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**Sustainability Development
Challenges of Territories in Contexts
of Uncertainties due to External
Shocks and Risks**

Programme and abstracts

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30th APDR – Sustainable Development Challenges of Territories in Contexts of Uncertainties due to External Shocks and Risks: Programme and abstracts

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**[ID169] HEALTH DECENTRALIZATION IN PORTUGUESE MUNICIPALITIES:
THE PERCEPTIONS OF MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY****Luís Filipe Mota Almeida**

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, decentralization to local governments has been a vital reform strategy in European public administration to improve decision-making, optimize costs, increase efficiency, and enhance accountability and transparency (Maia et al., 2023; Teles, 2021). Portugal has adopted this approach and started a decentralization process in 2018, transferring competencies, including healthcare, to 201 out of 308 municipalities. This process requires cooperation between the executive and deliberative bodies. Still, the potential problem of information asymmetry, particularly the control role of deliberative bodies over executive bodies, must be examined. This study uses the principal-agent theory to analyze municipal deliberative bodies' perceptions of executive agencies' implementation of health decentralization. Surveys were conducted to collect data from the presidents of the municipal assemblies (APM) of all 201 municipalities. The survey was distributed by email and was open for completion from December 12, 2022, to February 3, 2023, with the support of the National Association of Municipal Assemblies. One hundred eleven validated responses were collected during this period, resulting in a 55% response rate. The survey aimed to assess Municipal Assemblies' theoretical and practical perceptions of decentralization. Specifically, it examined whether PMAs supported decentralization in theory and contrasted this perception with the actual transfer process within the municipality. The survey also explored the flow of information between the executive body, the central government, and the PMAs. The results show that although the PMA respondents support decentralization in theory, the practical aspects must be improved. In particular, the prevailing view is that the financial resources allocated to the process are insufficient and that decentralization is perceived as a means by which the central government passes on costs to municipalities. These findings highlight the importance of addressing these concerns to ensure a more effective decentralization process. The national government should prioritize better communication and prior coordination with local authorities, especially in defining the financial resources associated with the process. The results also highlight the need for more active involvement of municipal councils and improved communication and coordination with these representative bodies. In addition, the results underline the importance of municipal councils using existing tools, such as municipal health councils or municipal health strategies, to engage in discussions and control the decentralization process.

Keywords | Decentralization of competencies, health, municipal assembly, city council.

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