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The Local Usages of Europe  
*Comparative Report*

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## 1. Introduction

The current report is part of the LOCALISE Work Package 5 which analyses the Europeanisation of inter-organisational, every-day practices in the governance of integrated social cohesion policies on the local level.

For achieving the European targets in employment and welfare policy, outlined in the Lisbon strategy, by using the Open Method of Coordination the EU builds on an innovative approach of coordinating Member States' policies (Citi and Rhodes 2007, Héritier 2003, Radaelli 2003, Begg and Berghman 2002). Throughout these processes, the concepts of "subsidiarity", and local delivery of services and cohesion policies have played a crucial role. For example, the Commission suggested to "encourage local and regional authorities to develop strategies for employment (...) and promote partnerships" because "all actors at the regional and local levels, (...), must be mobilised to implement the European Employment Strategy" (European Commission 2001). In order to support the regional and local implementation of these European policies, structural funds (€347 billion from 2007 to 2013) are now concentrated on the objectives defined by the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (Mairate 2006, European Commission 2005, 2006). The European Employment Strategy (EES) is built on the European Social Fund (ESF), which makes available more than €75 billion in 2007-2013, facilitating integrated social cohesion policies particularly on the regional and local level. Although it is well known that for Member States with less developed administrative capacities, structural funds have been an important incentive for institutional reform (cf. Zirra 2010, Mailand 2008, López-Santana 2006), while the Europeanisation of national employment and welfare regimes has attracted much research in recent years (cf. Heidenreich and Zeitlin 2009), the local usage of OMC processes, European programmes and structural funds, has rarely been analysed to date. By not accounting for the *local usage* of European resources the positive dynamics for social cohesion created by Europeanisation or, more in general, fail to understand how local social policies have changed due to European policies may be underestimated.

In order to address this research gap, this report will analyse the "Usages of Europe" (see next section) at the European local level. In particular, in-depth empirical analysis was conducted in eighteenth local entities<sup>1</sup> belonging to six European countries, that is, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. An average of 35 WP5 relevant interviews were administered in each country and all the actors were asked to answer specific questions regarding EU usages.

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<sup>1</sup> For the details related to the actors interviewed and the research methods used in each case, see the WP4 National Comparative Reports.



The three national case studies were selected following the analysis conducted for LOCALISE Work Package 3 by CETRO (German partners in this consortium). Work Package 3 ranked NUTS-II<sup>2</sup> regions within the six nation-states according to the level of social inequality in order to identify best, average and under-performing regions. This classification was based on three variables for 2008: labour force participation rates; total unemployment rate; regional gross domestic product.

## 2. The Usages of Europe

This paper tries to analyse whether, and to what extent, the EU affects the social cohesion policies at the European local level and what kind of usages of the EU are employed at the local level. In order to achieve this task, the approach of the “Usages of Europe” (Jacquot and Woll 2003; Jacquot and Woll 2004; Jacquot 2008; Woll and Jacquot 2010; Graziano, Jacquot and Pallier 2011) will be used. This approach has been developed as a contribution to the Europeanization approach (Graziano and Vink 2007). It confers a great emphasis on “the study of individual action and its role in the transformation of the European political system” drawing attention to “intentional action...to argue for a more nuanced perspective on strategic action in European studies” (Woll and Jacquot, 2010: 111).

Indeed, the Europeanization approach, by deeply focusing on the structural and institutional aspects which allow or inhibit the EU to impact on domestic policy structures, does not fully capture the way in which national actors make use of EU resources and constraints, and downgrade to “mediating factors” the role played by them in bringing the Europe into the domestic picture. By contrast, the notion of usages does not merely imply that actors respond to the institutional context, but also that they “can choose and learn and thus develop agency independent of structural conditions” (Woll and Jacquot 2010: 220).

Therefore, since Europe might bring about change by providing new resources (both material and immaterial), it becomes crucial to study when, how and through which mechanisms and political games local actors use these resources or transform EU constraints into political opportunities. In this sense, the notion of usages, by departing from the micro-foundations of actors behaviour, must be referred to as the social practices through which “actors *engage*

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<sup>2</sup> The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU. NUTS 1: major socio-economic regions; NUTS 2: basic regions for the application of regional policies; NUTS 3: small regions for specific diagnoses (Eurostat website [accessed 6 April 2013] [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts\\_nomenclature/introduction](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/introduction)).



with, interpret, appropriate or ignore the dynamics of European integration” (Woll and Jacquot 2010: 220).

This approach proves particularly interesting in exploring the role of both Europe at the local level and that of local actors in “using Europe”. Indeed, “concentrating on practices, and thus on usage, allows focusing on political action or political work and on the substance of *political relations*”, by scrutinizing “how actors are transformed by their relations with European policies, instruments, actors” (Jacquot 2008: 22) and the way in which these actors use Europe for pursuing their goals and interests, thus eventually creating a context of reciprocal influence. Furthermore, this approach has the advantage of allowing us to look at the actors’ behaviour at the local level without taking for granted that the EU necessarily impacts the local policy agenda. As a result, empirical research becomes crucial to detect the possible role of the EU at the local level.

