

Local Government and European integration – beyond Europeanisation?



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Abstract

Amongst the range of studies focusing on the Europeanisation of various types of local government across Europe, only a few attempts have been made to address European integration from a local government perspective. European integration triggers top-down and bottom-up (as well as horizontal) Europeanisation processes of local government, but it is not clear how local actors feed back into the dynamics of integration. The paper, therefore, explores how the engagement of local authorities and their agents has led to a greater role of local governments within the formal set-up of the EU. Moreover, integration from a local government perspective needs to account for the evolution of interactive policy styles and cooperative modes of governance amongst institutions and actors from multiple levels of government. Notwithstanding the limited scope of local engagement and the role of national governments as powerful gatekeepers, local mobilisation has achieved modest success in modifying integration. The relationship between the European and the local level may be best understood in the light of a blurred, compound policy arrangement involving actors from different levels.

Key Words: European integration, local government, Europeanisation, multilevel governance, Fusion

Introduction

Since the early 1990s with the completion of the single market, the European integration process has significantly affected local governments across Europe. The implementation of EU legislation and the European Regional and Cohesion Policy have led to Europeanisation processes at the local level, whereby local authorities became increasingly aware of the EU's influence on their practice, and as a consequence they adapted their politico-administrative

structures. The impact of European integration, however, is not a one-way street. EU membership has also provided local authorities with windows of opportunity that changed local decisions and encouraged municipal entrepreneurship to promote local concerns at the European stage (Fleurke and Willems, 2006: 85; Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997: 1 *et seq.*; Marshall, 2005: 669; Martin, 1997: 63; Sturm and Dieringer, 2005: 282). Consequently, a new quality in the relationship between the local and the European level has been achieved, which raises a number of questions. How do we need to understand the relationship between the European and the local level? Is it a matter of Europeanisation or of European integration at the local level? How do we need to understand Europeanisation and integrative processes at the local level? And how do these processes affect the relationship between both layers of government?

A number of studies have looked at the implications of integration on local authorities within individual member states (see for example Alemann and Münch, 2006; Goldsmith, 1997; Guderjan, 2011; John, 1997; Le Galès and Lequesne, 1998; Loughlin, 2001; Marshall, 2008; Mather, 2000; Mawson, 1998; Montin, 2011; Rechlin, 2004; Witte, 2011). Other works have researched Europeanisation processes within cities (see for example Hamedinger, 2011; Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008; Marshall, 2005; Schultze, 2003), the implementation of EU legislation by local authorities, the allocation of Structural Funds and horizontal activities through local governance networks (see for example Bennington and Harvey, 1999; Goldsmith, 2011: 35; Heiden, 2011; Karvounis, 2011; Martin, 1997; Zerbinati, 2004; Zerbinati and Massey, 2008). Notwithstanding the value of these studies, insights of isolated case studies remain partial and can hardly account for a differentiated picture of integration processes at the local level (Martin and Pearce, 1999: 33 *et seq.*).

Fifteen years after Goldsmith and Klausen (1997) addressed the need for an overall theoretical perspective of the change of local governments in the light of European integration, there is still a lack in such attempts. This article thus explores potential dynamics relationship between the local and the European level beyond Europeanisation processes. It seeks to do so by suggesting how integration from a local government perspective needs be approached and conceptualised. This article begins with an overview of Europeanisation concepts in relation to local government and discusses they differ from approaches dealing with the dynamics of European integration. It is suggested to understand integration from a local government perspective as an evolving, yet not omni-present and ever-lasting pattern of cooperation and interaction between actors from multiple levels. In order to support this perspective, this article looks at top-down and bottom-up dynamics, as well as their potential impact on the formal acknowledgement of local governments within the EU's polity, and the design and delivery of its policies.

This article concludes that even though national governments remain in charge of the major decisions about the EU's policies and polity, and municipalities engage in a fairly limited range of policy areas, local actors feed into the multilevel realities of the EU. However, whilst there is clear evidence for various Europeanisation processes at the local level, the impact of the latter on European integration is less straightforward and differs across member states, time and policy areas. Nonetheless, whereas Intergovernmentalism and the Multilevel Governance approach (MLG) engage more with debates about shifts of power amongst territorial levels, the study of local government shows that a theoretical perspective of multilevel integration benefits from an additional focus on the interplay between actors and institutions from different levels within compound governance arrangements.

