



## Call for papers

**Symposium OLA-CEMR**  
**Lille (France) and Brussels (Belgium)**  
**Date: tbc (September 2017)**

### *Democratic and Electronic Changes in Local Public Action in Europe: REvolution or E-volution?*

European states have each operated in their own way the opportunities offered by the significant technological development and dematerialisation, with varying success, evolving between E-volutions and REvolutions.

The aim of this conference is to draw on specialists in many European countries, from a variety of scientific fields (sociologists, political scientists, economists, lawyers, managers, geographers, historians), but also data managers, open data and transparency experts, representatives of research and intelligence services of local governments, etc., to get an overview of democratic and electronic changes of local public action and services, to share national experience and offer potential perspectives.

For this purpose, two angles of approach have been chosen: digitised and dematerialised changes of local governance (including e-services and the use of open data to improve local functions) (1) and the mutations of public participation in local public action.

However, these angles intersect and merge, so papers combining public participation and local government will naturally be welcomed.

#### **To be noted:**

**The articles which answer the below-mentioned questions, and which, all while meeting demanding academic and theoretical standards, keep their reflection firmly grounded in reality are encouraged.**

In particular, will be considered of great interest those articles that: present comparative research or studies taking a European perspective; make large use of case studies; propose practical recommendations in their conclusions.



## Theme 1: Electronic Mutations of Local Public Action and Services, and the Use of Open Data

The exponential development of computing since the 1970s has profoundly challenged the conventional modes of administration. Inhabitants/citizens want a fast and effective interaction with all public services. Major challenge, this development is also a major opportunity in that it can enable **public services to be more efficient while satisfying with less budget and better internal communication, increasing demands of inhabitants**. Four major issues are identified.

First, dematerialisation of public services offers **new opportunities for exchanges between administrations and the citizens and inhabitants**, which improves the effectiveness of existing public services, from dematerialised tax formalities to online requests of civil state acts. This necessarily leads to a major reorganisation of services. How is the administration adapting to these new opportunities and new needs? Is it actually a source of savings? What are the consequences of the digital transformation and use of open data on employment conditions within local administrations? And the main skills and competences required from workers in this sector? Is this dematerialisation really bringing greater satisfaction to the inhabitants/citizens? How are these changes evaluated? Are the results discussed and are they used to modify or adapt e-devices or to use open data and e-devices for “traditional” services? If so, which ones? Besides, the access of the unprivileged social class, the elderly, etc. to electronic technology and products can be questioned, with the risk to increase their feeling of social exclusion. What can be done to solve it, and/or to train them to use IT?

Second, innovative services and use of open data are now possible thanks to technological advances, allowing to bring public service into a new era. In doing so, the expectations of the inhabitants/citizens change and the relationship between the government and the people do mute. Local authorities are innovating to deliver new services to the point that sometimes there is a competition between them. **May the administration then become, from the point of view of the user/client, an “ordinary” service provider forced to innovation and continuous interaction?** At the point, perhaps, to deprive public action from its singularity. Similarly, arises the question of whether public officials and servants are prepared and/or trained for such evolutions? Senior officers as well are not always ready to manage this change and can be in opposition to their subordinates. Subordinates can also be in opposition to the change organised and managed by their upper hierarchy. Yet, to manage these E-volution or REvolutions, every local public servant, senior officers and subordinates, need to be trained.

Third, the data processed by administrations continues to grow, thus offering new perspectives. This is the era of **open data**, massive open data (stored or "active"), an apparent pledge for administrative transparency. But these data can also be economically valued, under certain conditions. Should the government distribute free reusable data? Commercial enterprises do use it for big data analysis and have more resources to do so compared to local governments. Beyond these questions, what place do we give to the protection of personal data, especially when facing unprecedented interconnection opportunities and given the current security context?



Finally, the fourth issue concerns **the influence of these evolutions on the administrative structures and on their action**; but also on their cost or the economy (real or perceived), on the value for money that these electronic mutations can generate. Indeed, dematerialisation is not a simple technological issue. It generally requires, to avoid failure, a deep questioning of the administrative mechanisms (merging or changes in the organisation of units, training and reorganisation of human resources, etc.).

“The digital” is therefore both one of the modalities and one of the triggers of the new public management. In doing so, e-government will not be understood for what it is, but for what it induces in terms of major structural changes, in order to try to answer ultimately to the question: REvolution or E-evolutions?