As stated before, in order to assess the type of influence the EU may have exercised on local reforms, the usages of Europe approach “investigate whether, where, when and how” *local* actors have been using EU resources, references and policy developments as strategic devices for their own strategies.

In particular, five main types of EU resources can be listed (Jacquot and Woll 2003, 2004; Woll and Jacquot 2010; Graziano, Jacquot and Palier 2011):

- 1) *legal resources* (primary legislation, secondary legislation, case law, etc.);
- 2) *financial resources* (budgetary constraints but also European funding);
- 3) *cognitive and normative resources* (Communications, ideas, etc.);
- 4) *political resources* (argumentation, blame avoidance mechanisms, multilevel games, etc.);
- 5) *institutional resources* (committees, agencies, etc.).

To these resources correspond three main types of usages (see Table 1):

1) *Cognitive usage* refers to the understanding and interpretation of a political actor and is most common when issues are being defined or need to be discussed; ideas serve as persuasion mechanisms, helping to aggregate interests and to build coalitions of heterogeneous actors.

2) *Strategic usages* refer to the pursuit of clearly defined goals by trying to influence policy decisions or one’s room for manoeuvre, be it by increasing one’s access to the policy process or the number of political tools available.

3) *Legitimizing usage* mixes cognitive and strategic elements and occurs when political decisions need to be communicated and justified.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the different types of usage**

	<b>Elements Used</b>	<b>Type of Actors</b>	<b>Political Work</b>
<b>Cognitive Usage</b>	- Ideas - Expertise	- Political entrepreneurs - Advocacy coalitions - Public policy networks - Experts - Epistemic communities	- Argumentation - Framing of political action - Problem building
<b>Strategic Usage</b>	- Institutions - Legal resources - Budgetary resources - Political resources	- Bureaucratic actors - Decision-makers	- Resource mobilisation
<b>Legitimizing Usage</b>	- Public space - Discursive references	- Politicians - Lobbyists, special interests	- Justification - Deliberation

Source: Woll and Jacquot (2010)

Summing up, in this paper we will try to detect whether Europe has an *influence* at the local level, what kind of European *resources*, if any, do local actors mobilize and which *kind of usages* (cognitive, strategic, legitimizing) the local actors pursue.

### 3. The British Case

Political devolution has shifted statutory powers from the London based UK parliament to the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive<sup>3</sup>. Despite the transfer of some statutory powers to these regional administrations, the UK government level retains control over a majority of public spending and, crucially with reference to structural funds, also supervises social security and the public employment service. As it will appear clearer below, this central control has several consequences for the European impact at the UK local level.

In particular, due to the overwhelming importance of the UK government level, local actors participation in EU policy making is very limited, as well as very limited local control over intermediate national state structures. Furthermore, local actors may arrive to perceive themselves as mere recipients of EU funds and “what we are doing is simply using EU money to

<sup>3</sup> The empirical analysis in the UK case is based on three regions in the UK (the two devolved administrations of Wales and Scotland and the North East in England) and one city within each region: Cardiff (Wales) as average performing; Edinburgh (Scotland) as very strong performing and Newcastle (England) as under-performing.



fund UK objectives”<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, European *financial* resources, and particularly the structural funds, are by far the most used and recognized EU resources at the UK local level.

The central, and to some extent, the regional control over funds represent a crucial barrier to the adequate targeting of programmes to local needs. This is particularly manifest in the case of Wales, where structural funds are conspicuous due to the presence in the region of convergence areas<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO), part of the Welsh Government, has responsibility for the funding, the policy implementation and the setting of the strategy (interpreting the guidelines coming from Europe). Nevertheless, the interviewees stated that this working method strongly impacts precisely on the *ownership* of the strategy: if relevant government policy departments were writing the strategy and the WEFO implemented it, this would be more beneficial to local needs since the departments better know and understand the local reality.

The new round of European funding for 2014-2020 has generated strong interest towards European resources to support national and local policies. The size of the available funding under the existing and future settlement in Wales has spurred the recourse to *strategic usages*, by augmenting the incentives for programme and policy alignment to make use of the available funds. However, local actors also expressed the view that such alignment would have likely occurred anyway as Welsh national government policy had already sought to enact measures to address social disparities and cohesion. Likewise in Scotland, respondents were aware that there had been policy and programme alignment to ensure fit with structural funding requirements but that the direction of Scottish national government policy on employment, structural deficiencies and competitiveness had already moved in a direction that made alignment with EU policy achievable without significant adaptational pressures.

In this sense, policy influence appears as a two-way interaction. On the one side, the European policy can be seen to affect decision making at national, regional and local level. On the other side, some participants stated that the EU seems to be following the UK in terms of policy direction, particularly in the area of active labour market policies (ALMPs) and welfare-to-work reforms. Indeed, the UK is understood to be a leader in the field of employment and social inclusion meaning that it is unlikely to follow an EU policy lead in this area (Macphail 2010).

A number of interviewees stated that European funding has influenced their work as they have been able to run programmes that otherwise they would not have been able to run, including

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<sup>4</sup> When lobbying takes place it is done through umbrella organisations and it is in this way that organisations usually get access to European institutions.

