

Change Management in Greek Local Government: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This PRISMA-guided systematic literature review synthesizes research on change management in Greek Local Government Organizations published between 2005 and 2025. Searches conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore, supplemented by a structured search of ResearchGate, yielded 159 records, of which 48 met the inclusion criteria. The reviewed studies were classified into four thematic strands: crises, administrative reforms, and resilience; environmental challenges and change management; e-government, accounting information systems, and change management; and urban planning, cadastre, and public space management. The findings indicate growing scholarly attention to municipal change but reveal a persistent focus on external drivers, including economic crises, digitalization, climate change, and institutional reforms, while providing limited insight into the organizational processes and capabilities through which change is managed within municipalities. By providing a systematic synthesis of this literature, the review contributes to public administration and local governance scholarship and highlights the need for future research on

organizational capabilities, leadership, learning mechanisms, and strategic change management under conditions of continuous and overlapping transitions.

Keywords: Local government; Change management; Organizational resilience; Digital transformation; Greece

Introduction

According to the Constitution of Greece, the administration of local affairs is entrusted to first- and second-level Local Government Organizations (LGOs), which enjoy administrative and financial autonomy and are governed by elected bodies. Within this framework, LGOs must respond to increasing demands for efficiency, transparency, and high-quality public service delivery.

Persistent weaknesses in public administration have intensified pressures for a more efficient, meritocratic, and adaptable system (Belias & Rossidis, 2025). Change management is therefore essential for organizational adaptability (Riyadi et al., 2024). Reforms such as the Kallikratis programme (Law 3852/2010), together with digitalization, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergence of artificial intelligence, have accelerated organizational transformation, making effective change management increasingly important for municipal sustainability. Rather than reviewing change management as a single managerial technique, this study adopts it as an analytical lens through which organizational responses to administrative, environmental, digital, and governance transitions are examined. Despite its importance, change management in Greek local government remains underexplored, with limited evidence of systematic synthesis covering the field over the past two decades. To address this gap, this study reviews literature published between 2005 and 2025 following the PRISMA methodology. It addresses three research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the publication trends on change management in Greek LGOs during 2005–2025, including geographical distribution and volume of output?
- **RQ2:** Which thematic areas dominate this research (e.g., climate crisis, natural disasters, ICT, AI, administrative reforms, Kallikratis, COVID-19)?
- **RQ3:** What challenges do local authorities face in managing change effectively?

For analytical purposes, the reviewed studies are classified into four thematic areas: (a) crises, administrative reforms, and resilience; (b) environmental challenges and change management; (c) e-government,

accounting information systems, and change management; and (d) urban planning, cadastre, and public space management.

Contributions of the Study

This PRISMA-guided review provides a systematic synthesis of research on change management in Greek LGOs over the 2005–2025 period. It maps publication trends, organizes the literature into four thematic areas, and identifies recurring barriers to municipal change, including centralization, resource constraints, skills shortages, bureaucratic fragmentation, and trust-related challenges. Although existing studies extensively examine external drivers such as digital and green transitions, they pay limited attention to the organizational processes through which change is designed, implemented, and institutionalized within municipalities. The review therefore highlights the need for research focusing on municipality-level change capabilities under conditions of continuous transition.

Article Structure

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The Methodology section describes the PRISMA review protocol. The Article Statistics section presents descriptive findings and thematic classification. The subsequent thematic sections synthesize the four thematic areas, while the Discussion examines theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research directions. The Conclusions summarize the main implications for change management in Greek local government.

Methodology

This systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to enhance the transparency and methodological rigor of the review process. The review comprised five main stages: (1) systematic literature searching based on predefined eligibility criteria; (2) screening and eligibility assessment; (3) data extraction and thematic classification; (4) analysis in relation to the research questions; and (5) synthesis and interpretation of the findings.

Search Strategy

The search covered studies published between 1 January 2005 and 16 October 2025. The search string "Local Government" AND "Change Management" AND ("Greece" OR "Greek") was applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. Searches were conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore and were supplemented by a structured search of ResearchGate. ResearchGate was included as a supplementary search source to broaden the coverage of the review, given the relatively limited and dispersed body of

published research specifically addressing change management in Greek local government. Its inclusion was intended to facilitate the identification of potentially relevant scholarly works that might not have been readily captured through the other search sources. Records identified through ResearchGate were subjected to the same screening and eligibility criteria as records retrieved through the other search sources. The search identified 159 records in total: 38 from Scopus, 89 from ResearchGate, 20 from Web of Science, and 12 from IEEE Xplore.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered eligible for inclusion in the systematic review if they: (a) were published between 1 January 2005 and 16 October 2025; (b) were written in English; (c) constituted scholarly works, including journal articles, conference papers, doctoral dissertations, and scholarly book chapters or related academic contributions; and (d) demonstrated substantive relevance to change management, organizational transformation, administrative reform, digital transformation, resilience, environmental adaptation, or related change processes within local government and relevant public-sector contexts.

Priority was given to studies directly examining Greek Local Government Organizations (LGOs). However, studies conducted outside Greece or addressing broader public-sector contexts were also considered eligible when their theoretical, empirical, or comparative contribution was directly relevant to the research questions and contributed to understanding change processes applicable to Greek local government. Accordingly, relevance to the objectives of the review, rather than geographical location alone, informed the final eligibility assessment.

