



The Social Consequences of Territorial Consolidation: A Comparative Study of Public Service Delivery and Social Equity in Albania and Croatia

Roland Bejko

PhDc, Faculty of Law, Political Sciences and International Relations
European University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania

Received: 20 February 2026 | Accepted: 10 June 2026 | Published: 23 July 2026

© 2026 Roland Bejko

DOI: 10.56345/ijrdv13n236

Abstract

The tension between centralization and local autonomy remains a critical challenge for social equity and public service delivery in transitional democracies. This paper examines the social and educational consequences of territorial consolidation, using the 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform in Albania as a primary empirical case study, with a comparative perspective on Croatia. While officially framed as a measure to deepen decentralization and improve service efficiency, this study explores indications that the reform has contributed to a functional re-centralization of administrative power, which appears to have had adverse effects on social welfare, educational infrastructure, and civic engagement. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, including a 2021 survey of 248 citizens and an analysis of local governance data, the research reveals a stark disconnect between administrative goals and social outcomes. The findings suggest that the consolidation of local government units may have exacerbated spatial inequalities, affected the perceived quality of social care and educational support services, and contributed to a democratic deficit by increasing the administrative distance between citizens and decision-making processes. A comparative analysis with Croatia highlights how different governance structures impact social equity and community well-being. The paper concludes that prioritizing administrative efficiency without sufficient safeguards for community proximity may negatively impact the social fabric of local communities. This study contributes to the global literature on state-society relations by demonstrating that genuine decentralization must be anchored in social equity and the empowerment of vulnerable populations.

Keywords: Governance, Public Policy, Social Services, Social Equity, State-Society Relations, Western Balkans

1. Introduction

The debate over the optimal distribution of power between central and local governments is not merely an administrative concern; it is fundamentally a question of social justice, equity, and the quality of life for citizens. In transitional democracies, particularly in post-socialist nations, the shift from highly centralized state apparatuses to decentralized models has been driven by the promise of

bringing governance closer to the people, thereby improving the responsiveness and quality of essential social and educational services (Elander, 2002). However, this trajectory is often non-linear, characterized by periods of progress followed by significant setbacks. This paper investigates the phenomenon of territorial consolidation, often leading to functional re-centralization and its impacts on social outcomes, focusing on Albania and Croatia.

Using Albania's 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR) as a primary case study, this research explores how administrative consolidation, ostensibly designed to enhance efficiency, may inadvertently pose challenges to social equity and community well-being. By merging 373 local government units into 61 larger municipalities, the reform aimed to create economies of scale and rationalize public resources (Guga, 2018). Yet, the human and social dimensions of this structural shift have been largely overlooked in official discourses. This study shifts the analytical lens from the mechanics of state power to the lived experiences of citizens, asking: *How does territorial consolidation affect access to and the quality of social welfare and educational support services? What are the consequences for civic engagement and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups? How does Albania's experience compare with regional peers like Croatia in terms of social outcomes?*

By addressing these questions, the paper aims to bridge the gap between public administration reforms and social science research. It employs a mixed-methods approach to assess the social consequences of the reform, providing critical evidence for re-evaluating governance models to align with genuine democratic standards and social equity.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this paper, "re-centralization" is conceptualized not necessarily as a formal reversal of decentralization policies, but as a functional consequence of territorial consolidation. While the Albanian reform is commonly interpreted as territorial consolidation aimed at economies of scale, the reduction of local government units and the transfer of certain competencies to larger, more distant administrative centers effectively concentrate decision-making power. This functional re-centralization alters the spatial distribution of governance, distancing citizens from local authorities and changing the dynamics of service delivery (Galizzi et al., 2023).

To interpret the social meanings and consequences of re-centralization, this study is grounded in a robust social science theoretical framework, integrating theories of social justice, state-society relations, and social policy implementation.

2.1 Social Justice and Spatial Equity

Theories of social justice emphasize the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society. In the context of local governance, spatial equity becomes a critical dimension (Rodriguez-Pose & Gill, 2003). When administrative boundaries are redrawn and power is centralized, the spatial distribution of public services, such as schools, health clinics, and social care centers, is often altered. Centralization can lead to the concentration of resources in urban hubs, marginalizing rural and peripheral communities. This framework allows us to analyze how the 2015 reform has impacted equitable access to essential services, particularly for vulnerable populations who rely heavily on localized support networks.