<sup>5</sup> Seven Local Authorities in Wales are Competitiveness and Employment Regions while the other 15 Local Authorities are Convergence Areas. There is around £700m funding for the convergence areas, and much smaller for the east Wales area (regional competitiveness and employment funding (RCE) receives around £52m).



training programmes, investment funds, and subsidised recruitment schemes. In some cases it has also permitted the expansion of the range and quality of services. In addition, EU funds were also said to allow the government to work with a number of partners that otherwise it would not have engaged with. For example, relations between some third sector organisations and national/local government have benefited as a result of the interaction made possible through the structural funds.

Nevertheless, EU financial resources come with many negative effects. Beyond the complexity of applying for structural funds and the fact that funding could be “a bit of a distraction” rather than adding value, with organisations focusing in “chasing the funding”, many also stressed that the amount of financial resources could also encourage duplications through the proliferation of projects. This multiplicity of interventions becomes complicated and confusing in terms of outputs, as organisations can be counting the same thing twice, or could be told they cannot count some of their outputs as some other organisation is doing that so that “it starts to be a bit of a jungle out there”. Furthermore, others emphasized the negative impact on organisations of late payment on cash flow and the fact that the level of financial control on EU funding is “excessive, ridiculous and disproportionate” while the performance of the project (how money is spent) is not monitored at all.

Despite most participants had taken part in EU funded projects, the majority of the participants did not feel the EU had influenced their work in terms of policy orientations. The main reason given for that is the perceived (pre-existent) alignment between regional and local policies with national and EU policies. This in turn depends on the fact that funding for local programmes delivered through structural funds comes from the central government. As a result, local programmes need to align to national policy, with the consequence that, as an interviewee pointed out, “UK employment policy has actually overwhelmed any influence that Europe might have had”. Nevertheless, it is worth underscoring that, especially in Newcastle, structural funds have been recognized as a powerful motivational factor in contributing to strategically shape local priorities and align them with EU priorities on social cohesion and unemployment.

As for the EU *cognitive* resources, structural funds are the main vehicle to *directly* disseminate the EU policy perspective. Therefore, EU money is instrumental to get acquainted to European ideas. It is the case that in Wales, where EU funding is more consistent, also awareness of EU policy and guidelines appears as being more rooted than in the other cases.

Despite actors at the local level of government are quite conscious of EU policy guidelines, directives and programmes, their effective impact at the local level is usually perceived as quite negligible. The main reason for that, as it was also recognized by many interviewees, is likely to be linked to the fact that the EU “cognitive influence” on the local level mainly occurs through





the intermediation of the national and regional levels<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, by the time local actors could perceive the European policy direction, the national level has already “imposed” that direction through the policies and the legal system.

A number of participants also saw the EU as an instrument for getting information out and learning from other countries experiences. Furthermore, Europe was in some cases described as a potential corrective against the centralisation of UK policy. Indeed, some interviewees emphasized that the OMC and European recommendations have contributed to encouraging the multi-stakeholders coordination between the local and the national level and the involvement of the third sector in policy development. However, according to some participants, the fact that the EU does not have directives in social policy and operates through the OMC also contributes to reducing the European influence by eventually slowing down the implementation of the EU policies.

Summing up, the UK Government employment and social policy was understood by most local officials to be the dominant force driving policies related to social cohesion. The EU *financial* resources are recognized as the most important at the UK local level and, consequently, *strategic* usages occur through policy alignment to ensure fit with structural funding requirements. Nevertheless, some participants also stated that the EU seems rather to be following the UK in terms of policy direction particularly in the area of active labour market policies and welfare-to-work reforms.

Even if local actors are aware of the EU *cognitive* resources, *cognitive* usages mainly befall at the national and regional level of government, through the alignment of the national and regional government policies and legislation to the EU social cohesion policies. Therefore, cognitive resources are mostly *indirectly* conveyed to the local level through the superordinate levels, thus reducing the real or perceived European influence at the local level. In this sense, national policy obscures the EU influence because EU documents, policies, ideas and guidelines are read and filtered through the lens of national policy.

Finally, it did not emerge significant evidence of discursive references to the EU and related *legitimizing* usages.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Strategy Reference Framework (NSRF) sets the policy context at the national UK level and aims to align national priorities with the EU policy priorities. Furthermore, regional programmes and operational programmes (OPS) are set below NSRF and national programmes. As a result, there is a quite strong alignment of the Scottish, Welsh and UK national government policy with EU policy on social cohesion.



## 4. The French Case

In France the centralisation of employment and social cohesion policies results in the following share of competences: the employment policy development is mainly a national competence while policy implementation and service delivery are a regional and local competence, respectively. Social cohesion policies have been devolved to subnational entities (i.e. professional training policies to regions while social assistance policies are under the competence of the “département” (NUTS 3). More specifically, regional actors implement employment and social cohesion policy while local caseworkers provide and deliver services. The use of the European resources and their corresponding usages are strongly related to the phase of the policy cycle: policy development covers a much broader spectrum of resources and usages (other than strategic) with the consequence that national and, to some extent, also regional actors mobilize more European resources, and with a stronger intensity, than subnational actors.