Studies were excluded if they were published before 2005, were not written in English, could not be retrieved in full text, or demonstrated insufficient substantive relevance to local government, public-sector change, or the research questions after title-and-abstract or full-text assessment. Studies addressing predominantly unrelated topics, including private-sector phenomena or topics with only incidental relevance to Greece, public administration, or local government, were therefore excluded.

Greek-language academic sources used solely to support the theoretical and contextual background of the manuscript were not treated as part of the systematic-review corpus and were therefore not included in the PRISMA screening and eligibility process.

Screening

The search identified 159 records (Scopus = 38, ResearchGate = 89, Web of Science = 20, IEEE Xplore = 12), including journal articles, conference papers, and doctoral dissertations. After removing duplicates ($n =$

16) and studies published before 2005 ($n = 8$), title and abstract screening excluded 56 records. Seventeen studies were unavailable in full text. Of the remaining 62 studies assessed for eligibility, 14 did not meet the inclusion criteria. The final sample comprised 48 studies. The initial screening and eligibility assessment were conducted by the first author. The resulting study selection was subsequently reviewed by the other two authors to verify consistency with the eligibility criteria. Questions concerning the relevance or eligibility of individual studies were discussed among the authors and resolved through consensus.

Data Extraction and Thematic Classification

Following full-text eligibility assessment, data were extracted from each of the 48 included studies to support systematic mapping and synthesis. The extracted information included bibliographic characteristics, publication year, geographical context, research focus, methodological approach, principal findings and contributions, thematic relevance, and recommendations or implications relevant to the interpretation and discussion of change management in local government. The extracted material was subsequently examined using an inductive thematic approach. The thematic categories were not defined a priori; rather, they emerged through the identification of recurring topics, research contexts, and substantive areas across the included studies. Studies addressing conceptually related issues were progressively grouped into broader thematic areas to facilitate the systematic mapping, interpretation, and synthesis of the literature.

This process resulted in four overarching thematic categories: (a) crises, administrative reforms, and resilience; (b) environmental challenges and change management; (c) e-government, accounting information systems, and change management; and (d) urban planning, cadastre, and public space management. The initial data extraction and thematic classification were conducted by the first author and subsequently reviewed by the other two authors to assess the coherence and consistency of the thematic grouping. Questions concerning the classification or interpretation of individual studies were discussed among the authors and resolved through consensus.

Quality Considerations

No formal standardized risk-of-bias or quality-appraisal instrument was applied to the included studies. Given the heterogeneous evidence base, which comprised different publication types and methodological approaches, methodological adequacy, clarity of the evidence presented, scholarly relevance, and overall suitability for addressing the research questions were considered during full-text assessment. Exclusion decisions were primarily based on insufficient substantive relevance, although evident methodological

or scholarly limitations contributed to a small number of decisions. Eligible publication types were treated equally in the thematic synthesis once they satisfied the review's eligibility criteria.