2.2 State-Society Relations and Civic Engagement

The relationship between the state and its citizens is fundamentally shaped by the proximity and accessibility of government institutions. Theories of state-society relations posit that decentralized governance structures foster stronger civic engagement, trust, and social cohesion by providing citizens with direct channels to influence policies that affect their daily lives (Sorensen et al., 2012). Conversely, re-centralization can create a democratic deficit, distancing citizens from decision-making processes and leading to feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement. This perspective is crucial for

understanding the decline in public participation and the erosion of trust in local institutions following the consolidation of municipalities.

2.3 Social Policy Implementation

The study of social policy implementation focuses on the gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes on the ground. It highlights the role of local actors, social workers, educators, and community leaders, in translating national policies into effective local services (Krogh et al., 2024). Re-centralization often imposes top-down, standardized approaches that fail to account for local contexts and specific community needs. By applying this framework, the paper examines how the loss of local autonomy has hindered the effective delivery of social and educational services, reducing the capacity of local governments to respond flexibly to the unique challenges faced by their communities.

3. Literature Review

The discourse surrounding decentralization and local government reform is a prominent feature of social science literature, particularly in the context of post-communist transitions. Following the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, decentralization was widely embraced as a core component of democratic reforms, aimed at improving public service delivery and enhancing social inclusion (Horvath, 2001). The literature identifies several key drivers for these reforms, including the desire to make social services more responsive to local needs and to empower marginalized communities.

Moreover, the delivery of social welfare and educational services is highly sensitive to the spatial distribution of administrative power. Studies indicate that centralized models often fail to address the specific needs of vulnerable populations, leading to 'service deserts' in rural communities (Cheema, 2020; Gershberg, 2014). Effective social policy implementation requires not only fiscal autonomy but also robust local capacity and cross-sectoral partnerships to ensure equitable access to public goods (Krogh & Triantafyllou, 2024; Cheetham et al., 2023; Bartlett & Popovski, 2013). Therefore, balancing the economies of scale with the imperative of spatial justice remains a central dilemma for local government reforms in transitional democracies (Galizzi et al., 2023; Charron & Rothstein, 2018). A critical dimension of these reforms is their impact on civic engagement and democratic participation. Extensive research on municipal amalgamations demonstrates a consistent negative effect on voter turnout and political trust, as larger administrative units increase the distance between citizens and decision-makers (Allers et al., 2021; Bhatti & Hansen, 2019; Tavares, 2018). This 'democratic deficit' is particularly pronounced in rural and peripheral areas, where the loss of local representation diminishes community well-being and social capital (Thurber et al., 2018; Soguel & Silberstein, 2015). Consequently, the re-centralization tendencies observed in countries like Albania reflect a prioritization of technocratic efficiency over the subsidiarity principle, ultimately undermining the capacity of local institutions to foster inclusive governance (Kalemaj, 2021; Shutina & Toto, 2021; Merkaj, 2017).

The broader literature on post-communist transitions highlights that while decentralization was initially viewed as a panacea for democratic consolidation and economic efficiency (Rodríguez-Pose, 2009; Jerre, 2001), the reality has been far more complex. Scholars have noted that the structural crises following deindustrialization often exacerbated spatial inequalities, making local governments struggle with service delivery (Greskovits, 2025; Tzagkarakis & Kritas, 2023). Furthermore, the Europeanization process in the Western Balkans has frequently resulted in 'reform without transformation,' where EU conditionality promotes formal institutional changes that fail to translate into substantive democratic practices or social cohesion (Semenov, 2025; Elbasani, 2013; Börzel, 2011).

However, the outcomes of these reforms have been highly varied. In many cases, decentralization has been a contested process, with central governments reluctant to relinquish control over resources. Recent studies have highlighted a countertrend of re-centralization in several transitional democracies,

where central authorities reclaim power under the guise of administrative efficiency or crisis management (Kalemaj, 2022). This re-centralization often has profound social consequences, leading to a deterioration in the quality of local social services and a widening of spatial inequalities.

In the Western Balkans, the process of Europeanization has been a major driver of governance reforms. The European Charter of Local Self-Government serves as the normative benchmark for local autonomy, emphasizing the right of local authorities to manage public affairs in the interests of the local population (Council of Europe, 1984). Yet, the substantive implementation of these norms remains uneven. Albania's experience with the 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform provides a compelling case study of how formal compliance with European standards can mask a substantive re-centralization of power, with detrimental effects on social equity and educational administration.