In all the case studies analysed<sup>7</sup>, both at the regional and local level it emerged a very scant knowledge of the European Union’s guidelines and strategies. Apart from regional executives referring to specific European orientations, even if most of the interviewees virtually recognized the existence of the European resources, they were not really able to concretely provide references to them. Europe is considered too far from the local priorities and needs which local actors have to address on a daily base.

The most important European resources are by far *financial* and the European Social Fund (ESF) is the most significant of the EU financial resources employed at the local level. In this respect, it clearly emerged the extent to which the actors consider useful to have a knowledge of the EU funding mechanisms and programmes, even if this knowledge is almost exclusively directed to gather money: “...we explore European recommendations and we design projects that fit them because we *need* money. So yes, there is an European influence but an influence *under obligation*”. To be sure, some local actors seem to imply that if they had a desirable budget, they would avoid to “resorting” to the EU.

Therefore, *strategic usages* are the most relevant and in the case in which organisational changes are required in order to adapt local bodies to the European recommendations, these changes are carried out following an instrumental logic and not because they are conceived of as potentially successful makeovers which would better allow to face new challenges. This instrumental logic also appears with respect to the linkage between project management and

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<sup>7</sup> In France three cities were empirically studied: Bordeaux in Gironde (well-performing region), Tours in Indre-et-Loire (average region), Montpellier in Hérault (underperforming region).



human resources since participating to EU calls and managing projects might become a way through which it is possible “to keep the staff and the caseworkers”.

EU *cognitive* and *legal* resources are used in a quite “soft” way since local actors refer to these resources without possessing a detailed knowledge of the EU guidelines and/or without being fully aware of using them. To some extent, it appears that local actors deem it important to recognize the relevance of the linkage to EU cognitive resources, but at the same time they admit the extent to which it is difficult to effectively track down that linkage at the local level. Furthermore, as already mentioned for the case of the financial resources, the usage of the EU cognitive and legal resources is mostly *strategic* in that it is considered instrumental by local actors to achieve their agenda and realize their goals rather than getting familiarized with new practices. Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of the *strategic* usage, some organisational and/or institutional changes (e.g. the introduction of new contractualisation patterns in place of “subvention type schemes”) might emerge as a by-product of the “absorption” of EU cognitive and legal resources.

The lack of awareness about EU guidelines also clearly emerged when actors were asked whether an overarching strategy to integrate employment and social policies exists at the local level and whether Europe was perceived as having a role for eventually realizing that integration (multi-level, multi-dimensional or multi-stakeholder). First all, the interviewees often had some difficulties to capture the nuance given to the word *integration* within the questionnaire. Second, once integration was defined by the interviewer, respondents rarely conceived it as a multi-level phenomenon, but mostly as multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approaches which in turn were not related to Europe, but rather to the impact of national and local policies.

Another important aspect to underscore is that when interviewees mentioned the impact of Europe, this impact was most of the time perceived as an *obligation* and/or a constraint rather than an opportunity, even when the purpose of the usage of Europe aims at gathering financial resources – which should in itself represent an opportunity. The main reasons cited for that are that the European procedures to access funding are too bureaucratized and burdensome, and that EU money come with many side effects, that cover a continuum which goes from the administrative and human resources costs to the lost of discretion and control over the processes.

Therefore, EU is often perceived as an actor which makes things more complex, thus hindering the policy implementation process. For example, interviewees were unanimous in pointing out that managing ESF-related projects require a strong professionalization and the need to develop new competences within the various structures. Furthermore, the positive effect of



upgrading the managerial culture required in order to manage these projects was often recognized as a negative upshot of the useless burden of formality, complexity, redundant control and evaluation procedures coming with EU funds. For this reason many local actors observed that in order to look for European financial resources an organisation needs to “expect numerous controls and be ready to justify everything”<sup>8</sup>, “be prepared to face uncertainty and delays in funding”<sup>9</sup> and “be of a reasonable size”.

The relevance of the size variable is further confirmed by the fact that, despite in France an overall analysis shows that there is only little difference from one city to another with respect to the EU resources used and the corresponding usages, there are some variations in terms of the extent to which each city uses European financial resources. For example, in Tours, the recourse made to European funds is less significant than in other cities. The main explanatory factor for this is precisely the size of the city: Tours is not a regional capital, but only a departmental one. Hence, local and departmental actors enlighten that “Europe is too complicated (...), it is not our culture”. By contrast, all public authorities in the two regional capitals, Bordeaux and Montpellier, use more extensively EU financial resources. Therefore, it appears that bigger cities are more able to deal with European funds and, regional and national instances, being stronger entities, are more equipped with the knowhow needed to face the European complexity. As a result, bigger cities might also more easily develop a local culture that is not reluctant to Europe, whereas smaller cities, which have fewer possibilities to work directly with Europe, lag behind in developing such a culture. By contrast, socio-economic variables do not seem to impact on the extent and kind of usages of European resources displayed at the local level.