European integration of local government beyond Europeanisation – theoretical considerations

In relation to the study of local government (as well as generally) Europeanisation encompasses a range of different meanings within the academic literature. The most common usage includes downloading processes as changes in policies, practice and preferences within cities; bottom-up mobilisation as the transfer of innovative urban practices to the supranational arena; horizontal processes of Europeanisation for local authorities, which involve cooperation and the exchange of best practice and innovations through transnational networks; and organisational adaptation within the politico-administrative structure of local authorities (see De Rooij, 2002: 449; Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 312; Marshall, 2005: 672; Van Bever, Reynaert, and Steyvers, 2011a: 16 *et seq.*). John (2000: 881 *et seq.*; 2001: 72) identifies different stages of Europeanisation of local governments, whereby the lowest step of his 'ladder' means the absorption in a top-down manner, followed by bottom-up and horizontal activities. The highest level of municipal Europeanisation is marked by the incorporation of European ideas and practices into the core of the local policy agenda.

Notwithstanding the differences in these understandings of Europeanisation, all of them have in common that they are the result of integration and address the corresponding adaptation of activities and institutions within the member states (Vink and Graziano, 2007: 3 *et seq.*; Börzel and Risse, 2000: 1). Europeanisation and integration thus are distinct phenomena. Europeanisation is a post-ontological phenomenon following the actual ontological matter, *ergo* European integration (Radaelli, 2003: 33). Since the former is not an explanatory theory itself (Olsen, 2002: 921 *et seq.*), its application as an empirical tool requires embedding it within a wider context of integration in

order to understand the causality of Europeanisation (Bulmer, 2007: 46 *et seq.*; Radaelli, 2003: 27 *et seq.*). Whilst most studies of local-supranational relations have highlighted the Europeanisation of local government, hardly any efforts have been made to explore how municipal actors and institutions relate to the overall system of governance. Europeanisation may be a means through which multilevel governance is accomplished (Pollack, 2005: 348), but does the Europeanisation of local government go in hand with a ‘municipalisation’ of European governance? This would include mutual exchange and socialising processes between the European and local level, and in particular changes in the dynamics of European policies and polity.

Since local government actors are for obvious reasons not the major actors in shaping the evolution of the EU, they provide an example of how integration is modified through and within compound policy arenas in which various stakeholders from different levels engage and interact. Although national governments remain the key players, some of their influence within EU policy-making has partly shifted to the supranational and the subnational levels of government (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 77 *et seq.*). Hooghe and Marks (1996; 2001; 2003; 2004; 2010) suggested that interconnected political arenas have evolved, and power and competencies have spread across multiple centres of governance. Notwithstanding the relevance of the Multilevel Governance approach for the study of subnational government (which will be discussed in the author’s forthcoming work), this article engages less with the shift of power between territorial levels, as suggested by MLG type 1, but more with a ‘complex set of overlapping and nested systems of governance involving European, national, regional and local actors, and networks’ (Loughlin, 2001: 20), which also reflects MLG type 2. This is partly the case, because not every local authority within every member states has become part of a fully-fledged multilevel governance system as promoted by MLG type 1 (see for example Bache, 1998; Martin and Pearce, 1999: 46).

The study of integration from a local government perspective benefits by looking at how active local actors and agents evoke new dynamics of integration rather than how local governments in general are forceful drivers of integration. Benz and Eberlin (1999: 332 *et seq.*) argue that multilevel governance develops through patterns of ‘loose coupling’ without relying on binding mandates or formal decision-making. Institutional and power-related tensions caused by resource dependencies and control mechanisms between different levels set structural limits to the formation of multilevel governance. Therefore, multilevel governance needs to be understood in the context of cognitive (instead of political), communicative and negotiation processes, as well as of coalition- and network-building (*ibid.*). Such an understanding of integration also goes in line with the Fusion approach developed by Wessels (1992, 1997, 2003) and Miles (2005, 2007), which focuses on moments of

political and functional blurring amongst different levels government. Like MLG, Fusion argues against a strict analytical separation between domestic and international politics in the context of European policies. In the course of integration, the European and domestic policy arenas have become interconnected, whereby subnational actors bypass central governments and operate in a blurred system of multilevel governance that is outside their national borders (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 4; Lindh *et al.*, 2009: 37).

