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**The Performance of Decentralization Policies Compared.**

An assessment of national decentralization policies and their impact on local government performance in Germany, France and England

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## 1 Introduction

The rearrangement of public functions in multi-level-systems is a central topic of inter-governmental relations. Thereby the decentralization of public functions seems to be a global trend in national public administration reform (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004; Pollitt 2005; Denters/Rose 2005; Deffigier 2007; Ahmad/Brosio 2008). National decentralization policies are often expected to impact upon both the efficiency and effectiveness of the fulfilment of public functions as well as on the democratic accountability of policymakers on the local level of government (Wollmann/Bouckaert 2006). Whilst one potentially problematic consequence of decentralization consists in the split of policy formulation and policy implementation between levels of government, central governments frequently expect more gains than losses from the decentralization of public functions. Yet, as decentralization impacts upon different dimensions of the fulfilment of public functions (Wollmann/Bouckaert 2006) and as diverse national decentralization policies normally differ from each other and concern different types of state functions, a premature generalization of positive expectations should be avoided. As a matter of fact, it today remains a still open question, which impact decentralization policies really do have on public policy-making at its implementation stage, i.e. on the performance of local service delivery and on service quality. And it also remains a basic puzzle of decentralization analysis, what differences dissimilar national decentralization strategies do make and whether there is variation in the decentralization impact according to diverse public policy-domains.

In this contribution we examine the impacts of decentralizations to the local level in Germany, France and England. We try to answer the following questions: Which impact do national policies of decentralization have on the functional profiles and the performance of local governments in the three countries under scrutiny? What differences make thereby different decentralization strategies and is there variation between different policy-domains? Underlying our analysis are the following two basic hypotheses:

First, from an interior-, strictly local government-oriented perspective, we presumed that a decentralization-related strengthening of multi-purpose local responsibility might increase the performance of local governments in some dimensions of public function fulfillment like the political accountability or the possibilities for cross-sectoral coordination (Wagener 1976; Wollmann 1997, 2004, 2008; Bogumil/Kuhlmann 2005). Yet, efficiency and effectiveness records might rather be reduced as economies of scale and scope decrease and political interference in administrative decision making rises. Vice versa a decentralization-related move towards a single purpose state administration is seen as being conducive to the efficiency and effectiveness record however associated with weak records on the dimensions of democratic control and horizontal coordination (Bogumil/Reichard/Siebart 2004; Bauer et al. 2007; Ebinger/Bogumil 2008; Kuhlmann 2006a) (*Institutions matter-hypothesis*).

Second, from a comparative, multi-level-systems-related perspective, we presumed that national decentralization policies will lead to diverting impacts as performance effects are supposed to depend on the transferred functions' characteristics and on the specific policy-bound decentralization strategies applied which leave local actors with varying degrees of autonomy concerning public spending, decision-making, and the resolution of local interest conflicts (Lockwood 2008: 34f.). (*Policies matter-hypothesis*)

In order to investigate these hypotheses, we apply our model to specific cases and present empirical findings from case studies on the decentralization of tasks and services in Germany, France and England.<sup>1</sup>

The paper is subdivided into three parts: In a first step the different decentralization strategies (political decentralization, administrative decentralization and administrative deconcentration) in Germany, France and England are introduced. In a second step the conceptual and methodological framework for assessing the performance of local governments will be outlined and five major performance dimensions will be developed. In a third, empirical step case studies on the performance effects of the decentralization of social or welfare state functions will be presented.

## 2 Decentralization strategies in Germany, France and England

### 2.1 Varieties of Decentralization

Since the beginning of the 1990s, numerous observers have stated a global trend towards a decentralization of public functions and services (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004; Denters/Rose 2005). Albeit the widespread research activities aiming at the comparative analysis of decentralization reforms, the question of how decentralization and the restructuring of intergovernmental relations impact upon the performance of local governments still remains an underexposed topic. In what follows, our argument is based on the premise that the performance of local government is a function of the specific organizational model underlying public administration and the intergovernmental setting in the respective state (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004; Wollmann/Bouckaert 2006). We therefore assume that a shift in the organization of public administration and the intergovernmental setting as instigated by national decentralization reforms should accordingly lead to a change in local governments' performance.

For a classification of public administrative and intergovernmental organization, we distinguish a *multi purpose model* and the *single purpose model*. According to Wollmann (2004) the primary criterion for the organization of public administration and intergovernmental relations based on the multi purpose model is territoriality whereas it is functionality when based on the single purpose model. The *multi purpose model* of local public administration thus refers to the (ideal) organizational case whereby local governments are charged with several interrelated or unrelated purposes. Territorial government in this case is based on a multipurpose or even universalistic functionality within a given, territorially defined jurisdiction. The *single purpose model* accordingly refers to the (ideal) organizational case whereby different types of administrative bodies are respectively charged with one main purpose (Wollmann/Bouckaert 2006: 12-14; Wollmann 2004).

