

## Conference

### *European Local Government at a Glance*

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The 4<sup>th</sup> general COST-LocRef Action meeting was held in Dubrovnik on 5-6 May 2015. Loc-Ref is an action within COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology which is the European Union project that supports trans-national cooperation among researchers, engineers and scholars across Europe) aimed to provide a platform for establishing a new set of comparative knowledge on local public sector reforms, integrate the fragmented research activities in this neglected area of investigation, and enhance the scope of the conceptual foundations as well as the methodological rigor of comparative public administration. The theme of the Conference was *European Local Government at a Glance* and it gathered more than 70 prominent European public administration, local politics, and local government researchers.

The Conference was opened by welcome speeches of the Action's chair professor Sabine Kuhlmann (University of Potsdam) and its local organizer professor Ivan Koprić (University of Zagreb). The joint introductory session consisted of key note speech given by professor Koprić on *Experiences, Problems and Prospects of Local Government in the Western Balkan Region*, information of Boris Milošević, an assistant to the minister of public administration, on the state of the Croatian local self-government system, and presentation of professor Hubert Heinelt (University of Darmstadt) on *The European Mayor and Local Public Sector Reforms*. After that, parallel sessions of four working groups began

The sessions comprised debates on new theoretical frameworks and research methods in the field of local government and public administration, discussions on joint projects and upcoming publications as well as presentation of papers related to reforms in local government system. The

activity of the first group, *WGI External (Post) NPM*, was primarily focused on the development of provision of public utilities and local social services in European countries. The second group, *WGII Internal (Post) NPM*, dealt with to major internal managerial changes that occurred in the European local governments as a consequence of post-New Public Management reform processes. In the third group, *WGIII Territorial/Functional Re-Scaling*, members were occupied with the territorial and functional reforms in Europe understood within the theoretical framework of action-centred institutionalism. The fourth group, *WGIV Democratic Renewal*, discussed political structures and processes related to representative and direct democracy and civic and public engagement and developments in participative democracy.

Parallel with the working groups, a meeting related to factors that determine the scope of local autonomy called *Local Autonomy Index Meeting* chaired by Andreas Ladner (University of Lausanne) and a meeting of the members of POLLEADER (Political Leaders in European Cities) project chaired by professor Hubert Heinelt and professor Annick Magnier (University of Florence) took place. The first day was concluded by a closed meeting of COST Management Committee.

The second day of the Conference started with two parallel sessions: *Re-scaling local governance: Amalgamation, cooperation, territorial consolidation*, chaired by professor Sabine Kuhlmann, and *Managerial reforms: From Weberian bureaucracy to performance management?* Chaired, by professor Geert Bouckaert (University of Leuven). These sessions were followed by new group of sessions: *Re-organizing local service delivery: From government to governance?* chaired by Filipe Teles (University of Aveiro) and *Local participatory reforms, political leaders, and citizens* chaired by Daniel Klimovský (University of Bratislava). More than 20 papers that were presented during these sessions are available at COST Loc-Ref website (<http://www.uni-potsdam.de/cost-locoref/>). After the sessions, the four working groups continued with their activities from the day before.

The closing plenary session was chaired by assistant professor Vedran Đulabić (University of Zagreb). Professors Bas Denters (University of Twente), Geert Bouckaert, Angelika Vetter (University of Stuttgart), Carmen Navarro (universities of Madrid and Bristol) and Ivan Koprić discussed the theme *Contested Future of Local Government? Main Challenges for Cities and for Comparative Local Government Research*. After a fruitful discussion on role of local government in European countries, professor Riccardo Mussari (University of Siena) summed up the impressions on

COST PhD School held in Sienna in September 2014, while professor Nikos Hlepas (University of Athens) announced a new COST PhD workshop that will be held in Spetses, Greece, both noting the importance of including young generations in scientific discourse in public administration, particularly local self-government. Professor Yüksel Demirkaya (Marmara University, Istanbul) invited all COST members to join the COST meeting in Turkey in October 2015 while Professor Reto Steiner (University of Bern) presented the programme of the COST meeting in Bern in spring 2016.

The Conference was closed by organizers, professors Kuhlmann and Koprčić, who thanked all the participants for contributing to the very inspiring COST Loc-Ref Action meeting and expressed their wish for continuing successful cooperation in scientific deliberation on local self-government.

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