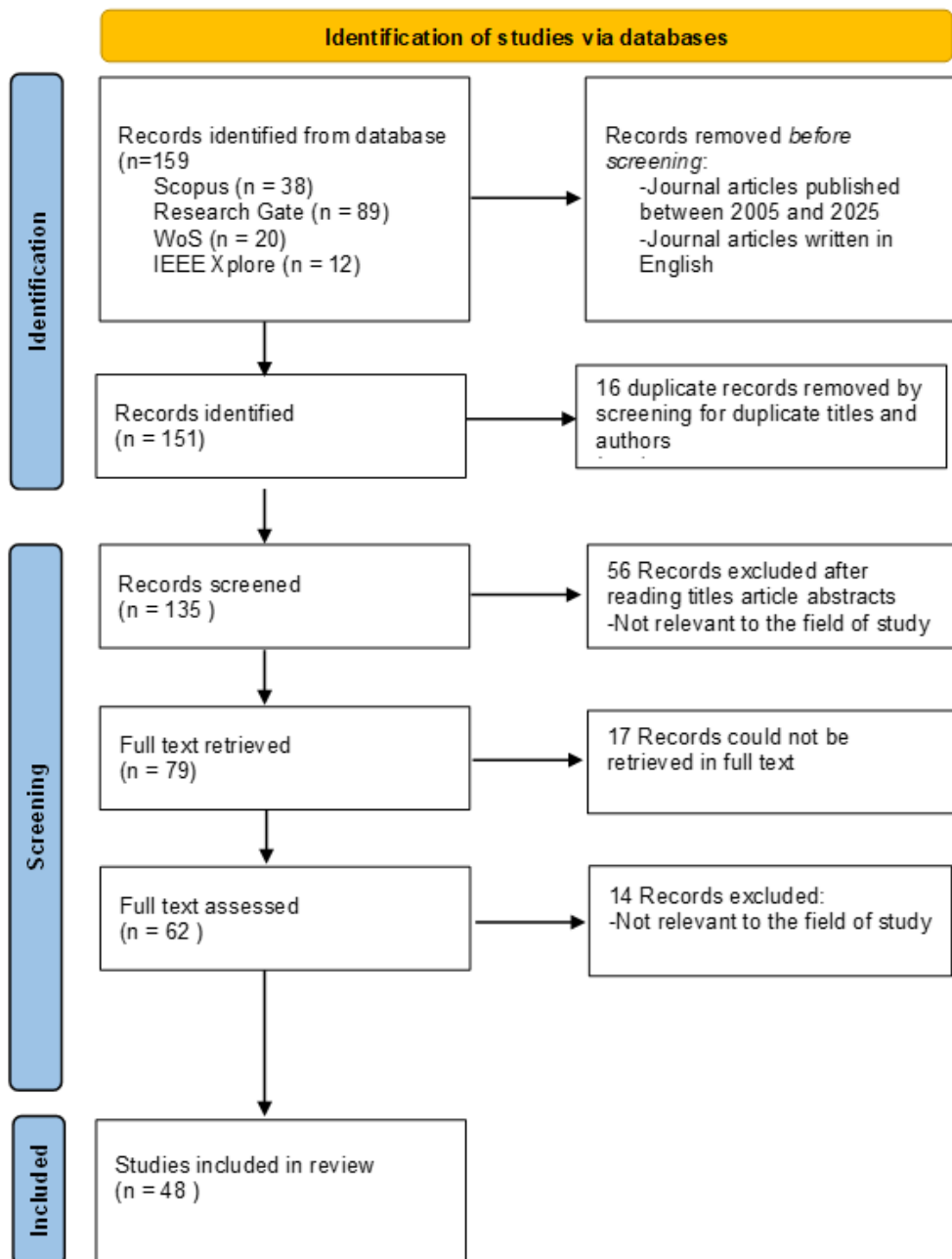


Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart

Article Statistics

This section summarizes the main characteristics of the 48 studies included in the review.

Geographical Distribution

The geographical origin of each study was identified through the first author's institutional affiliation. The 48 studies originated from 13 countries, with most affiliated with Greek institutions, reflecting the review's national focus.

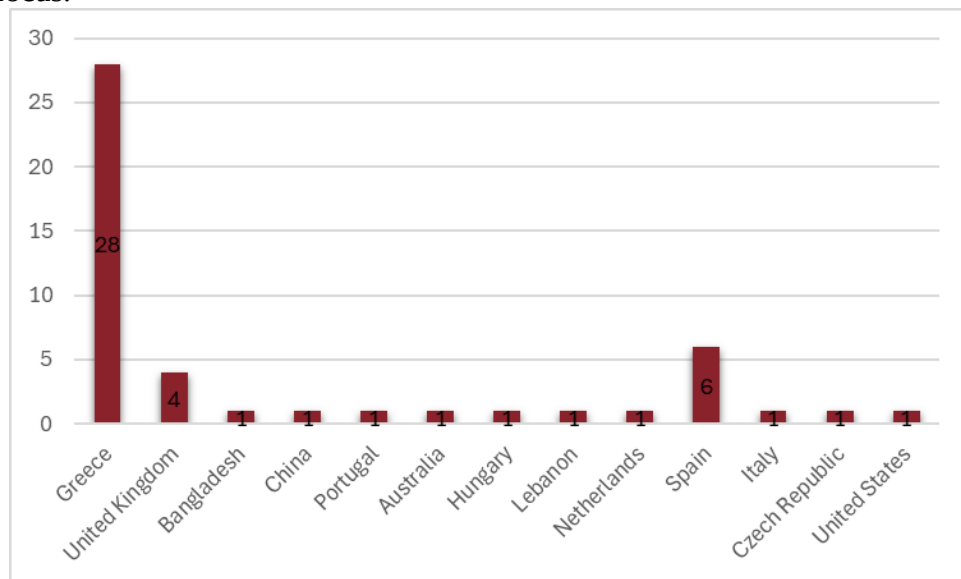


Figure 2: Geographical Origin of Data

Top 10 Most Cited Publications

The ten most cited studies were ranked according to Google Scholar citation counts (24 January 2026). The most cited publication received 132 citations.

Table 1: Top 10 Most Cited Publications in the Reviewed Literature

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Number of Citations from Studies in the Review</i>
Tulumello et al.(2020)	132
Nader et al. (2008)	105
Villamayor-Tomas et al.(2019)	96
Cohen et al. (2017)	88
Górriz-Mifsud et al. (2019)	69
Papageorgiou and Kassioumis (2005)	63
Davetas et al. (2022)	62
Panagiotopoulos et al. (2023)	57
Koutsoveli et al. (2023)	39
Leclerq (2018)	32

Publication Timeline

The reviewed studies span 2005–2025. Publication output increased substantially in recent years, peaking in 2025, indicating growing scholarly interest.