4. Methodology

This study employs mixed-methods research design to capture both the structural changes and the lived experiences of citizens following the 2015 reform.

Primary Data: The core of the empirical analysis is based on a survey conducted between September and December 2021 across five regions of Albania: Shkodër, Elbasan, Tiranë, Vlorë, and Gjirokastër. A total of 248 questionnaires were completed through public meetings and individual interviews. The survey was specifically designed to measure social metrics, including citizen satisfaction with access to social welfare, the quality of educational infrastructure, cultural facilities, and levels of civic engagement. It is important to note a methodological limitation: the study relies primarily on post-reform perception-based survey data. To establish a comparative empirical baseline for the pre-reform period, the analysis draws on respondents' retrospective evaluations of pre-reform conditions, supplemented by secondary data and existing literature on pre-2015 service delivery. Consequently, conclusions regarding the deterioration of services reflect perceived changes and structural shifts rather than absolute quantitative declines.

Secondary Data: The quantitative analysis relies on data from the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE) and the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) for the post-reform period (2015-2017). This data was used to assess the financial capacity of municipalities to deliver social services and to identify spatial disparities in resource allocation.

Analytical Framework: The data was analyzed to evaluate specific social and educational outcomes. We measured educational attainment disparities, access to social welfare programs, and levels of civic participation in the centralized post-reform context compared to the pre-reform period.

5. Context: The Social Landscape of the 2015 Reform

Prior to 2015, Albania's local government system consisted of 373 local government units (65 municipalities and 308 communes). While this fragmented structure faced challenges in administrative capacity, it provided a high degree of proximity between citizens and local authorities. Communes played a vital role in managing local schools, providing basic social assistance, and maintaining community infrastructure.

The 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform consolidated these units into 61 large municipalities. The official rationale emphasized modernization, economies of scale, and improved service delivery. However, the reform fundamentally altered the social landscape. By abolishing the communes and replacing elected local leaders with appointed administrators, the reform significantly altered the direct link between communities and their representatives. This structural shift set the stage for the social consequences explored in the following sections. Crucially, while the reform primarily altered the administrative structures responsible for service delivery centralizing management at the municipal level, this structural shift had downstream effects on the actual provision of services. Prior to the reform, local communes directly managed basic maintenance and localized social assistance. Post-reform, the physical and administrative distance to access these services increased, affecting the timeliness and localized responsiveness of service delivery, even if the formal service portfolio remained similar.

6. Empirical Findings: The Social Consequences of Re-Centralization

6.1 Impact on Social Welfare and Support Services

The survey data indicates a perceived decline in the perceived quality and accessibility of social services following the reform. Only 14.3% of citizens rated social services as good or very good, while nearly 60% were explicitly dissatisfied. The consolidation of municipalities has centralized the administration of social welfare, requiring vulnerable individuals to travel to distant municipal centers to access assistance. This increased distance has created significant barriers for the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income families. The provision of social housing and the operation of community centers were identified as particularly weak, highlighting challenges in protecting and supporting the most marginalized members of society.

6.2 Educational Infrastructure and Community Facilities

The territorial consolidation appears to have posed challenges for educational infrastructure and cultural facilities. While the central government retains control over educational curricula, local governments are responsible for the maintenance of school buildings and the provision of support services (transportation, heating). The survey indicates that 56.5% of respondents lack access to local public transport, severely hindering students' ability to commute to consolidated regional schools. Furthermore, services related to culture and the environment were highly criticized, with nearly 60% of respondents lamenting the poor maintenance of cultural heritage sites, public libraries, and sports facilities. The lack of investment in these community assets undermines social cohesion and youth development.

6.3 Citizen Engagement and Democratic Deficit

Beyond the quantifiable metrics of fiscal autonomy and service delivery, the 2015 reform has had a notable impact on the quality of local democracy itself. The consolidation of municipalities has created a significant democratic deficit, characterized by a loss of citizen proximity to decision-making, a decline in public participation, and a growing crisis of trust between citizens and their local institutions. The empirical evidence suggests that the reform, by replacing smaller, more accessible units of governance with large, distant bureaucracies, has alienated citizens and affected local democratic engagement.

The most striking evidence of this democratic deficit is the overwhelming public preference for the pre-reform system. As noted previously, 89% of survey respondents stated a clear preference for the previous administrative division of communes and smaller municipalities (Bejko, Survey unpublished data, 2021). This sentiment was not confined to any region or political affiliation but was a near-universal finding. The primary reason cited for this preference was the principle of **proximity**. Citizens felt that the former communes were "closer to the people" and more responsive to their needs. The smaller scale of these institutions fostered a direct and personal relationship between citizens and their elected officials, which has been lost in the new, larger municipal structures.