In order to see whether the role of local government within the EU is merely a matter of Europeanisation processes or whether it is part of a wider integrative dynamic, whereby the ‘hierarchical management by the state is replaced by cooperation between state, local and social actors’ (Benz *et al.*, 2000: 19); this article gives a short overview of top-down and bottom-up Europeanisation processes at the local level, which are subsequently linked to their potential impact on European integration. This is assessed against developments in the acknowledgement of local governments within the EU’s polity, as well as in the design and delivery of its policies. Thereby, the primary focus lies on the evolution of cooperative and interactive patterns amongst actors from different levels of government, which can be interpreted as modification of European integration.

European integration of local government beyond Europeanisation – empirical evidence

Europeanisation

Downloading and uploading (as well as horizontal and adaptation) dynamics are major indicators for integration. In a first step, these processes are the consequence of the EU’s evolution. As they also feed back and potentially modify the logic of integration, the following provides a short outline of them in order to link them back to changes in the EU’s polity and policy style.

With the Single European Act in 1987 and the completion of the common market, the legal impact on local authorities rose continually, as the free movements of goods, persons, services and capital had to be implemented (Münch, 2006: 127; Rechlin, 2004: 16 *et seq.*). As local authorities are a major administrative capacity within the member states, the increasing scope and number of EU policies has led to a corresponding impact on the local level (Goldsmith, 1997: 5 *et seq.*; 2003: 121 *et seq.*). Around three quarters of EU outputs are implemented at the subnational, and particularly at the local level (Bever, Reynaert and Steyvers, 2011a: 16), and directives directly apply for local governments, in case nationals or regional governments have not transferred them into domestic law. Cities, for example, enforce EU legislation

in fields, such as public procurement, state aid, regional policy, social and health policy, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, vocational training, food and health control, the environment, energy and transport etc. (Schultze, 2003: 123).

The three major fields relevant for local governments include legislation related to the internal market, environmental law, regional and cohesion policy. Particularly in the area of competition and state aid, the EU holds exclusive competences and produces regulations, which are directly applicable at the local level (Goldsmith, 2003: 121; John, 2000: 879; Wollmann and Lund, 1997: 64). The impact of environmental legislation on local authorities is direct and of great significance, because in many cases they have to implement and control it within their territory (Witte and Nutzenberger, 2006: 154 *et seq.*). In addition to such legal acts, the EU also operates through programme and funding schemes to promote European policy objectives. Although the EU's regional and cohesion policy is part of the new opportunity structure that local authorities can deploy, these policies still require compliance. In order to qualify for funding, local governments have to meet certain eligibility criteria, follow given strategies or aim for specific objectives (Van Bever, Reynaert and Steyvers, 2011a: 18, De Rooij, 2002: 453).¹ The instruments of the regional and cohesion policy for 2007-2013 have been subordinated to the Lisbon priorities, such as economic competitiveness and growth. Subsequently, the new Europe 2020 strategy also provides an important reference for local governments because it continues and even extends the function of the Lisbon Agenda as the framework for the regional and cohesion policy (see BBSR, 2011).