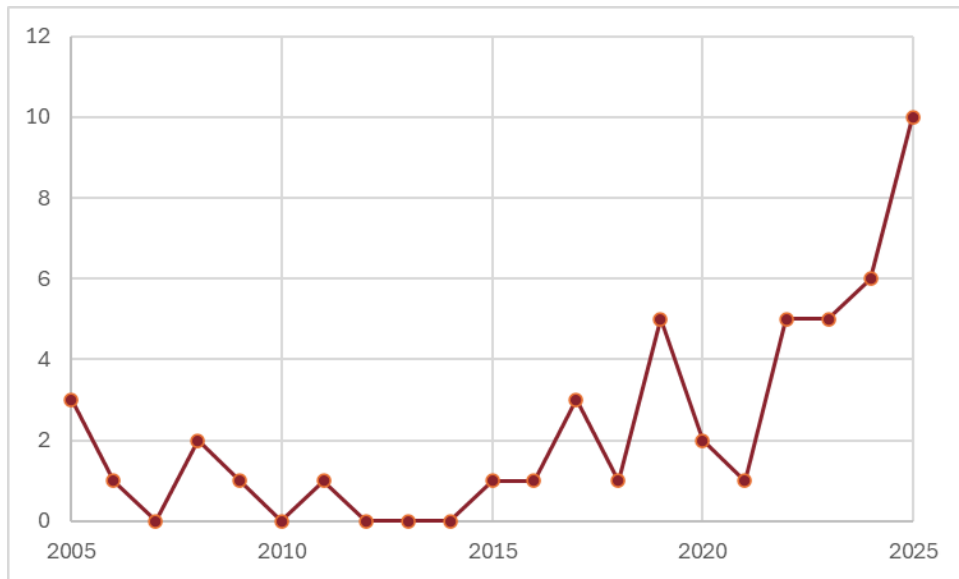


Figure 3: Publication Timeline

Thematic Areas

The 48 studies were classified into four thematic categories (Figure 4), which provide the analytical framework for the review.

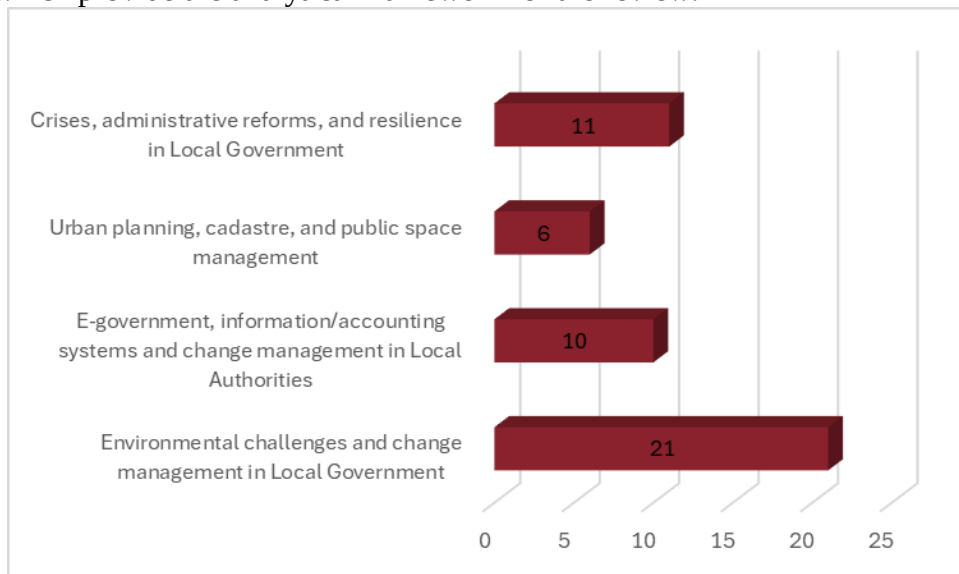
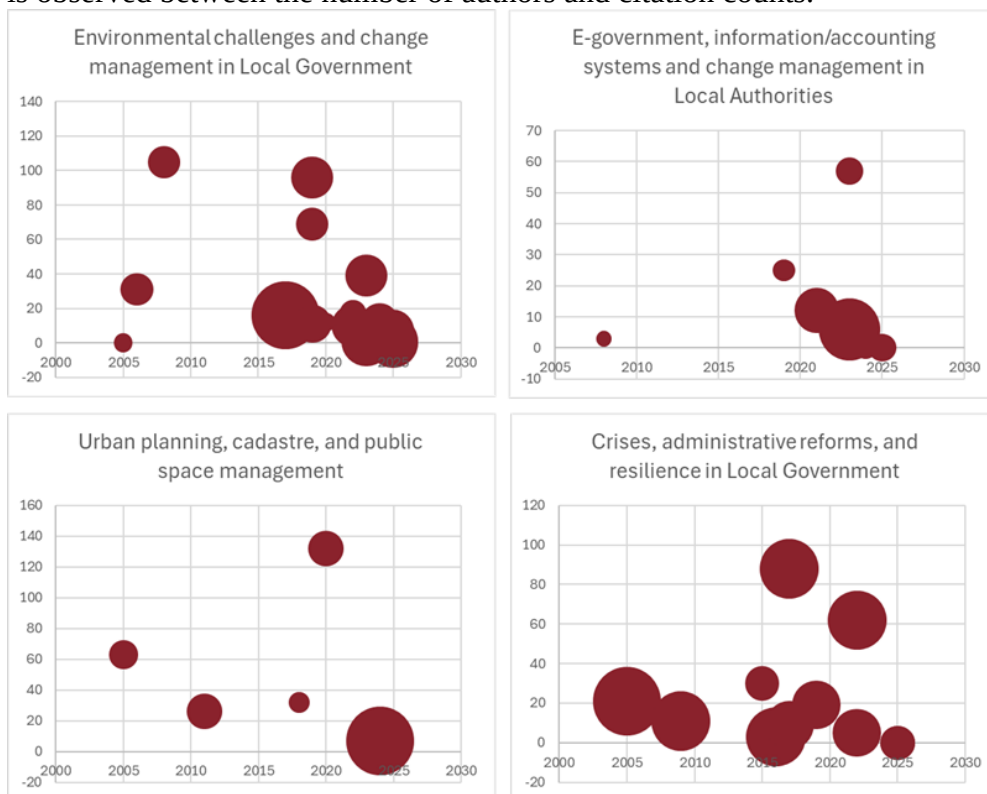


Figure 4: Thematic Areas of the Included Studies

Citation Impact by Year and Thematic Area

Figures 5–8 illustrate citation impact by publication year and thematic area, with bubble size representing the number of authors. Urban planning exhibits the highest citation levels, particularly around 2020, while environmental challenges show consistently strong influence. Crises and reforms display citation peaks in selected years, whereas e-government demonstrates lower but gradually increasing impact. No consistent association is observed between the number of authors and citation counts.



