



## PSG V “Regional and Local Government” Call for Papers 2015

### “Two steps forward or one step back? Assessing sub-national reform in turbulent times”

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In these times of austerity and socio-economic change, there is a pressing need to identify the direction and impact of local and/or regional reforms. Across Europe, the role and future of sub-national level institutions are under continuous challenge, reform and evaluation.. To date, the research focus has tended to be on capturing (the types of) drivers and objectives of sub-national reforms rather than on evaluating their impact on the pattern of responsibilities between central/federal and sub-central governments and the direction of change. However, assessing these impacts is crucial in locating how, and whether, recent reforms have intensified NPM modes of reform (such as performance management frameworks and contracting-out) in local and/or regional governments. For example, assessing an institutional reform in a select number of local pilots can clarify the level and sorts of efficiency gains to be expected on sub-national level. And whether central governments proceed in an evidence-based manner or policy-based manner in which the evidence is only collected after the policy decisions are made. Likewise, reform evaluations can preserve sub-national governments from, even temporarily, having to take steps back instead of towards more efficient, effective and democratic policy-making. A so-called early warning evaluation during the first stages of implementation can for example detect a lack of service users’ support vis-à-vis new arrangements between the local public, private and non-profit sectors. And if acted upon in time, this will prevent local officials from having to invest too many of the already scarce resources in large-scale remediation at a later stage.

Against this background, the EGPA PSG V on Regional and Local government **calls for papers on the assessment of sub-national reforms** during a sustained period of austerity and socio-economic change. In particular, PSG V is interested in papers that focus upon one and preferably several evaluation topics and related research questions including:

- the direction and impact of sub-national reform initiatives
  - Has the local and/or regional reform brought about the intended change? Put differently, is it regarded as a success or a failure? By whom and why? And what evidence is used to assess this success?
- the explanation of sub-national reform success
  - What variables explain the relation between reform policies on the one hand and their actual impact on the other? In general, the evaluation literature points to

various explanatory factors such as the structure and stability of the institutional environment, conflicts over reform goals and the means necessary or the scope of change required of the implementing actor. But can these – as well as other – factors also account for ‘success’ of local and/or regional government reforms? Or are other factors more at stake?

- the (sub-)national practice/culture of evaluating local and/or regional government reforms
  - Are sub-national reforms systematically assessed? What evaluation criteria (i.e. goal achievement, efficiency, responsiveness, ...) and approaches (i.e. conformance or performance assessment etc.) are used to this end? By whom (i.e. merely internal and/or also external actors) and for what purpose? Overlooking recent reforms, is there an overall reform theory? And what happens with the assessments’ results? Are they (mis-)used and if so, in what way i.e. to support/undermine future decisions, to account for/attack prior decisions, to improve/obstruct policy-making, ... ?

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 2015** by the latest. Abstracts should be uploaded through the EGPA submission website (<http://www.iias-iisa.org/egpa/events/egpa-annual-conferences/2015-egpa-annual-conference-toulouse-france/>) and sent to the conveners of this EGPA Study Group (see above). **Notification of acceptance** will be **no later than the 5th of May 2015**. 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 2015** 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 to achieve 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 29 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. The collaboration between PSG V and LocRef includes, inter alia, joint workshops and conferences, PhD training schools, high level seminars, short term scientific missions for PSG-members (research stays for scholars in partner institutions), joint publications and policy papers. For further information refer to: <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/lk-kuhlmann/cost.html>; [http://www.cost.eu/domains\\_actions/isch/Actions/IS1207?management](http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1207?management)