Zimmermann, Katharina: Local policy integration funded by Europe? The impact of the European Social Fund on local social and employment policies in Germany. Paper presented at the Ph.D. conference: Local welfare systems and social cohesion; Barcelona 10.06-12.06.2013.

Abstract: During the last decades, scholars in Europeanisation research have intensively studied ‚softer‘ forms of Europeanisation and EU-induced change in less regulated fields such as social and employment policies (Lopez-Santana 2009, Heidenreich/Zeitlin 2009). New tools of analysis have been developed in order to adequately analyse new modes of European governance. However, recent studies dealing with these forms of governance show that the EU impact on member states‘ national social and employment policies is surprisingly low (Graziano 2012). Nevertheless, since an increasing EU focus on subnational levels during the last years can truly be stated, the question arises whether the multi-level aspect and the relationship between the EU-and the subnational level has been underestimated within Europeanisation research in certain policy areas.

In addition, by coupling EU social-, employment-, and cohesion policies (mainly in the framework of the Lisbon strategy), this stronger multi-level perspective is not only applied to different policy fields, but is also underlined by an integrated governance framework, combining hierarchical, network-based and market-based instruments. Here, both the proposition of partnership approaches and policy fields’ integration is not only observable in European governance instruments, but as well in a programmatic dimension with the aim of achieving higher stakeholder cooperation and policy integration in the member states. The European Social Fund (ESF) - introduced in this integrated governance framework explicitly as a supporting instrument for the Lisbon/ Europe 2020 targets - is already well established in the implementation- and service delivery landscape in the majority of the European countries. In this context, the subnational level and its specific logic in terms of implementation of social and employment policies (Künzel 2012) is of crucial relevance for the understanding of the impact of the European governance framework.

Without questioning the above mentioned results of recent Europeanisation studies, but going beyond the analysis of the national level, the paper aims at addressing the issue of Europeanisation of the subnational level by structural funding in a broader context. More precisely, the hypothesis will be tested whether the implementation of crucial aspects of the integrated European governance framework via structural funding leads to an increasing integration of policy fields and actors’ cooperation in subnational social and employment policies. The relevance of the ESF as an integrated market-based governance instrument for these processes will be analysed in three different welfare systems, namely UK, Germany and Italy, on the basis of two in-depth qualitative case studies per country. The main theoretical contribution of the paper consists in the discussion of the findings against the backdrop of European governance and Europeanisation theories, as well as in the broader context of social policies’ and welfare state debates.