The three states under scrutiny in our study, Germany, France and England, started from diverging origins and deployed different approaches to decentralization resp. the rearrangement of central-local-relations over the past two decades (Kuhlmann 2006a). Within the limiting

<sup>1</sup> The case studies are conducted in the comparative research project „European Local Systems under Change: Institutional Decentralization and its Effects funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The research is jointly headed by Jörg Bogumil and Sabine Kuhlmann and conducted by the authors at the. For an outline of the research project cf. Ebinger et al. 2007; Bogumil/Kuhlmann 2005. Further information at <http://homepage.rub.de/Joerg.Bogumil/navigation/Lokalsysteme.htm> and <http://www.humboldt.kuhlmann.peroma.de/>.

scope of traditional models and given power structures the national or state governments advanced their administrations along particular paths. Following the literature on state and local government reform, national decentralization approaches can – on an abstract level – be classified into three ideal-typical forms of decentralization (Benz 2002: 209-214; Wollmann 2004).

The first form, *political decentralization*, can be defined as the transfer of state functions that have either been located on the central level of government or its agencies into the sphere of local government. Political decentralization means that locally legitimized bodies become competent to decide autonomously on the planning, financing and administration of their newly acquired executive functions. Compared to this rather far-reaching step, *administrative decentralization* marks a more moderate form of reordering intergovernmental relations. It is defined as the concession of executive functions from the state to local administrative authorities without the assignment of locally elected bodies to decide autonomously on the purpose. Acting as agents of national governments or governmental offices local authorities remain at least formally under the states' full control not only of the legality but also of the functionality and the professional quality of the respective action (Wollmann 1997: 106). Finally, *administrative deconcentration* is defined as the delegation of central state functions to administrative bodies on the sub-central level of government hence which are still part of the states' own administration or dependent on it financially but not controlled directly. Subsumed are the 'classic' delegation of central state functions to governmental bodies – as government agencies – and the assignment of functions to *Quangos* (Quasi-non-governmental-Organizations, Skelcher 1998) – a kind of 'horizontal' decentralization typical for state restructuring in the Anglo-Saxon countries – given the state keeps direct financial and juridical control of the decentralized fulfillment of tasks by quasi-autonomous bodies.

## **2.2 Pathways to decentralization in Germany, France and England**

Even though, in reality no straightforward implementation of one or another of these idealtypically distinguished forms can be expected to appear, the cases of Germany, France and England with their specific pathways to decentralization each roughly stand for one of the three forms.

### **2.2.1 Administrative decentralization in Germany**

Germany has a tradition of a politically and functionally strong, multi-purposive local government. This profile was re-established and constitutionally guaranteed after the Second World War. The local level is since then formally designed as the residual administrative level delivering each function to local citizens which is not administered on an upper level. Local functions and tasks must be split in those which can be derived from the autonomous rights granted to the local level and those duties delegated to them merely for execution by the states (*Länder*). With the beginning of the new millennium the traditional portfolio of local tasks underwent an enlargement. Faced with immense financial pressures the states of Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony took the lead in implementing far reaching administrative reforms. In both states many dozen of state agencies were reorganized or dissolved entirely. One trait of these reforms was the delegation of considerable packages of administrative responsibilities on the local level while maintaining political decision-making and control in the hands of the state. The intention behind this step was to empower the municipalities and reduce costs by cutting red tape. A wave of reforms imitating this approach actually roles over

Germany as it proved to be at least politically successful. It was not the municipality as the lower tier of local government but the county level as the upper tier which benefited mostly from the transfer of tasks. The character of these transfers is one of administrative decentralization: The local or county councils still remain excluded from decision-making.

Drawing on this empirical knowledge the first basic hypothesis formulated above should, on a general level of argumentation, translate in Germany as follows: The modification of administrative structures and functional reforms on the *Länder* level of the state supposedly strengthen the territorial organization model and lead to even more comprehensive responsibilities on the local level. Consequently, mutually disruptive functions of state and local entities could be harmonized and cross-sectoral services become better integrated. However it is to be expected that local democratic accountability will stay limited for two reasons. First, many of the new responsibilities hardly interfere with citizens daily necessities but are complex administrative tasks. Secondly as competencies are mostly transferred in the form of an administrative decentralization, decision-making competencies of local councils are very limited. According to the hypothesis it is to be expected that the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of individual functions is inadequate and will diminish further.

### 2.2.2 Political decentralization in France

Due to its unitary character and *Jacobine* state tradition (Rouban 2008; Peters 2008), the French state has traditionally been depicted as an example for a highly centralized model of public administrative organization with local authorities being in a rather 'weak' position (Hoffmann-Martinot 2006: 231-32; Wollmann 2004). The states' dominance was only "tamed" (Mabileau 1996: 25) by the traditionally established practice of an accumulation of offices (*cumul de mandats*) which enabled locally elected office holders (*notables*) to gain political influence on the national level. Given the wish of the French government to bring the state 'closer to the citizens' and manage external and internal pressures for state modernization, decentralization started fulminant in 1982 with a "system change" (Kuhlmann 2009: 263). It comprised the admission of the regions as new territorial authorities in their own right, the abolishment of the prefects' right to comprehensive control of local government action (*tutelle*) and the full recognition of local self government to territorial authorities of each type and level (*regions, départements, municipalities*). It was already during this first step of decentralization reforms in 1982 (*acte I*), that this state-controlled, basically single purposive setting moved towards a more locally-controlled, multi-purposive form of territorial government (Le Lidec 2007; Kuhlmann 2008a, 2008b, 2009).