Figures 5–8: Year vs. Citations Bubble Plots Across the Four Thematic Areas

Crises, Administrative Reforms, and Resilience in Local Government

This section examines crises, administrative reforms, and resilience in Greek local government through the lens of change management. The literature shows that economic, institutional, and social disruptions have acted as catalysts for organizational transformation while also exposing the constraints municipalities face in adapting to changing governance conditions.

Trust in national and international institutions is positively associated with citizens' subjective well-being (Hudson, 2006). As global crises evolve, public evaluations of crisis-management policies also change (Davvetas et al., 2022). In Greece, successive economic, health, and institutional crises

highlighted the importance of change management, as the ability of public institutions to adapt, communicate effectively, and implement reforms directly influences public trust and well-being.

Angelidis (2025) examines the evolution of horizontal intergovernmental cooperation in Greece within the EU's multi-level governance framework. Although the pandemic, the energy crisis, and the war in Ukraine were temporary events, the governance changes introduced in response had lasting effects. Regional and local authorities assumed a stronger role in recovery, restructuring, and the Green and Digital transitions, highlighting the need for closer cooperation between first- and second-tier local government.

Fiscal decentralization can enhance financial autonomy, improve resource allocation, and better align public services with local needs (Liu & Li, 2017). However, the Greek debt crisis also exposed structural imbalances between public expenditure, service quality, and risk management, reflecting persistent tensions between central government and local authorities.

Similarly, Chondroleou et al. (2005) show that centralized states face continuing challenges in balancing decentralization with central oversight. In Greece, these challenges are intensified by clientelism and corruption, despite the institutional protection of local autonomy under the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Migration policy reforms followed a similar pattern. Although legislation introduced in 2010 expanded citizenship rights and local electoral participation for legally residing migrants, implementation remained limited because of political and societal resistance (Triandafyllidou, 2015).

Corruption represents another persistent obstacle to effective municipal governance. Beyond its administrative consequences, it undermines municipalities' capacity to address contemporary challenges such as climate change, energy transition, water governance, artificial intelligence, demographic change, and geopolitical uncertainty (Prontzas, 2025). At the same time, knowledge management and organizational learning have become increasingly important as public administration operates in a continuously changing environment (Apostolou et al., 2009).

Several studies identify innovation as a key mechanism for municipal adaptation. Melissanidou and Johnston (2019) show that fiscal austerity encouraged public entrepreneurship, prompting municipalities to adopt innovative policy, administrative, and technological practices that enabled them to operate more effectively with limited resources. Likewise, Trivella et al. (2017) demonstrate that the adoption of business management practices can strengthen municipal cultural organizations by improving service quality, public engagement, and organizational adaptability.

Lekakis and Liddle (2022) present Thessaloniki as an example of municipal resilience, illustrating how strategic leadership, organizational

learning, and long-term planning supported adaptation during prolonged austerity. At the same time, empirical evidence indicates that municipalities reduce administrative and public relations expenditures more rapidly during revenue declines than during revenue growth, reflecting reactive fiscal adjustments rather than strategic change management (Cohen et al., 2017).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that crises and administrative reforms have significantly influenced Greek local government, but research remains largely focused on institutional and macro-level developments. Comparatively little attention has been given to the organizational processes through which municipalities design, implement, and sustain change. This gap highlights the need for further research on leadership, organizational capabilities, and resilience as key determinants of effective change management in Greek local government.

Environmental Challenges and Change Management in Local Government

This section examines environmental challenges in Greek local government through the lens of change management. The literature highlights the growing role of municipalities in promoting sustainability, climate adaptation, resource management, and resilience under conditions of increasing environmental uncertainty.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an important policy orientation promoting sustainable development in Greece and internationally (Tsakarestou, 2005). Likewise, sustainable development has emerged in response to the growing interdependence between economic development, environmental degradation, demographic pressures, and political change (Nader et al., 2008). Public administration plays a central role in supporting this transition by promoting environmental responsibility and broader social transformation, although it cannot substitute for state environmental policies (Tsakarestou, 2005).

Climate change increasingly shapes governance priorities. Katsinas and Soudias (2025) argue that although positive governmental narratives remain influential in Greece, climate-related disasters are likely to challenge these perceptions, emphasizing the need for effective crisis management. The growing frequency of heatwaves and extreme weather events further increases pressure on local communities (Charvalis et al., 2025). Similarly, coastal zone management remains highly centralized despite evidence that greater local involvement could improve adaptation and ecosystem protection under changing climatic conditions (Toledo et al., 2025). Soil protection also requires stronger coordination between national and European governance frameworks to respond effectively to climate-related pressures (Schismenos et al., 2022).