Summing up, the influence of Europe at the local level in France is relatively weak and mainly related to *financial* resources. Only very few local actors are aware of the European strategies and guidelines and they get interested to them according to an instrumental logic, that is, especially when they need to abide by them in order to get funding. In this sense, the *cognitive usage* might at most emerge as a side effect of the *strategic* one, which remains the main kind of usage at the French local level. Nevertheless, local actors seem more and more interested in deepening their “knowledge about Europe” and prone to recognize its possible benefits.

Likewise, the *legitimizing usage* is quite rare at the subnational levels: it has mainly been identified in the national employment agencies to explain their management schemes (notably

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<sup>8</sup> As underlined by many actors, some of these controls are set up at the national level as an umbrella strategy and, in this sense, this level can be perceived as adding further obstacles.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, two recent reports of Europ’Act support this idea: as of February 1st 2013 only 36% of the ESF has been paid; this rate is up to 38% for the Regional competitiveness and employment objective. See DIACT, DATAR (2012), (2013).



regarding governance schemes, choice of targets, and increasing sanctions) and justify national changes.

Furthermore, EU resources are often considered as constraints rather than opportunities, also because local actors mainly implement national policies which were influenced by the EU guidelines, that, in turn are often perceived as being related to the increase of controls and evaluation mechanisms. When EU resources are conceived of as opportunities it is more the effect of individual variables linked to *leadership* and professional background, than to factors related to the local culture.

## 5. The German Case

The analysis of the usages of the European resources showed a differentiated picture of the role of European legislations, funding, discourses and institutions at the local level in Germany. Both the relevance of certain resources as well as their usages by local actors differs from case to case<sup>10</sup>.

It is worth emphasizing that Germany is a federal country in which policy formulation in employment policies takes place mainly at the national level, while the regional level has some additional competences. As the lowest administrative level, the local level (mainly the municipalities) is only partly involved in employment policies while holding a strong role in designing social policies which show several interfaces with employment policies.

Especially since the Hartz-reforms 2003-2005 which merged the former unemployment assistance and the social assistance into a minimum income scheme for unemployed capable of work but not entitled to unemployment insurance, local social services are more closely linked to unemployment protection. The minimum income scheme (UB II, *Arbeitslosengeld II*) is tax-financed, needs-tested, flat-rate and entails the delivery of services such as psycho-social counselling or debt-counselling, as well as support for childcare or housing if necessary. Social services in general, but also those linked to the minimum income scheme, are provided by municipal public authorities or, in most of the cases, by Welfare Associations or other providers. The minimum income for persons capable of work is administrated and delivered by the local Jobcenters, which are in most of the cases<sup>11</sup> jointly governed by the municipality and

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<sup>10</sup> The German cases are three cities belonging respectively to the Saxony-Anhalt region (underperforming case), the Lower-Saxony region (average case) and the Bavaria region (well-performing).

<sup>11</sup> 304 German municipalities have decided to organise the delivery jointly with the local employment agencies in so-called "joint venture" (*gemeinsame Einrichtungen*), while 106 municipalities have opted for a solely responsibility in delivery of UB II ('accredited institutions', *zugelassene kommunale Träger*). In this study, only joint ventures have been investigated.



the local Employment Agencies, which are branches of the Federal Employment Agency, a public body under tripartite self-government.

The Federal Employment Agency is at the national level involved in policy designing in employment issues in the field of the relatively status protecting (provision limited to one year), contribution-financed unemployment insurance (UB I, *Arbeitslosengeld I*), and is responsible for implementation and service delivery of both unemployment insurance and – together with the municipalities – the minimum income scheme in most cases. From a broader perspective, the minimum income for persons capable of work is a long-term unemployment scheme<sup>12</sup>, while the unemployment insurance scheme is for short-term unemployed.

Generally speaking, European social and employment policies are far from being of high relevance for local policy-making. While at the policy formulation and implementation stage, it is possible to observe an impact of EU legal, institutional, political and cognitive resources among actors involved in the unemployment insurance scheme, this impact however appears to be quite limited, with the partial exception of the case study belonging to the well-performing region (Bavaria). Indeed, while all the main actors related to the UB I in these policy stages (chambers, public authorities, local Employment Agencies and social partners) are often well informed about European discourses and legislation, only in the well-performing case they are concretely more strongly oriented towards multi-level European contacts, and the regional level provides certain infrastructures to deepen these contacts, thus making them crucial also the EU *institutional* and *political* resources.

With this respect, not only the different set of actors involved in delivering services and the policy stage in which they operate, but also the economic and labour market performance of a local entity is crucial in explaining the different type of resources used. Indeed, in Germany the unemployment structure defines the relevance of the respective unemployment protection scheme (minimum income/UB II or unemployment insurance). The chambers, social partners or the local Employment Agency – all actors involved in the unemployment insurance scheme which is more relevant in the well-performing case – use more legal and cognitive EU resources, while they use financial resources only in a limited way; by contrast, the Jobcenter, training providers or welfare associations are especially targeted by long-term unemployed, thus becoming more relevant in the low performing cases, and use more financial resources at the service delivery stage.