Due to the new opportunity structure provided by the EU's regional and cohesion policy, local authorities have possibilities to interact with institutions at different levels. They can take individual action, or more commonly rely on their domestic municipal associations and umbrella organisations and participate in transnational networks, such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), EUROCITIES and other transnational networks (Benington and Harvey, 2001: 204; De Rooij, 2002: 449; Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008: 173 *et seq.*). Compared to national governments, the Commission's divisional structure is less entrenched, but more open towards interest groups. Although the Commission does not offer institutionalised access to local actors, it seeks to legitimise its activities with input from regional and local government (Benington and Harvey, 1999: 204). Moreover, as the Commission relies on information on policy needs and information from

¹ Examples hereof are multiannual running-times of programmes, joint preparation, implementation and monitoring through multilevel partnerships, additionally of financial means and co-financing between the EU and the partners within the member states (John, 2000: 880; Marks, 1993: 395 *et seq.*; Timm, 2006: 120).

local government alternatively to that of national governments, it developed an interest in working with the local level (Goldsmith, 2003: 121). This in turn created opportunities for bottom-up activities (Schultze, 2003: 123 *et seq.*), and even fostered mutual alliances when the local level would conflict with their central government. Additionally, local actors participate in the EP's intergroups and they lobby across different party groups (Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008: 175 *et seq.*).

However, only a 'small European avant-garde' of local actors operates at the European level to influence political and legal decisions. Most local actors perceive the EU as too far away and do not understand how the EU works (Witte, 2011: 279 *et seq.*). How effectively the new opportunities can be exploited depends the position of local authorities in their domestic context, as well as on the situation within these authorities; for example, the availability of financial and personnel resources or personal contacts to relevant actors (De Rooij, 2002: 449). Although central governments dominate the activities of local governments, especially in unitary states (Goldsmith, 2003: 125), local authorities occasionally bypass their intra-state arrangements and directly address the European level. At the same time, however, they seek to cooperate with their regional and national government as part of a complementary strategy. The simultaneous deployment of intra-state (cooperative paradiplomacy) and extra-state (bypassing paradiplomacy) channels of interest representation increases the prospects of successful interest promotion (Tatham, 2010: 76 *et seq.*).

The top-down impact of EU certain policies as well as the opportunity structure of the regional and cohesion policy, and the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 define the areas in which the evolution interactive policy styles is primarily relevant. The strong gatekeeper role of national and regional governments leads to a two-fold mobilisation strategy of local actors dependent on the existing tensions in the relation between territorial levels within a member state. The combination of cooperative and bypassing diplomacy leads to varying patterns of interaction and to blurred policy outcomes. This is elaborated at a later point.

European integration of local governments – a polity perspective

Due to the joint efforts of municipal actors across the EU in the forerun to the failed Constitutional Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty has been a major success of the joint efforts of local actors across different member states (Münch, 2006: 247). In particular the German and Austrian municipal associations together with the CEMR have been able to address their demands at an early stage of the Constitutional Convention. Not only was the president of the Convention, the former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, also the president of the

CEMR, the vice-president Heinrich Hoffschulte represented the CEMR in Convention in a very engaged manner, because d'Estaing had to temporarily resign from his presidency during the Convention. The demands of the municipal representatives included the acknowledgement of the right to local self-government; the extension of subsidiarity to local government; the protection of the delivery of services of general interest through local authorities; and a stronger role for the CoR. The Lisbon Treaty meets most of these concerns (Zimmermann, 2006).

It is the first European treaty that explicitly refers to the local level, which indicates the growing significance of local government in the integration process. Under Article 4.2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the EU for the first time acknowledges the right to local self-government for the first:

The Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and local self-government.

According to Hoffschulte (2006: 63), the Lisbon Treaty manifests the constitutional recognition of a 'Europe of four levels'. Though the Maastricht Treaty subsidiarity introduced the principle of subsidiarity to safeguard competences at the national level, Article 5.3 (TEU) extends subsidiarity to the regional and the local level:

Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level.

Whereas the 'new' subsidiarity clause is not supposed to change local-central relations within member states, it does protect local freedoms and flexibilities vis-à-vis the EU and allows the CoR to invoke the principle in front of court (Flynn, 2005: 6). The question is whether subsidiarity stands in a trade-off against integration. Previously, the Court of Justice tended to ignore subsidiarity as a legal principle in favour of driving integration forward and legitimising EU action. However so far there was no legal case where new subsidiarity clause has been applied. The right to defend subsidiarity before court potentially creates greater mutual awareness between the local and the European level. The Commission would have to put greater emphasis on local competences, whilst local actors might engage more with the EU to prevent or shape legislation according to their interests. Thus, instead of blocking

integration, subsidiarity may add a new quality to it by fostering cooperation between actors and institutions from different levels of government. The formal acknowledgement of the local level indicates that European integration is increasingly considering the role of regional and local governments.