During the second round of decentralization (*acte II*) the installation of multi purposive forms of territorial government, notably in the form of intercommunalities complemented this newly emerging system more and more (Thoenig 2005). At the actual stage the administrative and intergovernmental settings of the French state are characterized by the coexistence of the mostly locally-run single purposive form of territorial government and an inter-communally-run, multi-purposive form of territorial government that gains in prominence (Borraz/Le Galès 2005). All in all, the organization of multi-level governance in the French case has, since 1982, become more complex and blurred (Kuhlmann 2006b; Kuhlmann 2009). It is as well marked by a strengthened autonomy of local governments as well as by a high degree of vertical integration between levels of government in different functional fields, taking on a specific form of policy interweavement *à la française*.

Considering this empirical knowledge the ‘Institutions matter-hypothesis’ formulated above should generally apply as follows in France: Political decentralization in conjunction with inter-communalization should make cross-policy coordination more viable and should presumably strengthen accountability for policy outcomes. Yet, as decentralization, inter-communalization, and administrative deconcentration are set in place simultaneously, these effects could to some extent be limited. Since actor relations in the local arena get more complex and coordination processes are complicated, transaction costs and the costs of coordination and negotiation become high and the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall system could be leveled out by these aspects (Kuhlmann 2008a).

### 2.2.3 Administrative deconcentration in England

England’s reform record differs substantially from the continental European countries regarding the central-local-nexus. Against the continental trend of decentralization it can be observed an ongoing weakening of local governments’ functional profile as well as a tightening of supervision, regulation and intervention by the central government since the early 1980s. The formerly strong and multifunctional localities in England were object of an obviously anti-localist policy of the conservative governments of Thatcher and Major. Local governments were considerably weakened in their functional profile not only by financial constraints and by compulsory competitive tendering which exposed traditional local tasks to market forces. Equally menacing to local government was the option granted to certain institutions to opt out of local control into quasi-autonomous bodies (or “*Quangos*”) financially dependent on the central government (e.g. grant maintained schools, Housing Associations etc). Additionally in certain fields “agencies” as deconcentrated parts of central government’s administrative apparatus were installed at the local level displacing the traditional local government. Finally the conservative government imposed a tight control regime on the local governments by audits and performance targets (cf. Stoker 2004; Wilson/Game 2006). Regarding the identified types of decentralization the English way is that of deconcentration or perhaps better “horizontal decentralization” (Pollitt 2005: 376). The change in government to New Labour did not change these policies in their substance, but added certain new features which can be subsumed under the headers of *democratic renewal*, *joint up governance* and *performance management* (cf. Stoker 2004; Wilson/Game 2006). Recapitulating the English case, we can – in contrast to the development in Continental Europe – observe a general centralizing trend since the 1980s. We can identify a trajectory from a strong multi-purpose model to a more and more single-purpose model. Similar to the Thatcher era, New Labour treats local governments as one “partner” amongst others in local service delivery.

Drawing on this empirical knowledge the basic hypotheses formulated above should translate for the case of England as follows: The sectoralization and fragmentation of administration is growing with the advance of local mono-functional agencies and quangos. If the hypotheses’ assumptions are correct this is likely to do considerable damage to inter-sectoral coordination. While functional performance might improve in individual sectors, transparency of decision-making processes, accountability and control should diminish.

Before going into details of the empirical case studies, the conceptual and methodological framework for empirically assessing the decentralization-related performance change of selected German, French and English local governments will be outlined. Thereby, we distinguish and develop five major performance dimensions.

### 3 Dimensions and indicators of decentralization-related performance effects on local government

How can the theoretically deduced assumptions mentioned on the effects of institutional policies on the performance of local governments in the introduction be approached in empirical research? In a first step we assess the different dimensions regarding the performance of local systems. The evaluation of public-sector-reforms faces numerous methodological and conceptual difficulties. One problem is that the performance of public institutions is influenced by numerous intervening factors. Consequently, it is often not possible to clearly isolate the impact of institutional changes (cf. Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004: 103ff, Boyne et al. 2003: 13ff.). Secondly, we cannot draw on an elaborated set of indicators for surveying performance improvements, which is partly because the target dimensions of modernisation are only very generally formulated, often inconsistent and even contradictory (cf. Bogumil/Kuhlmann 2006) as well as changing over time. Following Pollitt/Bouckaert (2004: 6) administrative reforms usually serve multiple ends such as savings, improvement of quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the service or product delivery. Moreover intermediate ends as improvement of political steering capacity or administrative independence as well as pure symbolic benefits might be furthered. Furthermore, the evaluation and the weighting of individual dimensions vary depending on the perspective and institutional affiliation of various stakeholder groups (cf. Connolly et al. 1980, Boyne et al. 2003: 14, Enticott 2004).<sup>2</sup>

This makes it necessary to develop a multidimensional framework which tries to cover the constitutive dimensions of performance and is oriented on the scientific discussion as well as is apt to reflect the multiple perspectives on the issues dealt with. For the deduction of these performance dimensions we are geared to the distinction of the single- and multipurpose distinction outlined out above (cf. Wollmann 2004; Benz 2002) as well as to the discussion on performance-indicators for NPM-style public sector-reforms (cf. Pollitt/ Bouckaert 2004: 103-142; Bogumil/Kuhlmann 2006).