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<sup>12</sup> Although the majority of minimum income/UB II-recipients is unemployed for one year or longer, among the total number of beneficiaries there is also a high number of persons receiving additional benefits due to low wages or persons who are short-term unemployed but are not entitled to unemployment insurance since they have not paid contributions due to low salaries or other reasons.



So far, the most crucial EU resources used at the service delivery stage are by far *financial*, and more specifically this use is limited to the ESF. All the actors at the service delivery level are informed about it, several actors are specialized on the application and implementation of ESF-based projects, and for a large number of them, EU money is a major element of their budget. Very often, the ESF is their only link to the European level, since regulations, guidelines or European discourses are not relevant for them.

Even if the ESF is the most relevant EU resource used in the German case, the extent to which it is used differs between the municipalities. For example, in the underperforming case, the use of the ESF is very intensive; by contrast, in the well-performing case only some actors apply for ESF-money. The crucial factors explaining this difference are especially the economic situation, the amount of the available funding and the extent of the necessary *co-funding*<sup>13</sup> an organisation has to contribute out of its own budget. Indeed, in the underperforming case, the financial incentives to apply for the ESF-funds are higher due to the major number of unemployed and the chance to be successful with an application is much higher as a result of the higher amount of available funding. Furthermore, actors in the underperforming case need to invest much less of their own funds for the co-funding (about 20%) than it happens to be in the average and the well-performing case (about 50%).

Nevertheless, institutional factors also play a role in influencing the recourse to the ESF. Indeed, due to the highly complex bureaucratic procedures related to the ESF, local actors need an administrative support and knowhow to have access to them. These competences can be centralised by public or private actors or internally and decentralised by ESF-beneficiaries (e.g. if there exists a specialised staff responsible for ESF-administration). This institutional funding background is not only a *prerequisite* for the usage of the financial resources, but also an *institutional change* brought out by European funding itself. The underperforming case is equipped with much more employment-related administrative infrastructures than the other cases, although the municipality in the well-performing case recently strengthened this aspect. Nevertheless, a large number of actors perceive the administrative processes as such a burden that it is an obstacle in using the ESF. Several actors decide not to apply for the fund since they do not have time, money or staff for application and implementation. As already said before, this is not the case in the underperforming case, where the higher amount of available funding makes applications more profitable, and investing in own administrative competences is therefore worthwhile for them.

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<sup>13</sup> In Germany, it has become very common to cover the obligatory co-funding by unemployment (or mostly minimum income) benefits. This implies that the public employment services are project partners and pay benefits to participants in ESF-projects. The leading project partner is mostly a service or training provider.





Furthermore, the programmatic aims of the ESF include elements such as the labour market integration of formerly excluded groups, a target group approach, a link between social and employment services, individualised services or the partnership approach which fosters cooperation between different actors. These programmatic aims are very much in line with the overall approach of the German minimum income/UB II scheme<sup>14</sup>. This facilitates the usage of the ESF by actors involved in the minimum income/UB II scheme, especially in the underperforming case where these actors are of very high relevance due to the weak economic situation. By contrast, the programmatic approach of the ESF, focusing on vulnerable groups, does not correspond with the target group of the unemployment insurance scheme (short-term unemployed, mostly easy to integrate).

Summing up, in the German case *financial* resources, and more specifically the ESF, are the most used EU resources at the local level, while legal regulations, European discourses and institutions are used as well, but only in a very limited way. The massive use of the ESF at the local level should not be surprising, since service delivery is the main task at the local level and the ESF is a redistributive instrument which is especially targeted to service delivery of social and employment policies. In addition, actors related to service delivery are often closely involved in the minimum income/UB II scheme whose programmatic aims are very similar to those of the ESF, thus further strengthening its use.

Almost in all cases *strategic usage* of EU resources is the dominant type of usage, also with respect to other non financial resources (mostly legal regulations). Especially the decisions for and against applying for the ESF are interest driven and mainly aim at resource mobilisation and allocation.

EU *institutional*, *cognitive* and *political* resources are especially important in the well performing case at the policy formulation and implementation stage. In particular, institutions become crucial tools to reinterpret issues, thus being associated not only with *strategic* but also with *cognitive* usages.

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<sup>14</sup> Although in the UB II a stronger activation principle is in action, there are a number of similarities with the programmatic aims of the ESF.





## 6. The Italian Case

In Italy, coherently with the subsidiarity principle inaugurated by the Bassanini law in 1997, the lowest levels of government, *province* and *comuni* (municipalities), are involved in the policy implementation and service delivery of employment and social policies, respectively. By contrast, the national and regional levels set the legislative framework for social cohesion policies and manage policy formulation and development. Consequently, also the strategic planning of the EU structural funds is handled centrally by the super-ordinate levels (national and regional). As it will appear clearer below, this fact has crucial consequences in shaping the relationships between Europe and the local level. Furthermore, local variations among the case studies<sup>15</sup> are also related to the highly dissimilar amount of EU funds<sup>16</sup> they are apportioned as a result of the different territorial development and socio-economic context.