Besides these explicit Treaty references to the local level, Articles 14 (former Art. 16) and 106.2 (former Art. 86.2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), the protocol on services of general interest, as well as Article 36 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights for the European Union provide the legal basis for directives and regulations that define delivery services of general economic interest in relation to national practice and European competition law. Since local authorities either maintain companies or commission companies to deliver public services, Article 107.2 (TFEU) (former Art. 87.2) lists the conditions under which state aid is compatible EU law without disturbing the internal market as foreseen in Article 107.1, and Article 93 allows for public aids for the provision of public transport (Münch, 2006: 130 *et seq.*; Waiz and Alkan, 2006: 138 *et seq.*).

With regard to the EU's institutional arrangement, the CoR is the only body through which local representatives formally participate in European policy-making. Contrary to 'common' interest groups, the CoR is assembled elected government representatives from European regions and localities (Neshkova, 2010: 1195). The policy fields where the CoR is consulted on a non-binding basis involve: education; culture; public health; social policy; trans-European networks for transport; employment policy; vocational training; telecommunication and energy; environment; economic and social cohesion. The extent to which the CoR exerts influence varies across policy areas and depends on the regional relevance (Neshkova, 2010: 1196 *et seq.*; Wagstaff, 1999).

Though the CoR holds fewer powers than the EP, the Council and the Commission, its influence has grown over time. With the Lisbon Treaty, the CoR received the power to enforce the principle of subsidiarity vis-à-vis other EU institutions before the Court of Justice, albeit it is not clear yet how the new role of the CoR will be realised in practice. Although the official policy statements of the CoR struggle to attract the interest of the main institutions, and despite the difficulties in assessing to what degree the Commission actually considers the recommendations of the CoR, the latter developed to a key advisor on issues of regional competence (Jahn and Derenbach, 2006: 55). Neshkova (2010) systematically examined the influence of the CoR within consultation procedures, and found that through the CoR subnational governments are effectively involved in EU decision-making.

With the establishment of the CoR, local governments entered the European *Politikverflechtung* and the compound through which policies can be coordinated at multiple levels of government (Jahn and Derenbach, 2006: 48). Because local actors are still dependent on the good will of the Commission and the EP to get their voice heard at the European level, some municipal representatives push for the expansion of procedures and institutions to guarantee their involvement at the European level. However, the capacity of local governments to initiate new procedures and structures is limited and depends on the national governments. The CoR has upgraded its position within the Union's institutional set-up through its engagement with other EU institutions rather than through formal provisions. Whether its new role as an agent for subsidiarity means that local governments will actually become more important for the direction of integration has to be seen in the future. Nevertheless, though some may argue that local actors are still marginalised in the EU's polity, it cannot be denied that since the Maastricht Treaty local governments have acquired an increasing role the EU's institutional and procedural set-up. Key actors from central governments are limiting formal participation rights of local representatives within the EU, the mobilisation of the latter has led some modifications in the Union's polity.

European integration of local governments a policy perspective

Despite the increasing recognition of local government in the EU's formal set-up, the joint design and delivery of policies at least equally important for the emergence of compound multilevel governance arrangements. Through the implementation of EU policies municipalities hold a great share in the success of the integration process (Derenbach, 2006: 77). Nonetheless, downloading does not manifest integration *per se*, when it is only part of a one-sided relationship between the European and the local level. In fields where local authorities hold decision-making competences, European policies create an incentive to engage in the wider integration process. Although the influence of the subnational level is for the most limited to the initial preparation of EU policies, according to Schultze (2003: 135), 'this participative mode of governance, which has superseded earlier forms of hierarchical and cooperative governance, implies significant changes to the 'logic of influence' in EU decision-making and a triangulation of relationships in the evolving EU polity.'

