citizens?”). In particular, PSG V is interested

in papers that focus upon one and preferably several topics and related research questions including:

- Intra-organizational reforms at the local/regional level, specifically:
- Cost-cutting strategies and modernization of budgetary procedures
- Re-organization of service delivery for the citizens (joined-up government, one-stop-offices, single-window access etc.)
- New modes of coordination and collaboration between local government units, in multi-level systems, and between different policy sectors on the local/regional/central levels for resolving complex (wicked) policy problems
- The driving forces behind, and the effects of, intra-organizational reforms: what explains reforms and do they make a difference for local performance?

We are particularly keen to welcome papers which seek to deliver empirical, research-based arguments and build a theoretical understanding of these issues. They might also pursue a comparative approach, be it “over time”, “cross-countries”, or “cross policies”.

Abstracts that address any and preferably several of the issues/questions mentioned above are expected by the **15th of April 2016** by the latest. Abstracts should be uploaded by that date through the EGPA submission website (<http://egpa-conference2016.org/>) and sent to the conveners of this EGPA Study Group (see above). Notification of acceptance will be no later than the **5th of May 2016**. Those authors whose abstracts have been accepted should dispatch their completed paper to the conveners as well as to upload it through the submission website by the **31st of July 2016** at the latest.

Collaborating closely with the COST Action IS 1207 “Local Public Sector Reforms: an International Comparison – LocRef” is one of the strategic objectives of the EGPA Permanent Study Group V on Regional and Local Government for the period 2014-2017. The research topics and the participating scholars of PSG V and LocRef show many overlaps. Therefore the close collaboration of the two networks promises a multitude of synergies and mutual enrichments. LocRef is an EU-funded international research network on local public sector reforms with more than 100 senior and early stage researchers in 32 countries chaired by Sabine Kuhlmann (Action Chair) and Geert Bouckaert (Vice-Chair); Martin Laffin and Ellen Wayenberg are Chairs/Co-Chairs of LocRef Working Groups; many LocRef members are also PSGV members. LocRef 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. For further information refer to:

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

http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/IS1207?management