From the empirical analysis it clearly emerged that in all the three cases scrutinized the EU *financial resources* are by far the most crucial EU resources at the Italian local level, with the result that Europe is often mainly considered as a “money provider”. In this sense, the EU is frequently approached in an instrumental way to get resources once decision-makers and bureaucratic actors are not able to find them somewhere else, a phenomenon which is spreading over more and more due to the economic crisis.

Especially in the well performing case, where EU structural funds are relatively less conspicuous, it emerged a somehow fragmented, random and anxious method of dealing with Europe. In this sense, local policy makers might be willing to “handpick” EU calls more on the basis of the money they would potentially allot rather than by the objective they aim at realizing. This implies “going after the EU calls through a senseless race” without following an integrated plan and using EU economic resources as complementary and additional tools to better accomplish predefined political objectives or policy outcomes.

Indeed, although most of the actors interviewed declared to have participated to European projects, these projects remain *de facto* isolated and are not preceded or followed by a strategic plan to amalgamate them into the local policy development or to clearly make them coherent with the political objectives sketched out within a given administration. As a consequence, these projects might turn out to be “contingent”, thus having a negligible impact and being without sustainable structural consequences for local development.

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<sup>15</sup> Empirical analysis is based on a comparison among three national cases: Milan (Lombardy Region), Rome (Lazio Region) and Naples (Campania Region), which represent respectively high, medium and low economically performing cases in Italy.

<sup>16</sup> Campania, being a “converging target” has received almost 8 billion euro of EU structural funds in the period 2007-2013. Lazio and Lombardy have received roughly 1,5 billion and 1,3 billion, respectively in the same period.



The high amount of EU financial resources granted to the Campania region determines an important difference with respect to the other two cases. While in Milan the offices concerned with “EU affairs” are particularly overloaded by their rush behind the EU calls, and in Rome there is even a duplication of EU offices (operating not only at the central but also at the departmental level), which also witnesses the importance conferred to intercepting EU funding opportunities, this did not emerge in the case of Naples. Indeed, in this case, the EU offices mainly work with the conspicuous EU structural funds and, as a result, are less troubled by the need to participate to the European calls in order to “get money”. In this sense, in Rome and Milan, *strategic usages* related to resource mobilization processes referring directly to the EU seem to be more consistent than in the case of Naples.

Local actors at the subordinate levels often complained for not being able to *strategically* influence political decisions at the EU level due to the fact that the super-ordinate levels are the main “interlocutors” of the EU. As a result, the municipal and provincial levels, as “indirect” resource recipients from the super-ordinate levels are mostly involved in receiving and spending these resources coherently with the objectives and the strategic lines set into the regional planning and without also necessarily having a say into it. Indeed, the room for manoeuvre to influence the regional level often depends exclusively on the goodness of the relationships between political levels. Therefore, generally speaking, the possibility that local actors have to control policy decisions related to EU funds remains quite negligible. The fact that the region acts as a *gate-keeper* of the EU financial resources, by also setting the strategic lines along which to allocate them, might contribute to further amplifying the *power asymmetry* between the regional and the municipal level.

The most striking example in this sense is provided by the Campania region. Indeed, due to the high amount of EU financial resources received by this region, the regional planning of the EU funds has become particularly constraining for the city of Naples. By contrast, on the other side of the continuum, Rome, due especially to its major strategic relevance as Italian capital city, seems to suffer less of this asymmetry, keeping more direct relationships with Europe which strongly impact especially on employment policies.

Beyond the already mentioned “contingency” problem, EU projects are often criticized for several other reasons, first and foremost the “remarkable complexity and the work load” required to participate to EU calls. In this respect, many actors complained about the fact that the bureaucratization of the procedures makes the EU somehow “caged into rules”; this, in turn, contributes to its inaccessibility. Furthermore, the management of the EU projects, especially with respect to the accounting phase, often requires some extra personnel resources, that is nearly impossible to hire in a period of economic crisis which allows no new recruitments



within the public administration. As a result, the central directions might be quite discouraged to present these projects since they usually result into a huge *work overload*, which aggravate the bureaucrats with additional objectives (beyond the ordinary ones) and spending responsibilities without any specific monetary reward or performance reserve. In this sense, the European projects, while producing many advantages for the community, might create “negative externalities” and become a burden for the bureaucrats and the decision-makers. Furthermore, EU projects are also said to be costly due to the difficulty to find the *co-financing quota*.

*Political resources*, especially with respect to blame avoidance mechanisms and multilevel games, emerged as the second most important EU resources both in the case of Rome and in that of Naples. On one side, some actors hold responsible the EU for operating as a massive constrictive power that *de facto* impacts negatively on the local spending ability. On the other side, other actors blame the Italian Government for being “subjected to EU’s decisions” without being able to negotiate more “advantageous conditions” which would eventually make it less hampering the Internal Stability Pact (i.e. a Stability Pact between the government and the regions).

Apart from the particular political juncture in which most of the interviews have been conducted (Monti government), the continue reference to political resources in these two realities, which, by contrast, did not come out in the case of Milan, is likely to depend on the intensity with which the crisis has struck these more fragile economic contexts as opposed to that of the “richer” Milan. Therefore, it appears clear that discursive references to the EU, as well as to the Italian government, as weighty constraints, are quite spread at the local level in these realities so as to become “political tools” to be eventually translated into *legitimizing usages* within the public space.