The five distinct performance dimensions guiding our research relate to the three aspects of input legitimacy (democratic control and accountability, transparency), output-legitimacy (efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery) and finally procedural aspects of coordination and steering. Additionally aspects of equity between territorial entities are included which deal with the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the fulfilment of public functions. As far as the procedural aspects are concerned, we are interested both in decision-making procedures and in the coordination-capabilities on the vertical dimension between local administrative bodies and the central state as on the horizontal dimension between different administrative bodies on the local level. For the analyses of these two dimensions we can draw on research strategies developed in implementation research. It comprises case studies in which real processes of interaction and communication will be scrutinized. For the analyses of the output-oriented dimensions we draw on the approaches used in evaluation research and mostly applied to the

<sup>2</sup> If one looks at the example of *effectiveness*, on a first stage one can define it as “the achievement of predefined goals”, the underlying problem becomes obvious. Which goals a public administration – and especially a local public administration – should pursue and should hence be measured against? Local governments are confronted regularly with the discrepancy of rather abstract formal laws or standards defined on a higher national level and with local interests finally articulated by local politicians. Especially the overarching goals stated in national laws would regularly require the administration to follow the advancing professional standards in the different fields such as healthcare, social services or environmental protection. As detailed professional standards enforce costly measures and limit the discretion of politicians in decision-making they pose a potential threat for the interests of these local actors. It becomes obvious that two definitions of effectiveness – an often implicit political and a rather abstract professional – have to be considered. Both perspectives tend to negate external effects related to their point of view: professional administration in one policy field often ignores the financial effects of its decisions while politicians at times deny the sense behind professionally set standards. Objective effectiveness should be found somewhere in between this two extremes.

evaluation of public management reforms (cf. Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004, Bogumil et al. 2007). We distinguish between an input-dimension which comprises changes in the charges of resources (personnel, finance, and time) and an output-dimension (number of treated cases; duration of case-treatment, effectiveness and quality of the services). Finally, we focus on the changes of the heterogeneity in service delivery between different local entities. Table 1 as well contains several indicators for the measurement of changes on these dimensions. Besides available quantitative data we also draw on case studies and on the assessments of the interviewed actors.

**Table 1: Dimensions and indicators for the measurement of local government performance consecutive to national decentralization reforms**

Dimensions of Performance	Performance indicators in different dimensions
Democratic control of decision making / accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Local council in charge of decision making and political control of implementation of the new competence?</li> <li>○ Integration of user groups/organised interests into local decision making?</li> <li>○ Partizipation of citizens?</li> <li>○ Transparency of Decisionmaking</li> <li>○ Responsiveness</li> </ul>
Horizontal and vertical coordination	Institutional integration in the forms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Issue- and problem-oriented coordination within local administration (informal)?</li> <li>○ Regular, formalised meetings/rounds for internal coordination?</li> <li>○ Creation of new administrative services/bodies in charge of the coordination task?</li> </ul> Inter-communal coordination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Change in intensity in issue-/problem-oriented inter-communal coordination?</li> </ul> Vertical coordination
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Changes in 'resource-input' (financial costs and personal)?</li> <li>○ Changes in administrative output ('rate of public service production': number of treated cases; duration of case-treatment)</li> <li>○ Ratio input-output</li> </ul>
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Legal quality, formal correctness of public service production</li> <li>○ Professional quality of public service production</li> <li>○ Proximity to citizens: spatial closeness of administration, electronic accessibility of administration</li> <li>○ Cutback of vertical policy-merge?</li> <li>○ Improvement of local capacity to decide and act autonomously</li> </ul>
Heterogeneity in local service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Amplification of 'unequal' service fulfilment in an inter-communal perspective?</li> </ul>

If we come back to the three types of decentralization developed in section 2.1 we can presume differences in performance effects for each of the three decentralization strategies which are shared widely in the relevant literature (cf. Pollitt 2003). Table 2 summarizes the expected performance effects for the three decentralization strategies. In the case of *Political decentralization* we can presume increasing democratic control and accountability and an increase of horizontal coordination capacity as we can deduce from the multi-purpose-model (Wollmann 2008). These virtues go hand in hand with the downside of decreasing vertical coordination, effectiveness (due to under-specialization) and effectiveness (due to decreasing economies of scale). Regarding the equity dimension we can presume growing heterogeneity between local governments. For the case of *administrative decentralization* we can expect only minor effects in the dimensions of democratic control and accountability and also in respects of horizontal and vertical coordination. As advocates claim for increasing effectiveness

at the cost of the effectiveness of service delivery. As in the case of political decentralization we can expect growing heterogeneity due to diverging capacities of service *delivery*. *Deconcentration* finally can be read as the mere opposite of political decentralization with decreasing democratic control and horizontal coordination, but improved vertical coordination, increasing efficiency and effectiveness due to specialization. Due to similar capacities and procedural specifications we can expect higher equity.