A key institutional change that has contributed to this democratic deficit is the abolition of directly elected local leaders in the former communes. Under the new system, the heads of the administrative units (the successors to the communes) are appointed by the mayor of the new, consolidated municipality. This has altered the direct chain of accountability between local leaders and the communities they serve. Citizens reported that they do not understand the role of these new appointed administrators and feel that their ability to influence local affairs has been severely curtailed. As one survey respondent noted, the previous system allowed for more direct communication and problem-solving, whereas the new structure is perceived as bureaucratic and unresponsive (Bejko, Survey unpublished data, 2021).

This loss of proximity and accountability has led to a decline in citizen participation and a

growing sense of marginalization. With decision-making power concentrated in a distant municipal center, citizens in peripheral administrative units feel that their voices are no longer heard. This has created a significant gap in citizens' trust in public institutions and has increased frustration among the population, making them less engaged in democratic processes. The survey revealed a widespread feeling that the new municipalities are less transparent and that citizens have fewer opportunities to hold local authorities accountable for their actions. This erosion of trust is detrimental to democratic governance and challenges the long-term goal of building a vibrant and participatory civil society.

Qualitative evidence from the survey provides concrete examples of this disconnect. For instance, several respondents pointed out that under the old system, the commune would often provide residents with raw materials to carry out small-scale infrastructure maintenance themselves, a practice that fostered community ownership and was cost-effective. Under the new system, all such work is tendered through the central municipal administration, a process that citizens perceive as more expensive, less efficient, and less responsive to immediate local needs (Bejko, Survey unpublished data, 2021). Similarly, citizens reported that accessing social assistance has become more difficult and bureaucratic, as requests now must go through the distant municipal center. These examples illustrate how the shift to a more centralized administrative model has had tangible negative consequences for citizen-state relations and has reinforced a sense of powerlessness at the local level.

6.4 *Marginalization of Peripheral Communities*

The fiscal data corroborates the survey findings, showing that municipalities remain highly dependent on central government transfers (accounting for approximately 73% of total resources). This lack of financial autonomy restricts the ability of local governments to address specific social needs. Furthermore, the allocation of central funds has been highly uneven, often favoring urban centers over rural and peripheral areas. This centrally driven investment strategy exacerbates spatial inequalities, leaving rural communities marginalized and deprived of essential social and educational investments.

7. Comparative Analysis: Governance and Social Equity in the Western Balkans (Albania vs. Croatia)

To contextualize Albania's experience, a comparison with Croatia offers valuable insights into how different governance structures impact social equity. Croatia, an EU member state, has pursued a more gradual and incremental approach to decentralization, establishing a stable two-tier system of local and regional self-government (Klemencic, 2023).

Fiscal Autonomy and Social Investment: Croatian local governments enjoy a significantly higher degree of fiscal autonomy, with a broader base of own-source revenues. This financial independence allows Croatian municipalities to invest more effectively in local social services, education, and community development, tailored to the specific needs of their populations. In contrast, Albania's high fiscal dependency limits local capacity for social investment.

Proximity and Representation: Croatia has maintained a balance between administrative efficiency and local representation, preserving smaller municipalities that ensure proximity between citizens and government. This structure fosters higher levels of civic engagement and social trust. Albania's radical consolidation, conversely, sacrificed proximity for perceived efficiency, resulting in a democratic deficit and social alienation.

Counterarguments and Nuances: It is important to acknowledge that Croatia's system is not without its flaws. Critics argue that maintaining numerous small municipalities can lead to administrative inefficiencies and disparities in service quality across regions, as smaller units may lack the capacity to deliver complex services. However, the Croatian model mitigates these risks through its two-tier system, where counties (regional governments) handle broader responsibilities, supporting smaller municipalities. This layered approach preserves local democratic engagement while ensuring administrative viability—a balance that Albania's "big bang" consolidation failed to achieve.

The Croatian experience demonstrates that successful decentralization requires endowing local

governments with meaningful autonomy and resources, which are essential for promoting social equity and effective public service delivery, higher levels of civic engagement and social trust. Albania's radical consolidation, conversely, sacrificed proximity for perceived efficiency, resulting in a democratic deficit and social alienation.