European integration affects the relations between different territorial levels by increasing potential coalitions for strategic action and simultaneously creating a new complexity of governance arrangements. As John (2001: 71) states:

In the view of many observers the impact of the EU is not just an amalgam of policy responses and short-term strategies to obtain extra public funds. Rather, European-level institutions and policies

transfer ideas and working practices in a manner that moves local decision-making away from national and hierarchical forms of politics towards more negotiated and interdependent practices that blur the impact of tiers of government and involve a wide range of interest groups.

In turn, supranational decision-making is increasingly subject to the influence of engaged local government actors. The EU's regional and cohesion policy, and its economic strategies - Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 - are direct points of reference for local governments to engage in EU policies. With the reforms of the European Structural Funds in 1988, the allocation of funds was decentralised by introducing the partnership principle for the implementation of funding programmes. National governments remained in charge of the final decisions on the allocation and monitoring of funds, but they were supposed to work in partnerships with local and regional authorities (and other societal actors) in order to realise the objectives of the Structural Funds (Conzelmann, 1995: 134).

According to Council Regulation (EEC) No 2081/93, Article 4.1:

Community operations shall (...) be established through close consultations between the Commission, the Member State concerned and the competent authorities and bodies - including, within the framework of each Member State's national rules and current practices, the economic and social partner, designated by the Member State at national, regional, local or other level, with all parties acting as partners in pursuit of a common goal. These consultations shall hereinafter be referred to as the "partnership". The partnership shall cover the preparation and financing, as well as the ex ante appraisal, monitoring and ex post evaluation of operations.

The partnership principle has provided local actors with legitimacy and opportunities to get involved in EU affairs (Conzelmann, 1995: 135; John, 2001: 69), fostered the participation of local authorities within transnational organisations and networks, and changed the relationship between the local and the European level (Marshall, 2008: 669). How the configuration of partnerships works within different member states depends on the national politico-administrative arrangements, the approach taken by national governments towards partnership, as well as on the Commission's ability to enforce partnership vis-à-vis national governments. Thus, not all member states have decided to relax the 'hierarchical command-and-control form' within the implementation process of the EU's regional policy (Conzelmann, 1995: 135-139).

In some member states the regional and cohesion policy provided local governments with more possibilities to interact with higher levels of government. The White Paper on European Governance from 2001 was a further effort of the Commission, the European Parliament and the CoR to enforce true partnership between different levels of government. The White Paper acknowledges a holistic and strategic approach for the formulation and implementation of policies that integrates different levels of government, which would include systematic dialogues with regional and local representatives (Atkinson, 2002: 782 *et seq.*; Karvounis, 2011: 215 *et seq.*; Reilly, 2001: 1).

Because the White Paper also failed to achieve a new style of joint governance (Münch, 2006: 174), its underlying ideas were complemented by the Systematic Dialogue in 2004. This was sought to provide local and regional government organisations with exclusive access to the Commission within the early decision-making process in order to improve policy-implementation (Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008: 175; Leitermann, 2006: 335): ‘The aim is to involve the local actors as far upstream as possible in the decision-making process so that fuller account will be taken of their opinions on Community policies with a significant regional and local impact.’ (see Europa, Summaries of EU legislation) The Systematic Dialogue was an important initiative to include subnational representatives within EU policy-making and it emphasised the privileged role of local and regional authorities. Although the first meetings of with the President of the Commission (first Prodi, then Barroso) were disappointing for most local participants and did not allow for a real dialogue, the Systematic Dialogue shows how national and European municipal umbrella organisations have become relevant points of expertise for the Commission (Münch, 2006: 242 *et seq.*).

In addition to the Commission’s commitment to greater involvement of subnational governments, the CoR (see 2009) ambitiously published its own white paper on Multilevel Governance:

Multilevel governance is not simply a question of translating European or national objectives into local or regional action, but must also be understood as a process for integrating the objectives of local and regional authorities within the strategies of the European Union. Moreover, multilevel governance should reinforce and shape the responsibilities of local and regional authorities at national level and encourage their participation in the coordination of European policy, in this way helping to design and implement Community policies.