**Table 2: Performance Effects of different types of decentralization**

Dimensions of Performance	Political Decentralization	Administrative Decentralization	Deconcentration/ Horizontal Decentralization
Democratic control and accountability	+	~	-
Horizontal Coordination	+	~/(+)	-
Vertical Coordination	-	~/(-)	+
Efficiency	-	(+)	+
Effectiveness	-	-	+
Heterogeneity	+	(+)	-

#### 4 Selected case study results

In the literature there are only few hints for differences in performance effects between different policies and administrative tasks. As will be shown later on this ‘general’ heuristic has to be differentiated between different tasks. For “testing” the applicability of these heuristics, we conduct(ed) case studies of decentralization effects in different policy-fields standing for “paradigmatic” shifts between the central and local levels of government in the three countries under scrutiny.<sup>3</sup> As a general rule, in each country we analyzed the decentralization of state functions in one more person- or community-centered policy-field (social assistance (F), integration services (D), schools (E)) and in one more ‘technical’ or planning related field concerning the regulation of interactions between the (local) state and different corporate interest actors (environment (D), town and spatial planning (F, E)). For the sake of reducing complexity, in what follows we concentrate on the presentation of empirical evidence from the country case studies with regard to person and community centered functions. Here, interesting parallels between the cases come to the fore. At the same time, the explanatory value of the *Policies matter-hypothesis* as connected to the distinction of different forms of decentralization becomes apparent.

One major criteria underlying our case selection was the requirement of sufficient experience the policy-specific national reform ventures. In all of the three country cases, we concentrated on the analysis of recently reformed person- or community-centered policy fields. Hence in Germany/ Baden-Württemberg we studied the decentralization effects in the functional field of integration services for the disabled (*Eingliederungshilfe*). In the French case, we concentrated on the decentralization impact in the field of social help and integration policy for the unemployed (*Revenu minimum d’insertion, RMI*) and in England, we were interested in the decentralization effects in the functional field of public school policy. From a methodological point of view, local case studies in the three countries were carried out on the basis of inten-

<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing three out of six case studies are finished. For the empirical part of this paper we draw especially on these concluded case studies in France and Germany. For the remaining cases first presumptions based on secondary analysis and first field contacts are integrated in the argumentation.

sive secondary and document analysis coupled with interviews with experts from local bureaucracies.

#### 4.1 Presentation of cases

In *Germany*, a first set of interviews was conducted in 2007 in one of the biggest and most densely populated counties (> 500.000 inhabitants) of Baden-Württemberg. The county under scrutiny is splendidly institutionalized as economy is thriving and low fiscal pressures burden the budget. Its bureaucracy counting 1.500 employees disposes of significant resources. One of the main characteristics of the decentralization reform here was a massive increase of the counties' administrative responsibilities. The number of employees rose on average about 40 to 50%. Hence despite this major shift in administrative responsibility, almost no political decentralization was undertaken. One of the many administrative spheres affected by this measure was the social policy subsection dealing with integration services for the disabled. At large, in Germany this policy, which represents a heavy weight on the political agenda of each level of government, has already been a politically decentralized responsibility before the reform. During the reform in Baden-Württemberg the related administrative functions were transferred from a centralized communal administrative body to the counties. Integration services for the disabled burdens the cumulated budget of local governments in Baden-Württemberg with about 1.1 billion euros p.a. and calls strong interest groups on alert, i.e. activists for the rights and opportunities of disabled citizens and manifold interests of care businesses

In *France*, empirical research was carried out in 2008 in one county or *Département* well comparable to the German/ Baden-Württemberg county-case at least on a structural level. The scrutinized *Département* equally represents a very big, densely populated *Département* (about 1.400.000 inhabitants) and a case being, as the German case, characterized by economic prosperity and a well-balanced public budget. The *Départements* administrative apparatus counts about 6.000 employees. This situation remained largely unaltered during the *acte II* of the French decentralization reform in 2003. The complete transfer of the functions resorting from the social help and integration policy for the unemployed (*RMI*) onto the *Département* level of government was one of the major projects of *acte II*. This social help regime subdivides into a person-related individual transfer-section and a group-related integration policy-section. It had been created only by 1988, i.e. five years after the first step (*acte I*) to the decentralization of state functions in France. By the time of the creation of the *RMI*, its implementation was based on an interwoven system of multi-level government with partly shared and mutually related competencies of the state- and *départemental* levels. By then, the responsibility for the functions within the person-related policy-section was given to the states' representative on the *Département* level, the *Préfet*, and the competence for the integration policy-section went to the *Département*, i.e. to the President of its elected council, the *Conseil Général*. After the complete take-over of all *RMI*-related functions in 2003, the budgets of the 100 French *Départements* increased by a total of around 4.9 billion euros. In the selected case this meant an increase of 147 million euros or 10 per cent of the *Départements*' annual budget. Given the fact that the transfer of the *RMI* was largely organized in the form of a political decentralization this redistribution of fiscal responsibility implied a massive impact for the *Départements*' practice of internal public policy-making.

