

## Project Supervision



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## European Local Systems under Change: Institutional Decentralization and its Effects

Functions and Performance of Local Governments  
in the United Kingdom, Germany and France



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## A Global Trend to Decentralization – What are the Effects and Consequences?

The decentralization of public functions is perceived as a global trend in recent research on comparative local government. Up to now scholarly attention has been focussing on the question of the reasons and triggers for national decentralization policies. The effects of the respective measures on local institutions and their performance (Does decentralisation make a difference?) received much less attention.

It is the aim of the research project to close this gap. Therefore the focus is put on the study of effects of institutional decentralization policies in the United Kingdom, France and Germany in a comparative perspective. We ask for the consequences of different forms of decentralization on functional profiles, decision making and operative results on the localities. Therefore two specific policy areas will come under scrutiny.

### Central Research Questions

#### Objects of research are thus:

1. The relevance of the specific form of decentralization and changes in the central-local government relations for sub-national governments' functional profiles. Regarding the term 'decentralization' we differentiate between 'pure' decentralization; administrative deconcentration; agencification/quangoization either separately or combined. Of special interest are shifts in responsibilities and range of services (multifunctional vs. single purpose model).

2. The effects and consequences of these measures for the local level: How do institutional changes affect their general capacity to act as efficient, effective and democratically accountable providers of goods and services ('performance'). Dimensions to be studied are vertical and horizontal coordination, efficiency and effectiveness as well as democratic control and accountability.

3. The explanatory significance of the preexisting national institutional arrangements and other determining factors that structure intergovernmental relations and, thereby, local government action in selected policy fields for the actual performance outcomes of local governments under conditions of a reshaped intergovernmental setting.

### Methodological Framework

From a methodological point of view a 'mix of methods' will be used which encompasses secondary analyses, expert interviews and intense case studies.

To provide a – conceptually/theoretically and methodologically – adequate interpretation of decentralisation processes and their local performance impact we utilize, in a first step, the single purpose – multi purpose-typology of public administrative organisation as a conceptual framework for a comparative mapping of the institutional and the functional consequences of national decentralization policies on the local, municipal and county level of government in the three selected countries. Therefore secondary analyses will be used.

Starting from this 'mapping', in each of the three countries two case studies will be conducted comprising one major city (district/Stadt/municipalité) and one county (county/Kreis/département). What are the specific consequences of the identified policies for these cities and counties? For each case study expert interviews will be carried out with decision makers in the policy areas under research as well as with the heads of administrations and other administrative staff. Additionally, local documents, reports and process generated data will be explored. For getting feedback from administrative practitioners intermediate results will be discussed in a broader circles of administrators in the cities and counties under concern.

To put the local case studies in a wider context, complementary interviews with actors from national and inter-local institutions and other experts complete the range of used data under consideration.