Municipalities play a key role in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 12 through recycling programmes, waste management, and public awareness initiatives (Papavasileiou et al., 2025). Achieving these objectives requires not only technical interventions but also behavioural change, citizen participation, and effective change management. More broadly, climate adaptation depends on integrated planning, resilience, and digital tools supporting sustainable urban development (Dimitropoulos et al., 2023), while European initiatives such as Interreg promote cooperation and innovation in energy transition across the Mediterranean (Echave et al., 2019).

The importance of information and stakeholder engagement is also evident in environmental governance. Gorgan and Bavorova (2022) demonstrate that access to information strongly influences public acceptance of land-related reforms. Similarly, Kalogiannidis et al. (2024) highlight climate-resilient infrastructure, disaster preparedness, and partnerships between businesses, local authorities, and communities as essential adaptation strategies.

Participatory governance emerges as a recurring theme. Koutsovili et al. (2023) show that collaboration among citizens, scientists, and local authorities improves flood risk management, while Togridou et al. (2006) stress that effective management of protected areas depends on stronger coordination among different governance levels and stakeholders. Comparable findings are reported by Villamayor-Tomas et al. (2019), who demonstrate that participatory dialogue successfully resolved long-standing water management conflicts in the Municipality of Volos by strengthening trust, cooperation, and collective decision-making. Likewise, Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis (2024) show that reforms in local water governance often generate strong social and political reactions, highlighting the importance of carefully managing institutional change.

Disaster preparedness has also received growing attention. Theodora (2020) argues for an updated national disaster management strategy integrating both traditional and climate-related hazards. Moradi et al. (2025) propose an agent-based evacuation framework for the Municipality of Aigaleo that improves resilience through scenario modelling. Wardropper et al. (2025) identify declining social capital as a significant barrier to wildfire adaptation in rural Greece, while Górriz-Mifsud et al. (2019) demonstrate that effective wildfire management depends on coordination among volunteer groups, public agencies, and local authorities. More broadly, Tzavella (2022) emphasizes that public organizations must continuously adapt to changing environmental conditions, while rapid demographic and social change further increases governance challenges (Pumar-Méndez et al., 2017).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that climate change, environmental risks, and sustainability have become central drivers of change in Greek local

government. Nevertheless, research focuses predominantly on institutional, policy, and operational dimensions, providing limited understanding of how municipalities build organizational learning, develop adaptive capabilities, and institutionalize change. This highlights the need for further research on organizational change management as a key component of municipal resilience and effective environmental governance.

E-Government, Accounting Information Systems, and Change Management in Local Government Organizations

This section examines digital governance and information and accounting systems in Greek local government, focusing on the organizational and human dimensions of change management. The literature highlights persistent challenges in adapting to digital and administrative reforms, while revealing important gaps in the implementation of organizational change.

Greece provides an important context for studying public-sector accounting reforms because of the diversity of accounting practices across government subsectors and the ongoing effort to establish a unified accounting framework. Local Government Authorities operate under a distinct accounting system, yet many employees responsible for financial management lack adequate qualifications, training, and understanding of existing procedures (Bekiaris et al., 2025). With the introduction of major accounting reforms expected by 2026, concerns remain regarding municipalities' organizational readiness and capacity to manage change effectively.

Digital transformation likewise depends on organizational capabilities. Panagiotopoulos et al. (2023) demonstrate that public managers combining technical and administrative expertise are central to developing dynamic capabilities and promoting digitalization. Larger municipalities generally possess greater capacity to support interoperability and technological innovation, while ICT infrastructure, software, and digital investments strengthen communication, coordination, and collaboration both within organizations and with external stakeholders (Liang et al., 2010).

Research on municipal e-government consistently indicates moderate digital maturity. Panayiotou and Stavrou (2019) report relatively low levels of web-based service development, reflecting Greece's historically limited investment in ICT (Rahman, 2008). Municipal performance varies according to financial capacity, population size, and geographical characteristics, although little evidence exists regarding how municipalities managed the associated organizational changes. Similarly, Patergiannaki (2023) identifies only moderate levels of e-government quality, with limited service usefulness emerging as a recurring weakness.

These limitations became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although municipalities rapidly expanded digital services and

citizens generally acknowledged the value of e-government initiatives, significant shortcomings remained in implementation and organizational preparedness (Chatzopoulou et al., 2022). Moreover, systematic evidence on how local authorities managed this abrupt digital transition remains scarce.

Emerging technologies offer additional opportunities but also expose important capacity gaps. Lotsis et al. (2024) conclude that Greece remains insufficiently prepared to exploit Big Data because of limited broadband infrastructure and underdeveloped ICT skills. Similarly, Digital Twins have been proposed as tools supporting urban planning and change preparedness by integrating physical, digital, and human dimensions into decision-making (Denazis et al., 2023). Although practical implementation in Greek municipalities remains limited, initiatives led by Greek universities demonstrate promising potential.

Organizational innovation is also highlighted by Deligiannis and Peristeras (2025), who show that interdisciplinary, merit-based teams can successfully accelerate digital transformation despite bureaucratic constraints. Their experience with the Diavgeia platform illustrates how organizational flexibility and technical expertise can facilitate broader administrative reforms.

Accounting reform represents another major organizational challenge. Greece is required to implement the European Public Sector Accounting Standards (EPSAS), based on IPSAS, despite important differences between European and national accounting systems (Papadeas & Tsamis, 2024). Successful implementation will depend not only on technical adjustments but also on effective change management capable of addressing shortages in expertise, training, and organizational capacity within Local Government Authorities.