One major example for the weakening of the role of local government in *England* in the process of "quangoisation" which is identified as a major shift in the functional profiles of English local governments is the field of education. Here two case studies will be conducted in two coun-

ties of medium size in the North-West resp. South-West of England. As the field work is outstanding for the sake of comparison preliminary results of secondary analysis and first field contacts will be presented. The field of state schools showed a rather typical reform record since the late 1980s. In 1988 the individual schools (previously under the umbrella of local government) were granted with the right to opt out of local government and become self-governed bodies, which was used by about 18% of schools. At the same time national curricula and a central system of benchmarking (league tables) were introduced which should make the performance of single schools transparent and open up competition between schools supported by parental choice and open enrolment (cf. Pollitt et al. 1998). Labours' policy reintegrated these "Grant Maintained schools" as "Foundation Schools" in the LEAs formally, but strengthened school autonomy further, so that the differences between the two models diminished. For scholars this nevertheless opens up the possibility for a direct comparison of two administrative models of school governance, which can be characterized as examples of 'horizontal decentralization'.

In the following, the encountered results are presented. To facilitate comparison, the effects of decentralization in the three country cases are presented one after the other in each of the five dimensions.

## 4.2 Mapping performance changes

### 4.2.1 Horizontal and vertical coordination

Decentralization of *integration services* in Germany/Baden-Wurttemberg allowed for the first time to bundle close to all social services on one level. As a consequence interfaces with school authorities, public health department or youth welfare office were smoothed as the merits of face to face contact between bureaucrats and local actors took effect. Furthermore the comprehensive implementation of a case-management approach became possible. Quality increased as the case managers' knowledge of local service providers improved. As a downside, the need for horizontal coordination between the local entities increased dramatically with decentralization. As counties now have to react to legal changes or newly arising professional questions on their own, they are forced to harmonize their decisions via several institutionalized intermunicipal meeting rounds at substantial interaction costs. The much downsized joint facility of the local level, the so called *Kommunalverband Jugend und Soziales (KVJS)* would obviously be the right entity to relieve the cities and counties in some respect. However it still provides to utter satisfaction for the knowledge-intense professional assessment of the disabled persons needs. Summing up, decentralization shows some shortcomings hence can be characterized a positive sum game concerning the actors' capability to coordinate.

In the French case, with the decentralization of the *RMI*-related public functions, the already high need for vertical coordination between the state and the *département* level of government inherent to the former model of *RMI*-implementation management was reduced as the states' deconcentrated social policy-actors retreated from their active role in local public policy-making and confined themselves to the role of contractors of the *Département* with regard to certain functions. Yet, in the *Département* under scrutiny the omission of vertical state-départemental coordination (and the shortfall of states' control power) did not turn out as a leeway to an 'easier' inner-départemental policy-management. Given the fact that French *RMI*-policy already before the decentralization reform compassed the case-management ap-

proach with its generally high need for coordination between public and private actors, it was now the duty of the *Conseil Général* to manage coordination with a wide range of different local service providers and the municipalities that were equally involved in the provision of local integration services to the unemployed. In the scrutinized case, this entailed massive problems of inner-départemental vertical coordination between the *Département* on the one side and the local interest holders on the other side. In this situation the retreat of the state was felt rather as retreat of a ‘neutral arbiter’ than as that of a ‘control instance’. The *Conseil Général* reacted with the strategy of increased inner-départemental centralization, i.e. an increase in the *Départements’* control over private and municipal actors. This, by the way, was not atypical for the French *Départements* reaction to the coordination challenge that resorted from the political decentralization of the *RMI*. At the same time, the complete take-over of the *RMI*-functions also increased the need for inner-administrative horizontal coordination. In the case under scrutiny this equally turned out as a major challenge as the départemental services involved in *RMI*-public policy-making did not manage to cooperate in a problem-oriented way but rather acted as opposed interest-maximizers. In other *Départements* inner-administrative coordination with regard to the *RMI* was rather unproblematic; generally *Départements* could profit from a tradition of inter-sectoral coordination as a characteristic of French public administrative culture. In sum, decentralization did show as well positive effects as well as shortcomings concerning coordination.

For the English case the existing evidence shows clear deficits regarding the horizontal coordination as an effect of horizontal decentralization. As well between the schools as between local government and the school there are a weakening of cooperation and diminishing planning capacities observable. The weakening of coordination with local authorities in crosscutting issues, especially in fields like youth welfare, crime prevention, planning, leisure or sports facilities is reported regularly: “The local authority has cut us off”. With the diminishing planning capacity of the LEA schools get in competition for personnel instead of cooperation and exchange of teachers in certain subjects. The same counts for common goods like rooms, sports facilities or food provision for mutual use. As a counter move vertical coordination was strengthened through national curricula and league tables and state-led inspectorates (OFSTED).

#### 4.2.2 Democratic control of decision making / accountability

In Germany, the chief administrative officer of a county is only indirectly elected by the county council. Therefore, popular pressure mostly reflects (opposed) interests of particular municipalities rather than party politics. Additionally, the functions under scrutiny in both policy fields can be described as specialized routine matters which normally generate only little advertency amongst the general public. Against this background, deviating effects could be observed: In general, regarding *Integration services for the disabled*, the municipalities in each county take primarily interest in controlling the financial burden apportioned amongst them.<sup>4</sup> Individual cases do not become subject to any kind of political intervention on a county-wide basis. Only in the seldom cases of mayor investments the usual quarrels among local interest become alive. Representation of disabled citizens in local advisory bodies has reportedly become more effective as immediate contacts to the responsible administration are now possible. Due to the nature of the policy – the strong legal binding and the high profes-

<sup>4</sup> The counties’ budget is primarily financed by a push across allocation shared by the counties’ municipalities.

sionalism within *Integration Services* – it can be concluded that no significant change in the exertion of democratic control has taken place.

