


Conference Report

International Conference ‘Fifty Years of Local Governance’, IGU Commission Geography of Governance, University of Lisbon, Portugal, September 4 - 6 2018

Carlos Nunes Silva, Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0265-6575>

The 2018 Annual Conference of the IGU Commission on ‘Geography of Governance’ (IGU-GoG), organized in collaboration with the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, was held in Lisbon, Portugal, on September 4 – 5, 2018, and was followed on September 6 by a Post-Conference Excursion. The Conference marked the establishment 30 years ago of the IGU Commission on Geography and Public Administration, after an initial period as a Study Group of the International Geographical Union (IGU), from 1984 to 1988.

The conference revisited the main research issues addressed by the Commission since the mid-1980’s and explored the current trends and future challenges confronting local and urban governance in the context of the new global urban agendas, namely the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its 17 SDGs, that came officially into force on 1 January 2016, the New Urban Agenda adopted in the Habitat III Conference, in October 2016, and the Paris Agreement or Paris Climate Agreement adopted in December 2015. The conference was an opportunity for researchers, from different disciplinary backgrounds, to present, discuss and exchange recent research findings on the determinants, processes and outcomes of the changes occurred in the field of local governance in the last three decades and to explore and debate, from different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, the current and emerging trends in this field.

Besides the opening and closing sessions, the conference comprised 17 sessions, 16 parallel sessions and the opening Plenary. This is a similar number of sessions compared to previous annual conferences, and the same happened in relation to the number of delegates and number of papers selected and presented. Delegates came from 35 countries, a number of countries slightly higher this time, compared to previous years, from Europe, Africa (North and sub-Saharan), America (North and South), Asia and New Zealand, with 13 countries from outside Europe (6 in 2015), which confirms the trend for the Commission to become a truly global organization of researchers in the field of local and urban governance. Participants in the conference work in the broad area of Urban, Local and Regional Studies, Geography, Economy, Political Science, Public Administration, History, other

Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. The Conference brought together researchers, students and planners from academia, and from public and private sectors organizations. Around 15% of the papers were authored or co-authored by PhD students. During the two days of the conference, the delegates discussed the last thirty years of Local Governance, revisiting institutional changes, processes and outcomes since the 1980s, as well as current trends and future challenges in Local Governance. The abstracts of the papers submitted for possible inclusion in the conference program were reviewed for relevance and appropriateness to the conference by an international scientific committee with 13 members.

The program was organized into two tracks. Track 1 looked 30 years back, revisiting the changes, processes and the respective outcomes in the field of local governance in different parts of the world. Track 2 looked into the future analyzing current trends in local governance. Track 1 included 4 main themes: Local Government in Europe post 1980: national trends and the Europeanization of urban governance and local policies; Local government reforms in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990; Post-colonial Local Government reforms in Africa; and Local governance in America, Asia, and Oceania after 1980. Track 2 aimed to address the following themes, although only part of them were effectively presented and discussed: Local governance in the new global urban development agendas; Local governance, spatial justice and the Right to the City; Good governance and autonomy; Decolonizing local governance; Local government reforms: decentralization and re-centralization; Regions and Political Devolution; The nexus of micro, local, regional and transnational governance; Meso-level governance; The challenges of multi-level governance; Rescaling of urban governance and the role of neighbourhoods; Inter-municipal cooperation; Cross-border municipal cooperation; Metropolitan government; Municipal amalgamation reforms; Informal institutions and hybrid local governance models; Local government finance system: financing the new urban challenges; Post-2008 austerity localism; Alternative models for local government social policies; Progressive localism and the transformation of urban governance; Re-municipalization of local public service provision; Municipal owned corporations and local public services; Managerialism, entrepreneurialism, public-private partnerships and privatization; Local economic development; Strategic and collaborative municipal planning; The governance of urban cultural heritage; Climate change and Green governance; The governance of protected areas and urban green spaces; Local governance and the new security challenges in urban areas; Participatory local governance and community engagement; Citizen participation in local policy making; Social movements and the New Municipalism; Local government in the digital era: democracy, participation, accountability; Smart urban governance: Internet and new ICT tools; Social media in local governance; Local governance in the age of Big Data; and Crowdsourcing in urban governance.

A PowerPoint presentation is available in the conference website, portraying briefly the three decades long history of the IGU Commission on Geography of Governance. In the opening and closing sessions PowerPoint presentations were also provided with a summary of the conference. The Plenary session included two papers, *'Recent and Contemporary Trends in European Studies of Local Government and Local Politics,'* by Paweł Swianiewicz (University of Warsaw, Poland), and *"A Conceptual and Historical Account of Metropolitan Policy Mobilities Across Europe,"* by Peter Schmitt (Stockholm University, Sweden). The following 16 parallel panels addressed different issues that can be grouped in the following main thematic areas: inter-municipal cooperation; municipal reforms; citizen participation; climate change and other environmental governance issues; urban governance in Africa; local economic development; governance issues in rural areas; e-governance challenges; urban policy issues; and meso level and multi-level governance topics, among other.

The ever-important issue of local government reforms was explicitly addressed in several papers, confronting and discussing the contradictory trends that cross several countries, in short periods of time, as has been identified in previous annual conferences of the IGU Commission on Geography of

Governance. The search for new institutional models and for new governance approaches are certainly among the important contributions of this conference to the ongoing discussions on the role of local government in both developed and in developing countries.

The annual conference of the IGU Commission on Geography of Governance was again a useful opportunity for networking and for researchers to meet and to discuss future research initiatives. The LGLG – Local Government and Local Governance Research Network will continue to be an instrument for the circulation of information on Local and Urban Governance issues.

A post-conference excursion, in the Northern part of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, which included an initial walking tour in the historic centre of Lisbon, was also part of the program.

A selection of the papers presented will be published, subject to the standard double-blind peer review process, in the International Journal of E-Planning Research, in the journal *People, Place and Policy* and in a book.

The full program, the abstracts, the PowerPoint presentations, a photo gallery, and other elements are available online in the conference website: <https://sites.google.com/site/geogov2018/home>.

At the end of the conference was announced the next annual conference, to be held in Cape Verde, in September 2019, with detailed information now available in the respective conference website: <https://sites.google.com/view/geogov2019/home>. The International Journal of E-Planning Research is once again associated with the organization of the IGU Commission Annual Conference, in 2019 focused on “*Local and Urban Governance: Trends, Challenges and Innovations in a Globalizing World*.”

Carlos Nunes Silva, PhD, Professor Auxiliar at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal. His research interests focus mainly on urban and metropolitan governance, the history and theory of urban planning, urban planning in Africa, urban e-planning, urban planning ethics, local government policies, local e-government, and research methods. He is the Chair of the International Geographical Union Commission on 'Geography of Governance' (2016-2020), and the founding editor-in-chief of the 'International Journal of E-Planning Research' (IJEPR).