The White Paper provides a good example for the self-assurance of local and regional governments to be recognised as part of a system that evolves across multiple levels of government. However, when even Commission and EP struggle to enforce cooperative-modes of policy making across different levels, without significant support of the member states' governments, the CoR's prospect are rather bleak.

Through the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 the ideas of partnership and dialogue also entered the EU's economic strategies, whereby the local level has gradually taken a greater role for the delivering of policy goals (Van Bever, Reynaert and Steyvers, 2011b: 236 *et seq.*). Europe 2020 (see European Commission, 2010) explicitly states:

All national, regional and local authorities should implement the partnership, closely associating parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society, contributing to the elaboration of national reform programmes as well as to its implementation.

Additionally, the Commission emphasises the need to include local authorities into the implementation of Europe 2020:

Dialogue between national, regional and local government will bring the EU's priorities closer to people, strengthening the feeling of ownership needed to get everyone involved in moving Europe towards the 2020 targets. In many EU countries, the regional or local authorities are responsible for policy areas linked to the Europe 2020 strategy such as education and training, entrepreneurship, labour market or infrastructure. (See European Commission, Europe 2020)

Though the actual implications for the implementation are not yet clear, the regional and local levels show a strong ambition to be involved in the design and delivery of Europe 2020 as permanent partners. Under the Covenant of Mayors, for example, local authorities across Europe have voluntarily committed themselves to exceed the Commission's objective of reducing 20 per cent of CO₂ emissions until 2020. This is also part of a wider horizontal dynamic of the Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020. Transnational partnerships between municipalities and the realisation of social and territorial cohesion through programmes and projects at the local level contribute to European integration (Derenbach, 2006: 77), since they enable local governments to feed innovative policies into the EU's agenda (John, 2000: 882; 2001: 72).

A consultation of the CoR on Europe 2020 has shown a great interest of

regional and local authorities in the new agenda. However, although regional and local governments call for the new approach to overcome economic recession and territorial disparities across Europe, they express doubts about the effectiveness of Europe 2020. One of the main concerns addresses the lack of practical efforts to implement the flagship targets of Europe 2020 in cooperation between national, regional and local authorities. Instead of promoting partnerships sufficiently, alike the Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020 is criticised for being decided upon in hasty, top-down manner without taking into account the role of subnational governments. As a consequence, regional and local authorities seek to contribute to the design and implementation of Europe 2020 as permanent partners, and call for greater cooperation with national governments (see Committee of the Regions, 2010a; Committee of the Regions, 2010b).

In order to overcome the deficits of Europe 2020, the CoR promotes a Territorial Pact of Regional and Local Authorities on Europe 2020 Strategy, as proposed by the EP (see European Parliament, 2009):

The European Parliament ‘...calls for the multi-level governance principle to be integrated into all phases of design and implementation of the EU2020 Strategy to ensure real ownership of the results by the regional and local authorities, which have to implement it; highlights in this connection the proposal for a ‘Territorial Pact of Local and Regional Authorities for Europe 2020’ to encourage regions and cities to contribute to the successful achievement of the objectives of the 2020 Strategy;’

Under such a pact, local, regional and national authorities would have to coordinate relevant policies in the context of Europe 2020. This may include legal and financial provisions, as well as adapting governance arrangements to deliver policies more effectively (see Committee of the Regions, 2010b; Committee of the Regions, 2010c). Despite the demands of subnational actors and willingness of the Commission and the EP to grant local governments a greater role within the preparation and delivery of European policies, such efforts still lack in implementation.

The introduction of the partnership principle and the subsequent policy initiatives, such as the two White Papers, the Systematic Dialogue, Lisbon Agenda, Europe 2020 and Territorial Pact, indicate a growing relevance for local actors within at least the delivery of EU policies. Commission, EP and CoR have pushed for a new policy style that integrates different levels not only for the implementation, but also for the preparation of policies. Despite the formal commitment to such measures, effective cooperation between different levels is still at an early stage and lacks in effective realisation. Whilst subnational actors have struggled to become involved in the design of the programmes of the regional and cohesion policy, the pressure to meet the Lisbon and Europe 2020 objectives has pushed European governance and

polity further towards a system of negotiation and cooperation processes involving European, national, regional and local actors (Grimm, 2011: 1528 *et seq.*).