In the French case, the political decentralization of the *RMI* to the *Départements* broadly went hand in hand with a formal increase in local democratic control and accountability as the *Conseil Général*, the elected body of the *Département* now became charged with decision-making on the respective *Départements RMI*-policy planning. Except from this formal effect on local representative democracy the political decentralization of the *RMI* equally brought the local state as a producer of local services related to the *RMI* ‘closer to the citizens’, i.e. both the beneficiaries of the social transfer regime and to the wider local public. With the take-over of financial responsibility for the *RMI*-policy, the *Conseil Général* now had a strong interest in budgetary control. This in turn placed local bureaucrats and case-managers under the pressure to look after ‘high quality’ in local service production which the effect that the “*RMIst*” were now being integrated closer into the *Départements’* case-management system not only as a party concerned. In turn, as local politicians now became accountable of the financing of the *RMI*-tasks, political decentralization of the *RMI* equally meant an increase in the control of the entitled person beneficial of local public money and services. To conclude, decentralization strengthened local democracy and political accountability.

In the English case the assessment remains ambivalent: there is a clear weakening of representative democratic control on the one hand, on the other hand there can be seen a strengthening of democratic self-government and participation of the persons involved (esp. parents) through the strengthening of “consumer” rights and “market” transparency. Through far reaching school autonomy school boards consisting of parents and representatives and local enterprises gain stronger influence. One could interpret this as a strengthened “consumer democracy” through parental choice and nationwide transparent benchmarking between schools (league tables etc.).

#### 4.2.3 Efficiency

Given the fact that in Germany *Integration services for the disabled* have always been a communal responsibility, decentralization did not entail any immediate change notably in funding in the case under scrutiny in Baden-Wurtemberg. However, as the fraction of expenses shared *Land-wide* are to decrease in a medium-range perspective, counties will have an incentive to keep an eye on costs in the future. The counties had to face rather different starting conditions as far as their resources were concerned, given that qualified personnel were distributed unevenly between them. Furthermore only a fraction of counties was able or willing to keep the sophisticated IT-systems in use beforehand. Better coordination amongst the services involved on the local level facilitated processes and hence helped to increased efficiency in the case observed. A rather negative effect of decentralization results from the suppression of formerly centrally provided back-office services. In sum decentralization in the field of *integration services* has proved to be supportive to a reduction of costs and an increase in service quality while further improvements seem possible.

In France, the political decentralization of the *RMI* equally was accompanied by an increase in cost efficiency as the *Départements* now being in full political account for public spending on the social help and integration policy for the unemployed started to exercise a strict abuse control of individual beneficiaries and thereby generally managed to economize and contain total spending. Yet at the same time, the French case of the decentralization of person-related public functions resembled the German one in so far as in France, the *Départements* were eager to uphold a high service quality after the take-over of the *RMI*-related functions from

the state. This however meant that costs for knowledge inquiry, management and technical support had to be increased in many *Départements*. The scrutinized *Département* was a paradigmatic case in this sense as the *Conseil Général* here decided to invest in the step-up of personal capacities, professional training and IT-solutions for better management. In sum, against this background costs did not increase but could equally not be reduced as an effect of decentralization.

In England the efficiency gains remain disputable so far. The main part of observable efficiency gains can be ascribed to new flexible budgets introduced as well in the LEA as the GM schools, not the administrative attribution (cf. Levacic 1994). In the contrary there are indications for higher administrative costs in the GM schools through internalization of administrative functions (e.g. personnel, building maintenance) and a de-professionalisation of administrative functions through self-government.

#### 4.2.4 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of all decentralized competencies reportedly depends heavily on the strength of their position within the host administration. The case observed in Germany/Baden-Wurttemberg in the field of *Integration services* was very favorably institutionalized and granted significant institutional autonomy. This setting allowed the management to establish the case-management approach on a broader basis and to tighten in-house and external relations with all actors involved in the support of disabled citizens. Closer multilateral cooperation reportedly improved controlling and helped to refine the range of services offered by third party providers. To compliment local competencies the central *KVJS* is now called in on a case by case basis for specialized knowledge. This functional division of labor increased the use of ambulant and low-threshold services and raised the overall service quality substantially.

In the French case, decentralization-related effectiveness losses as indicated by a possible decrease in the legal and professional quality of local service production could not be detected due to several reasons. First, as had been mentioned above, the *Départements* were generally geared to guarantee for keeping the policy-quality constant after the full take-over of the RMI-functions in 2003. Second, as under the former multi-level government regime of the implementation of the RMI, the *Départements* had already been in charge for the service-intensive integration policy-section of the RMI-policy, the *départemental* bureaucracy already disposed both of the knowledge necessary for high quality service production as well as of the contacts to a wide range of pertinent private local service providers to whom service delivery could be out-contracted. In this respect, quality deficits only sometimes emerged as a consequence of coordination failures which come up subsequent to decentralization. This had been the case e.g. in the scrutinized *Département* where especially the inner-*départemental* vertical coordination between the *Conseil Général* and the municipalities in local integration service production turned out to be problematic. Third, as the *Départements* in general continued to closely cooperate with the states' local social insurance and employment services regarding the fulfillment of certain technical functions (e.g. abuse control; registration and bureaucratic accompaniment of individual beneficiaries) or certain policy-functions (e.g. job placement), they profited from the given technical knowledge base of the central states' actors on the local level of government. All in all effectiveness did not change subsequent to decentralization and could, in many cases, even be increased.

