Preface and acknowledgements

This volume is the result of a collective and interdisciplinary effort of researchers from five European countries (France, Germany, Italy, the UK and Norway). The concept of the underlying project emerged from discussions in the Scientific Council of the Paris-based Groupement de Recherche sur l'Administration Locale en Europe (GRALE). In view of the massive changes that the delivery of social and public services has undergone in most European countries, the international group of scholars set out to perform a comparative analysis of these changes and the factors that have shaped them.

The joint work that has produced co-authored chapters was carried forward in a sequence of three research conferences held between 2006 and 2008 in the Villa Vigoni, located at Lago di Como, Italy. Villa Vigoni is a research centre jointly funded by the German and Italian governments. Its programmatic aim is to facilitate discourse and cooperation among European scholars.

Hence our thanks go, first of all, to the Villa Vigoni programme, to the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) and to Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (MSH), Paris. Besides the financial and logistical underpinning, the beautifully located villa and its amiable staff provided a unique environment and atmosphere in which to pursue the collective and collegial work.

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