Overall, the literature indicates that, despite progress in e-government and accounting information systems, relatively little is known about how Greek municipalities manage digital and administrative change. Research continues to focus primarily on technological infrastructure and reform outcomes, while giving less attention to organizational processes, leadership, artificial intelligence, accounting reforms, and the capabilities required to sustain digital transformation. These gaps highlight the need for further research placing change management at the center of reform implementation in Greek local government.

Urban Planning, Cadastre, and Public Space Management

This section examines urban planning, cadastre, and public space management through the lens of change management in Greek local government. The literature highlights the role of municipalities in implementing spatial reforms while addressing increasingly complex governance and planning challenges.

Spatial planning reforms in Southern Europe, including Greece, have been strongly influenced by the economic crisis, austerity, and European integration. Tulumello et al. (2020) show that although national governments largely adopted EU-driven planning reforms, several municipalities expanded citizen participation beyond national policy frameworks, strengthening the legitimacy of local planning processes.

Spatial planning in Greece operates across national, regional, and municipal levels, making coordination and interoperability essential (Poulaki et al., 2024). The National Cadastre represents a major step towards a unified digital property registration system (Deligiannis, 2025). However, its implementation continues to face organizational and administrative challenges, highlighting the importance of effective change management and intergovernmental coordination.

Contemporary cities must simultaneously address urban mobility, demographic change, environmental sustainability, and strategic development (Broz et al., 2024). In this context, Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as an important governance mechanism capable of generating environmental, social, and economic benefits (Kyvelou et al., 2011). Their development in Greece has been closely linked to Europeanization and local government reforms following the economic crisis. Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven, as larger municipalities generally possess greater financial, technical, and administrative capacity than smaller authorities. Limited experience, multi-level governance complexity, political risk, and private-sector constraints continue to restrict the effective use of PPPs (Kyvelou et al., 2011). These findings suggest that successful collaborative governance depends not only on institutional arrangements but also on organizational capacity, leadership, and effective change management.

Similar governance challenges are evident in environmental planning. Papageorgiou and Kassioumis (2005) argue that the management of Greek national parks continues to be constrained by organizational weaknesses, limited coordination, and insufficient resources. Ongoing reforms increasingly involve local authorities, NGOs, and private organizations, following international conservation principles (Davey, 1998), but their effectiveness depends more on managerial capacity and institutional coordination than on formal administrative structures alone.

Urban regeneration has likewise expanded the involvement of private actors in the production and management of public space. Nevertheless, public authorities remain responsible for safeguarding public interests and adapting urban governance to changing socio-economic conditions. Experience from local government in England illustrates that implementing such governance models is particularly challenging under fiscal constraints and increasing outsourcing, reinforcing the importance of effective change management in collaborative urban governance (Leclercq, 2018).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that spatial planning, cadastre implementation, and public space management are increasingly shaped by complex governance reforms requiring coordination across multiple administrative levels. However, relatively little research examines how Greek municipalities organize, implement, and institutionalize these changes. Greater attention is therefore needed to organizational capacity, leadership, and municipal change management in supporting spatial and digital transitions.

Discussion

The findings of this review indicate that the reviewed research on change management in Greek local government has expanded in response to external pressures such as economic crisis, administrative reforms, climate change, and digital transformation. Across the four thematic strands, the reviewed literature highlights these drivers of change, while offering limited insight into the internal organizational processes through which change is designed and implemented within municipalities. Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that Greek Local Government Organizations operate under conditions of multiple and overlapping transitions, while their capacity to manage change strategically is frequently constrained by centralization, resource and skills limitations, bureaucratic fragmentation, and trust-related challenges.

Theoretical Implications

This review offers several theoretical contributions to the literature on change management, public administration, and local governance. First, while previous systematic reviews have examined local governance, digital transformation, and public administration more broadly, the literature on change management in Greek Local Government Organizations has received comparatively limited systematic synthesis. By applying a PRISMA-guided approach to studies published between 2005 and 2025, this study addresses this gap by providing a structured synthesis of municipal change management research in the Greek context.

Second, the findings extend broader debates within local governance and public administration research. Consistent with recent reviews emphasizing the need for greater attention to reform mechanisms, contextual dynamics, and implementation processes in local governance (Yi & Qiu, 2025), the findings of this review suggest that the reviewed research on Greek municipalities remains largely focused on the drivers and outcomes of change rather than on the organizational mechanisms through which change is designed, implemented, and sustained. Similarly, the findings support the observations of Kuipers et al. (2014), who argued that public-sector change research has traditionally emphasized reform contexts and policy agendas over implementation processes and organizational dynamics. Across the four thematic strands identified in this review, external pressures such as economic crises, administrative reforms, climate change, digitalization, and spatial governance reforms are prominent in the reviewed literature, whereas leadership, organizational learning, communication processes, and institutionalization mechanisms remain comparatively underexplored.

Finally, the review advances the conceptualization of change management as a cross-cutting organizational capability linking governance structures, human resources, organizational learning, digital transformation, environmental adaptation, and institutional resilience, enabling municipalities to navigate continuous and overlapping transitions.

Practical Implications

The findings of this review generate several practical implications for municipal leaders, public managers, and policymakers. The evidence suggests that municipalities should move beyond treating change as a reactive response to external pressures and instead develop organizational capacities that support the strategic management of continuous transformation. Although the reviewed literature documents the impact of economic crises, climate-related challenges, digitalization initiatives, and governance reforms, it provides comparatively limited insight into the organizational conditions required for successful implementation. This highlights the importance of strengthening leadership, organizational learning, staff development, and coordination mechanisms within Local Government Authorities.