Regarding the effectiveness dimension no clear results are observable for the English case. Against the aims the centralized control on school performance no clear standardization of

results has taken place. Differences between schools can be traced back to the social background than to school governance.

#### 4.2.5 Heterogeneity of service production between local units

In the German/Baden-Wurttemberg case, regarding *Integration services* the very different starting conditions between counties led to very different approaches in institutionalization, instruments and in dealing with claims of entitled persons. The lacking of a central legal and policy department further increased this heterogeneity. Nowadays a multitude of coordinative meetings and commonly edited guidelines guarantees harmonization in “90 percent of the issues”. Meanwhile, some differences remain, mainly by deviations of counties in favor of their disabled citizens.

In France, the decentralization of the *RMI* equally led to an increase in heterogeneity. Parallel to the German case of the decentralization of person-related functions, the French case study revealed differences between the *Départements* concerning the institutionalization and instrumentation of RMI-related local public policy-making. Remarkable differences equally emerged between those *Départements* with a well-balanced public budget and those under budgetary constraint, the latter not being able to afford an expansion of the départemental range of integration services to the “RMIst”.

## 5 Conclusion

The empirical analysis of decentralization reforms has allowed for a first test of the analytical framework developed for the measurement of local government performance. As work is still in progress only preliminary results can be presented. Not surprisingly, our basic assumption that decentralization actually makes a difference can be confirmed. Even though findings can not be qualified yet it became obvious that the form of decentralization and the respective decentralization-pattern in the three countries under observation influence the ‘performance’. In all three countries exercise and results of the transferred functions changed considerably. Furthermore traditional national peculiarities and pre-existing national institutional arrangements structuring intergovernmental relations seem to determine considerably public sector modernisation – even if they can not completely foreclose fundamental breaks and changes as the French and British cases show.

In the comparison of countries and policy sectors we can observe in some dimensions rather clear confirmations for our hypotheses deducted from the body of literature Table 3 summarizes the findings and contrasts them with our expectations. Especially the procedural dimensions of political control and (vertical and horizontal) coordination seems to meet the expectations as hints for a weakening of political control and a loss in horizontal coordination can be found in the case of schools in England, whereas a politicization and partly strengthened coordination capacities in France’s RMI/RMA and the German Integration services. However, no clear-cut statements can be made regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the reforms under scrutiny. Concerning the dimension of inter-local heterogeneity the hypothesized effect of growing disparities between communities as a consequence of administrative and political decentralization seems to be confirmed.

The presented results show also significant differences between the policy fields under scrutiny. Our performance hypotheses fit better for the more technical fields of environment and

planning than for the person related services. One can presume that in fields where better coordination of cases is essential for the service quality, the decentralization gain in effectiveness overweighs the loss in specialization. This hints to a technology-based bias in the debate on performance effects and performance management so far.

Going beyond these findings and taking a wider perspective we can observe that our still rather crude set of dimensions seems to cover well the actual changes. Only few residual dimensions remain unconsidered. Hence it became apparent that not necessarily the form of decentralization as such makes a difference. Rather comparable forms of decentralization – this became apparent in the case study presented here and is being expected in the French and British cases as well – seem to unfold differing performance effects when applied on tasks differing in characteristics and requirements. Political saliency of policies, possible synergies on the local level and finally the expertise required locally seem to be decisive factors for the ‘success’ of decentralization as a multi-level governance strategy.

**Table 3: Performance effects in comparison**

	Germany						France						England <sup>1</sup>					
	Policy 1 (AD)			Policy 2 (AD)			Policy 1 (PD)			Policy 2 (PD)			Policy 1 (HD)			Policy 2 (DZ)		
	<i>Integration Services</i>			<i>Environment</i>			<i>Social Assistance</i>			<i>Planning</i>			<i>Schools</i>			<i>Planning</i>		
	Exp	C1	C2	Exp	C1	C2	Exp	C1	C2	Exp	C1	C2	Exp	C1	C2	Exp	C1	C2
Democratic control and accountability	~	~		~	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+/-		-	-	
Horizontal Coordination	~/(+)	+		~/(+)	+		+	~	~+	+	+	+	-	-		-	-	
Vertical Coordination	~/(-)	~		~/(-)	-		-	-	~	-	-	-	+	+		+	+	
Efficiency	(+)	+		(+)	+		-	~	~	-	~	~	+	~		+	-	
Effectiveness	-	+		-	-		-	~+	~+	-	+	+	+	~		+	+	
Heterogeneity	(+)	+		(+)	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+		-	-	

Legend: Exp: Expected Performance Effect; C1 Case 1; C2 Case 2, Green marks an agreement with the Performance Hypotheses, red an deviance and yellow unclear effects.

<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork outstanding. Assessment based on secondary analysis

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