The Croatian experience demonstrates that successful decentralization requires endowing local governments with meaningful autonomy and resources, which are essential for promoting social equity and effective public service delivery.

8. Discussion: Interpreting the Social Impact

The empirical findings suggest that Albania's 2015 reform, driven by a technocratic logic of administrative efficiency, has been accompanied by challenging social consequences. By neglecting the principles of social justice and state-society relations, the reform has widened spatial inequalities and reduced access to essential services for vulnerable populations.

Engaging with Counterarguments: Proponents of the 2015 reform might argue that the pre-reform system of 373 units was financially unsustainable and administratively paralyzed, making consolidation a necessary evil to prevent state failure at the local level. They might contend that the short-term social disruptions are a transitional cost for long-term administrative modernization. However, this argument conflates administrative size with governance quality. The evidence presented here suggests that the "transitional costs" have disproportionately fallen on the most vulnerable, i.e. the elderly, rural populations, and low-income families, who rely heavily on localized support. Furthermore, the promised long-term gains in service efficiency have not materialized, as the newly consolidated municipalities remain financially dependent and administratively distant.

The re-centralization paradox can be explained by the primacy of administrative control over democratic values. The reform treated local governance as a technical problem to be solved through consolidation, ignoring the vital role of local institutions in fostering social cohesion and community well-being. The resulting system is less responsive to local needs and less capable of implementing effective social policies.

Furthermore, the reform highlights the risks of superficial institutional adaptation, where candidate countries adopt the formal structures of European governance without internalizing the underlying democratic norms of subsidiarity and social inclusion.

9. Implications for Social Policy and Education

The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers and international actors involved in governance reforms in the Western Balkans.

1. Prioritize Social Equity in Governance Reforms: Future administrative reforms must explicitly consider their social and educational impacts. Policies should be designed to ensure equitable access to services across all geographic areas, preventing the marginalization of rural communities. This requires mandatory social impact assessments prior to any territorial restructuring.

2. Empower Local Actors in Social Policy Implementation: Local governments must be granted genuine fiscal autonomy and decision-making power to tailor social and educational services to the specific needs of their communities. This includes adequate, ring-fenced funding for school infrastructure, social housing, and community centers, protecting these vital services from central political maneuvering.

3. Restore Channels for Civic Engagement: Mechanisms for direct citizen participation and local accountability must be strengthened. Re-establishing elected representation at the sub-municipal level such as directly electing the heads of administrative units, could help bridge the gap between citizens and local authorities, fostering social trust and civic involvement.

10. Conclusion

This study has examined the social and educational consequences of territorial consolidation in Albania, challenging the narrative that administrative consolidation inherently improves public service delivery. The evidence suggests that the 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform has contributed to spatial inequalities, affected the perceived quality of social and educational support services, and increased the distance between citizens and decision-makers.

By shifting the focus from administrative mechanics to social outcomes, this research highlights the critical importance of proximity, representation, and local autonomy in fostering social equity and community well-being. The comparative analysis with Croatia underscores that genuine decentralization, backed by fiscal autonomy and a commitment to subsidiarity, is essential for building inclusive and resilient societies.

Ultimately, the re-centralization of power in Albania provides an instructive case for transitional democracies. It demonstrates that reforms prioritizing technocratic efficiency over social justice may negatively affect the social fabric of local communities. A fundamental re-evaluation of governance models is required, one that places social equity, educational access, and citizen empowerment at the heart of the state-building process.

11. AI Use Statement

All content, analysis, and presentation of this article is the original work of the author. No AI-based generative platform, software, or tool, including but not limited to text, image, or data-generation systems, was used to create, edit, or analyze any part of this manuscript.