The review further suggests that municipal reforms should be accompanied by stronger implementation and capacity-building mechanisms. This is particularly relevant given the growing prominence of digital transformation within the reviewed literature. Recent research indicates that digitally induced change in the public sector should not be understood merely as the adoption of new technologies but as a broader process of organizational transformation shaped by leadership, organizational readiness, collaboration, resources, and implementation practices (Haug et al., 2024). In the Greek

context, where resource constraints, skills shortages, bureaucratic fragmentation, and centralization continue to affect local government performance, policymakers should complement reform initiatives with targeted capacity-building programmes and knowledge-sharing mechanisms. Such interventions may help municipalities strengthen organizational resilience, reduce implementation gaps, and respond more effectively to digital, administrative, and environmental transitions. More broadly, the findings suggest that sustainable transformation depends not only on the adoption of new policies or technologies but also on the development of organizational capabilities that enable municipalities to learn, adapt, and institutionalize change over time.

Study Limitations

The findings are subject to several limitations. The wide geographical dispersion of the studies complicates generalization, as cases differ significantly in spatial and administrative contexts. In addition, limited availability of reliable data within Greek local government constrains in-depth analysis. The literature also concentrates mainly on climate and environmental issues, giving less attention to digital transformation and major administrative reforms such as Kallikratis. Finally, relatively few studies examine change management processes themselves, limiting understanding of how organizational transitions are implemented in Greek local authorities.

Future Research

The findings point to a need for further research on change management in Greek local government, with emphasis on the human factor and emerging technologies. Future studies should examine how employees and elected officials perceive and respond to change, and identify organizational, institutional, and technological barriers at the local level. Particular attention is needed for provincial municipalities, where resources and administrative capacity are limited. Research should also explore the role of artificial intelligence in supporting change management, including applications such as decision-support systems, data analytics, and scenario modeling.

Conclusions

This PRISMA-guided systematic literature review (2005–2025) indicates that the reviewed research on change management in Greek local government has expanded in recent years but remains uneven and fragmented. Although Greek Local Government Organizations operate under conditions of overlapping administrative, digital, and environmental transitions, the reviewed literature focuses primarily on external reform pressures such as

economic crisis, austerity, climate change, COVID-19, and digitalization, rather than on sustained, municipality-level analysis of how change is organizationally designed, implemented, and institutionalized.

Regarding RQ1, from 159 initial records, 48 studies met the inclusion criteria. Publications span the full 2005–2025 period, with a marked increase in output in the most recent years, indicating growing scholarly attention. Most studies are affiliated with Greek institutions, reflecting the review’s national focus, while author affiliations span 13 countries, situating the reviewed research within broader debates on governance, resilience, and institutional reform. Overall, the reviewed publication patterns suggest an emerging but still relatively narrow body of literature directly addressing change management in Greek LGOs.

Concerning RQ2, the reviewed studies cluster around four thematic strands: (a) crises, administrative reforms, and resilience; (b) environmental challenges and climate adaptation; (c) e-government and accounting information systems; and (d) urban planning, cadastre, and public space management. Environmental transitions and disaster management are particularly prominent within the reviewed literature, reflecting the visibility and urgency of climate-related risks. Digital transformation is widely acknowledged as critical but often assessed through infrastructure and maturity indicators rather than organizational change processes. Within the reviewed studies, major administrative reforms, including Kallikratis, receive comparatively limited examination as structured organizational transformations within municipalities. Artificial intelligence appears primarily as an emerging opportunity and research gap rather than as a mature field of empirical investigation.

With respect to RQ3, the reviewed literature points to a recurring set of structural constraints that may hinder effective change management in LGOs: centralization and institutional asymmetries in central–local relations; financial and human resource limitations, particularly in smaller municipalities; skills and training deficits (notably in accounting reform and digital technologies); bureaucratic fragmentation; and socio-political factors such as low trust, clientelistic practices, and corruption-related phenomena. Across crises and reform waves, municipalities frequently adopt reactive, short-term adaptations without embedding organizational learning mechanisms that convert emergency responses into durable capabilities. Taken together, these findings suggest that change management in Greek local government is often approached reactively rather than through sustained strategic processes.

The central contribution of this review lies in mapping the field and identifying a persistent gap between the analysis of change drivers and the limited understanding of internal change processes at the municipal level.

Future research should prioritize empirically grounded studies of change processes within municipalities, including leadership, communication, employee engagement, resistance management, and institutionalization mechanisms. Greater attention is needed to capacity differences between large and provincial LGOs, as well as to the management of digital and accounting reforms. Artificial intelligence should be examined not only as a technological innovation but also as a potential tool for strengthening administrative capacity.

In sum, change management in Greek local government should be conceptualized not as a technical adjustment but as an integrated organizational capability linking strategy, resources, skills, governance structures, and societal participation. While the reviewed literature suggests increasing scholarly interest, advancing both theory and practice requires moving beyond descriptive accounts toward systematic analysis of how municipalities build, sustain, and institutionalize change capacity in an environment of continuous and overlapping pressures.

Generative AI Use Declaration

The authors used ChatGPT (GPT-5.5/OpenAI) for language editing and stylistic refinement.

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