National governments remain strong gatekeepers for local activities, and the ability of local actors to effectively participate in European policy-making depends on the constitutional and political arrangements within the member states (Atkinson, 2002: 785 *et seq.*). At the same time, there has been a change in EU policy-making, whereby the agenda-setting and decision-making powers of EU institutions and national governments does not automatically lead to a dominating position or to full control over policy outcomes anymore (see for example Fairbrass and Jordan 2004). Instead, local government networks, for example, can exert joint control over policy outcome by initiating proposals which serve as references for decision-making and implementation (Schultze, 2003: 135). This development is not only an issue of Europeanisation of local government, but also involves a certain level of ‘municipalisation’ of EU policies. Though a fully-fledged multilevel system of joint governance arrangements has not emerged through the outlined policy initiatives and local actors are excluded from major decisions about the EU’s macro-trajectories, beneath the surface local actors contribute to new patterns of integration.

Conclusion

The article sought to offer a perspective of European integration from a local government perspective beyond the prevailing focus on Europeanisation processes. As the EU’s legal, financial and political impact has led to corresponding bottom-up mobilisation in order to influence EU policies, the interplay between downloading and uploading (as well as horizontal) Europeanisation has fed into the dynamics of European integration. The impact of cooperative and bypassing diplomacy has modified the EU’s polity, which is indicated by the emergence of the CoR, the formal recognition of local self-governments in the Lisbon Treaty, and the extension of subsidiarity to the local and regional level, which may require deeper cooperation and even integration of multiple territorial levels.

Arguably more relevant for evolving integrative patterns is the attempt to foster joint preparation and delivery of European policies, in particular of regional and cohesion policy, and the Lisbon and Europe 2020 objectives, through compound governance arrangements. The White Paper on Governance, Systematic Dialogue, White Paper on Multilevel Governance and Territorial Pact have sought to establish multilevel partnerships. However, despite such initiatives, the formal commitment to the local level does not necessarily bring effective changes of practise. Only a small European avant-garde of local actors

engages in European affairs (Witte, 2011: 279), and EU actors may still be somehow ‘blind’ towards municipal concerns. At the same, EU membership does not always make a noticeable difference in the relationship between local and central government within a member state (John, 2000: 878 *et seq.*). Multilevel partnerships still lack in effective implementation at European level, as well as within member states. Control and power over policy-making remains a key determinant in the design and implementation of EU policies, and local actors are facing political or bureaucratic resistance from national executives, which defend their powers vis-à-vis enhanced multilevel governance.

Nonetheless, although national actors may slow down the involvement of subnational authorities, they may find it increasingly difficult to oppose socio-economic pressures and supra- and subnational trends affecting the realisation of common policy objectives. Local actors are excluded from most major decisions about the Union’s macro-policy and -polity developments, but they have an impact dynamics of integration, which is modest and limited in scope. Instead of neglecting the role of local actors within the integration process or over-emphasising the shift of powers amongst territorial levels, study of European integration from a local government perspective needs to look at interactive, cooperative policy arrangements involving actors and institutions from multiple levels of government.

The EU and member states do not act independently from each other anymore, but increasingly fuse vertically and horizontally in a common policy cycle (Rometsch and Wessels, 1996: 328 *et seq.*). A number of local actors have entered these compound, blurred governance arrangements, or *Politikverflechtung* (Derenbach, 2006: 78; Scharpf, 1985) respectively. The compound polity, however, is not finished yet and instead of having all groups of actors involved in the European policy-cycle, the existing elites decide who are allowed to enter (Miles; 2005: 41). Corresponding empirical studies need to operationalise the hypothesis of a compound multilevel system through which local actors fuse into the EU, for the study of different member states, as well as of different policies.

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