## Theme 2: Public Participation in Local Public Action

The extensive literature on the question of public participation in public action is experiencing a revival around the issue of **non-institutional forms of participation**, and around issues of sharing and data collection (participatory research, crowdsourcing, living lab, etc.). New tensions arise between the institutionalisation and professionalisation of public participation in public policy, on the one hand, and its overflow through informal initiatives of participation, on the other hand; but also around the objectives of the participation, granted by the government policies as public action instruments or claimed by groups as an opposition to or emancipation tool.

Participatory democracy, understood as a way to consider and associate citizens/inhabitants to public life, is facing new **challenges**: ecological transition, digital revolution, the "to do democracy" (fab lab, do it yourself, etc.), co-production and sharing of knowledge. Thus new forms of "public innovation" are emerging alongside more traditional participation institutional arrangements.

This conference will be an opportunity to **analyse the way in which these different forms of participation intersect, in a conflictual or complementary way, within very contrasting European contexts**. The degree of involvement of citizens/inhabitants, as well as the value of their participation, varies from state to state. Several questions arise, with the following main features.

Firstly, the question of the **scope** of these devices or movements is central. Most approaches suggest a list of factors or potential impacts, more or less direct, of public participation in decision-making. Studies on the effects of participatory mechanisms, since the famous Arnstein ladder, through the "cube" of Fung, are trying to develop tools to assess the scope of participative devices. The majority of studies show the difficulty of such an exercise, usually restricted to the limits of the device itself, and show the weakness of these effects. Thus the legislative scope of the participation devices will necessarily be questioned, as the solutions adopted in this regard differ by state.





Then the study of **the links between these devices and the decision or the relevant project** also attracts attention and raises many critics. The disconnection between the deliberative public arena and its findings with the final decision radically limits the interest in participating. In most cases, it is rather about consultation or dialogue than participation in the sense of contribution to the discussion and decision. The investigation of the terms of the decision is therefore essential. Dematerialisation here can be a commendable solution, since it enables better information and enhanced monitoring of the effects of participation.

In addition, it is usually a **participation “granted” by elected officials rather than conquered by citizens/inhabitants**. Institutional control of the participative tools or devices generally maintains topics submitted to the citizens at the micro local level, with seldom politicised issues or controversies. Moreover, the topics are often addressed "upstream" or "cold", that is to say outside moments of controversy. Mechanisms such as, for example, online petitioning, contribute to this. In contrast it is even more interesting to look at, for example, most innovative devices or those intended to adopt a local decision by referendum (as in Switzerland) or removing a mayor (as in Poland or in some German Länder). The question that could be further studied here is the accountability of decision-makers. If citizens and inhabitants are taking part in the decision-making or have a louder voice during the debates, this might actually increase the **accountability** and responsiveness of local decision-makers.

Finally, the theory of deliberation prevailed over the rhetoric approach or the post dialogical approach that leave room for **emotions and conflict**. The dialogic model, based on the exchange of rational arguments, assumes equal conditions of exchanges and possibilities of consensus. What is the importance given to the conflict and disagreement? Most of the participative devices are designed and driven so as to remove the conflict and emotions in the name of streamlining arguments, which itself reflects the dominance of one social class. The poor use and the lack of procedural inventions able to help the collective thinking also highlight the tendency to confine participatory exercises to pure oral exchange of arguments that excludes any other form of interaction, and de facto favours certain players.



## Practical Information

The CEMR (the Council of European Municipalities and Regions), the OLA Network (the Observatory on Local Autonomy), and the University of Lille will organise in September 2017 (date tbc), three days of symposium on the above-mentioned issues. The symposium will take place in Lille and Brussels.

The conference organisers will cover expenses related to the accommodation and meals of all selected speakers. Participants will be in charge of their travel expenses.

If several authors are submitting a single proposal, the organisers reserve the right to cover costs for only one of them.

**The proceedings will be published in English and French with a famous European publishing house. A translation and a financial participation may be asked to the authors willing to be published.**

## Submission and Selection

Proposals should be submitted **no later than 15 September 2016** to Ms Line Salmon-Legagneur: [line.salmon-legagneur@univ-lille2.fr](mailto:line.salmon-legagneur@univ-lille2.fr).

Notification of acceptance will be sent by email by **7 October 2016**.  
The template below has to be used for sending paper proposals.

The European selection committee is composed of the Executive Board members of OLA and representatives of the CEMR. The candidatures will be anonymously evaluated.

### **For further information, please contact:**

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