Zimmermann, Katharina: Local Welfare Systems and the European Social Fund. Paper presented at the Young Researchers Conference on Local Welfare Systems; Hamburg, 19.09.-20.09. 2013.

Abstract: This paper draws on the findings of six in-depth case studies on the organisation of integrated social and employment policies at the local level and aims at identifying the impact of the European Social Fund in local welfare policies. It is based on research in the framework of the FP7-project LOCALISE.

The majority of the European countries experienced a turn towards activation policies during the last decades (van Berkel/Borghi 2008, Bonoli 2010). The interlinked aim to increase employment rates also by integrating formerly excluded groups into the labour market requires a closer link of training, family or social policies with employment, and often comes along with modifications regarding policy organisation (van Berkel et al. 2012: 263). Furthermore, the local level plays a crucial role in the context of integrated policies (Künzel 2012) and thus deserves particular scrutiny which is not much present in the welfare state change literature.

On the other hand, the European level has as well paid increasing attention to social and employment policies during the last decades. A coupling of EU social-, employment-, and cohesion policies (mainly in the framework of the Lisbon strategy) can be observed, which is also underlined by a comprehensive governance framework. Scholars in Europeanisation research have intensively studied these new forms of European governance (Lopez-Santana 2009, Heidenreich/Zeitlin 2009). However, recent studies show that the EU impact on member states‘ national social and employment policies is surprisingly low (Graziano 2012). The European Social Fund (ESF) - introduced in the above mentioned governance framework explicitly as a supporting instrument for the Lisbon/ Europe 2020 targets - is already well established in the subnational implementation- and service delivery landscape in the majority of the European countries. In the context of funding, the proposition of partnership approaches and policy fields’ integration as well as target group approaches focusing e.g. on the employability of females, youths or long-term unemployed, are of crucial relevance. When it comes to implementation, these European funding principles meet local welfare systems and their own specific logic. Here, the question arises how the local level deals with these European resources.

In order to shed light on this question, 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 European social and employment policies via structural funding (ESF) 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.