



EGPA 2017

PSG V “Regional and Local Government” Call for Papers The Changing Role of Local Government

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The focus of this call is on the changing role of local government. Over recent meetings this Study Group has focussed on the management reform agenda, and the concern has been with specific reforms and how services are organised and delivered. The Group now wishes to step back and take a wider view of how the role of local governments is changing, particularly in relation to what does it mean for a council to ‘govern’ its locality, how services are being joined-up and the source of those policy pressures to which they are responding.

The impact of fiscal austerity in particular has triggered a re-appraisal of the role of local government across Europe. During the period of welfare state expansion, local authorities acquired a key social role and delivered many of what were seen as key social services in most European countries, although the mix of local services varies between countries. Over recent years major changes have taken place in the mix and mode of services delivered by local authorities. Central governments have increasingly sought to ‘burden-shift’, passing more responsibilities downwards to local governments, sometimes following through a logic of service or inter-service coordination but, more often, to reduce expenditure or to ‘shift the blame’. Less commonly, services have been shifted side-ways to new or existing extra-governmental organisations in order to reduce costs or/and reap the supposed advantages of allowing institutions (such as schools) greater organisational autonomy; how far have local governments been able to influence or cope with these shifts?

Meanwhile, the pressures of fiscal scarcity are tightening and exacerbating the tensions between their social policy role, in supporting the less well-off in the locality, and their economic development role. In some countries, such as England, central governments have even encouraged local authorities to concentrate on economic development issues rather than their social policy role. In other countries, such as Germany, local authorities are struggling under the increased financial burden of delivering social services, such as unemployment benefits, and of fulfilling an increasing amount of state-delegated tasks (e.g. environmental, planning,

supervision tasks) without having a political say on these tasks (although some authorities are experiencing an increase in finances), which thus decreases their political discretion and autonomy. Consequently, many local authorities are increasingly just fulfilling their statutory duties and maintaining minimum (centrally determined) standards rather than responding to the needs of their local communities.

Against this background, the Study Group is interested in papers is on how austerity measures, over the last seven years, and changing ideas on the scope of government and design of new ways of delivering services are changing the role of local government. In particular we are interested in studies which analyse the recent trajectories of change, identifying how local government roles are changing under the various pressures for change and resolve the ‘wicked issues’ inherent in the economic-social tension.

We are particularly interested in the following questions:

- How have central-local government relationships changed? Is central government (or another sub-national tier) imposing change?
- Have central governments tightened controls over local governments, given local governments more freedom but fewer resources or used performance management systems in different ways?
- How much freedom of action do local authorities enjoy? To what extent have local governments sought to ‘innovate’ in response to greater freedoms and/or the need to do ‘more with less’?
- Should the preference be given to competition or cooperation with upper-tier levels (e.g. regional authorities)?
- Are municipal mergers or collaborative arrangements reasonable responses to the limited capacities of small municipalities/counties in order to increase effectiveness/efficiency of service delivery and functional viability?
- Is there a new role of the citizens in service delivery (e.g. as co-producers, co-decision-makers etc.)? Is citizen satisfaction with services and local performance in-/ decreasing as a result of local innovations?
- Are these pressures leading to local authorities competing or cooperating with upper-tier (regional) authorities?

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-service”.

Abstracts that address these issues/questions should be **submitted by the 10th of April 2017**. Abstracts should be uploaded through the EGPA submission website and sent to the conveners of this EGPA Study Group (see above for email addresses). At this point the Study Group organisers will liaise with the organisers of SG V Local Democracy and Governance to ensure that the papers in each SG address the specifications in the Calls and to ensure a balance of papers across the two SGs.

Notification of acceptance will be **no later than the 8th of May 2017**. Those authors whose abstracts have been accepted should dispatch their **completed paper** to the convenors as well as upload it through the submission website **by the 1st August 2017**.

Please note that PSG IV on Local Governance and Democracy and PSG V on Regional and Local Government will be liaising with each other for the 2017 conference to ensure that papers are allocated to both groups in a coordinated manner.