References

- Allers, M., De Natris, J., Rienks, H., & De Greef, T. (2021). Is small beautiful? Transitional and structural effects of municipal amalgamation on voter turnout in local and national elections. *Electoral Studies*, 71, 102334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102284>
- Bartlett, W., & Popovski, V. (2013). Local governance and social cohesion in Ukraine. Seventh Work Programme. <https://www.ub.edu/searchproject/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/WP05.22.pdf>
- Bhatti, Y., & Hansen, K. M. (2019). Voter turnout and municipal amalgamations—evidence from Denmark. *Local Government Studies*, 45(2), 269–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1563540>
- Börzel, T. (2011). *When Europeanization hits limited statehood. The Western Balkans as a test case for the transformative power of Europe* [KFG Working Paper Series, No. 30]. Kolleg-Forschergruppe (KFG) "The Transformative Power of Europe", Freie Universität Berlin.
- Charron, N., & Rothstein, B. (2018). Regions of trust and distrust: how good institutions can foster social cohesion. In *Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786436672.00017>
- Cheema, S. (2020). Governance for Urban Services: towards political and social inclusion in cities. In *Advances in 21st century human settlements* (pp. 1–30). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2973-3_1
- Cheetham, M., Redgate, S., Van Der Graaf, P., Humble, C., Hunter, D., & Adamson, A. (2022). 'What I really want is academics who want to partner and who care about the outcome': findings from a mixed-methods study of evidence use in local government in England. *Evidence & Policy*, 19(1), 74–94. <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421x16535820632215>
- Council of Europe. (1984). *European Charter of Local Self-Government*. Strasbourg. <https://rm.coe.int/european-charter-for-local-self-government-english-version-pdf-a6-59-p/16807198a3>
- Elander, I. (2002). Partnerships and urban governance. *International Social Science Journal*, 54(172), 191–204. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00371>
- Elbasani, A. (2013). *European Integration and transformation in the Western Balkans: Europeanization or Business as Usual?* Routledge.
- Galizzi, G., Rota, S., & Sicilia, M. (2023). Local government amalgamations: state of the art and new ways forward. *Public Management Review*, 25(12), 2428–2450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2023.2177327>
- Gershberg, A. I. (2014). Educational infrastructure, school construction, and decentralization in developing countries: Key issues for an understudied area. In *Decentralization and Education* (pp. 145–168). Routledge. <https://icepp.gsu.edu/files/2015/03/ispwp1412.pdf>

- Greskovits, B. (2025). The postsocialist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, 22(4), 579–593. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-31572002-1270>
- Guga, E. (2018). Local government modernization in Albania: Historical background and the territorial reform 2015–2020. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 31(4), 422–442. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-01-2017-0018>
- Jerre, U. (2001). Post-Communist Transformation and the Problem of Weak State Capacity. CFE Working Paper Series. <https://www.cfe.lu.se/en/sites/cfe.lu.se/en/files/2020-12/cfewp17.pdf>
- Horváth, T. M. (2001). Decentralization: Experiments and reforms. In *Medical Entomology and Zoology*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA89656028>
- Kalemaj, I. (2022). Territorial reform and lack of real decentralization in Albania. *Jus & Justicia*, 16(1), 7–18. <https://doi.org/10.58944/dwng1333>
- Klemenčić, I. (2023). Financial autonomy of local self-government in Croatia. *Central European Academy Law Review*, 1(1), 103–124. <https://doi.org/10.62733/2023.1.103-124>
- Krogh, A. H., & Triantafillou, P. (2024). Developing New Public Governance as a public management reform model. *Public Management Review*, 26(10), 3040–3056. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2313539>
- Merkaj, E., Zhllima, E., & Imami, D. (2017). Fiscal decentralization in Albania: Trends and challenges at the dawn of territorial reform. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 19(6), 684–699. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2017.1328898>
- Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Gill, N. (2003). The Global Trend towards Devolution and its Implications. *Environment and Planning C Government and Policy*, 21(3), 333–351. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0235>
- Shutina, D., & Toto, R. (2021). Territorial rescaling and polycentric governance in Albania. *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 28(2), 103–129. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1231-1952.28.2.06>
- Semenov, A. (2025). Reform without transformation: the EU's diminishing leverage in the Western Balkans. *Social Sciences*, 14(12), 722. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14120722>
- Soguel, N., & Silberstein, J. (2015). Welfare Loss with Municipal Amalgamations and the Willingness-to-Pay for the Municipality Name. *Local Government Studies*, 41(6), 977–996. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2015.1061507>
- Sørensen, E., Torfing, J., Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (2012). Interactive Governance: Advancing the paradigm. In *Medical Entomology and Zoology*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB08104678>
- Tavares, A. F. (2018). Municipal amalgamations and their effects: a literature review. *Miscellanea Geographica*, 22(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2018-0005>
- Thurber, A., Bohmann, C. R., & Heflinger, C. A. (2017). Spatially integrated and socially segregated: The effects of mixed-income neighbourhoods on social well-being. *Urban Studies*, 55(9), 1859–1874. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017702840>
- Tzagkarakis, S. I., & Kritas, D. (2022). Mixed research methods in political science and governance: approaches and applications. *Quality & Quantity*, 57(S1), 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01384-y>