To be sure, what said so far does not imply that at the local level a negative attitude towards the EU dominates. Indeed, local actors clearly distinguish the EU “political” from the EU “cognitive” role. In all the three cases Europe is likewise referred to as an entity from which “we can and should learn many things!” and as a real “opportunity to polish and overcome the negative peculiarities entrenched in the Italian culture”.

Indeed, respondents are virtually fully aware of the relevance that EU *cognitive* and *legal* resources hold<sup>17</sup>. While they are not always concretely able to make precise references or provide specific examples for these EU resources, many of them are perfectly aware that this may stem from the fact that these resources are so entrenched (especially in the legislation) to

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<sup>17</sup> Local actors also consider EU projects as a crucial tool through which absorbing EU cognitive resources.



“make it difficult to effectively disentangle what is European from what is not” because “so much is European!”

EU cognitive resources have a relevant impact for the employment policies at the local level (especially in the case of Rome, and more generally, as a by product of the EU directives and guidelines adopted at the national and regional level). By contrast, particularly with respect to the social field, there seems to be more difficulties in translating the EU guidelines into the policies developed due to the still quite “traditional” way to conceive the welfare state in Italy and/or to the fact the EU is somehow perceived as being “too far to correctly interpret our local realities”.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that since the national and regional levels are the main “legislation-makers” and “decision-makers”, also *cognitive usages* mainly occur at these levels and the biggest portion of EU *cognitive* and *legal resources* is handed over the local level via a top-down “legislative” transmission bell or through the “policy windows” which are opened in the national arena by EU ideas, policies, strategies and guidelines.

## 7. The Polish Case

The European Union is often spontaneously mentioned by most of the interviewees at the Polish local level. Indeed, almost everyone declared to have had indirect or direct contacts with the EU, especially through the European projects.

For most of the interviewees at the local level, the EU is often associated with the *financial* resources it provides, which are allocated in accordance to centrally (especially nationally and regionally) established mechanisms. Almost without exception, when asked about the influence of the EU on social cohesion policy, local actors refer to EU funding which turns out to be crucial especially for employment and social assistance policies. Some interviewees underscored that, had the EU funds not been available, many initiatives and/or programmes, and the related institutions needed to implement them, would have not been launched at the local level. Nevertheless, local actors deem that the EU does not affect the strategies of the institutions which operate at the local level<sup>18</sup> but it mainly results in an expansion of the tasks performed, the amount of people reached and the services offered.

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<sup>18</sup> An exception is constituted by the Voivodship Labour Offices. Indeed, the bureaucrats working in these offices recognize the crucial role played by EU *cognitive* resources.



Instead, the empirical analysis<sup>19</sup> shows that the availability of the EU funds deeply impacts on the relations between institutions at the various levels of government. In this sense, *financial* resources are often played as *political* resources since they are used not exclusively as tools to expand the range of activities and programmes to implement at the local level, but also as instruments to increase the role and significance of one political level against the others in multi-level games.

To be sure, it is worth underscoring that the decentralization process in Poland (see WP2 Polish report) occurred in two steps: they were initially created the municipalities (*gmina*), which were equipped with numerous competences and funds, while *poviat* (sub-regional level) and *voivodship* (regional level) were established only a few years later and were assigned a negligible amount of economic resources and competences, which were mostly related to control and regulation. Furthermore, due to a lack of direct power over the municipalities and the high inter-institutional competition between *voivodship* and *poviat* even these functions could not be fully and effectively carried out.

Nevertheless, the EU funds have quite radically altered the *power asymmetry* between levels, because the *voivodship* level performs precisely the task of allocating the EU economic resources, this resulting into a strengthening of its political relevance and into a redefinition of the relationships between levels.

In addition and, as a result of that, the process of resources allocation might provoke several tensions between institutions. Indeed, it appears that the *voivodship* level is progressively tightening the procedures for the apportionment of the funds, by also trying to affect to a larger extent the choice of the goals and target groups to be financed. Indeed, while up until a few years ago, before allotting money, the regional level mainly based its controls on checking whether the procedures were formally observed or not, it has now come to set the policy priorities and the target groups and, in doing that, it often refers to EU requirements, ideas and guidelines in order to justify its choices.

In this sense, not only the EU *financial* resources, but also the *cognitive* ones, become inextricable from the *political* resources: blame avoidance mechanisms are employed into *legitimizing* usages, to strategically steer the expenditure of the EU funds accordingly to *voivodship* priorities and augment the inter-institutional weight of this local level of government as opposed to the others. In turn, the more cogent setting of the priorities on behalf of *voivodship*, as well as a more and more stringent imposition of evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, has also resulted into an enhancement of its competences and

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<sup>19</sup> The analysis covers three Polish *poviat*: Częstochowa, Toruń and Słupsk.



capabilities as controller.

Summing up, despite the role that the EU effectively holds in the stiffening of the controls over the spending, it should not be underestimated that its being constantly kept as the unique responsible for that, is also the result of *strategic* and *legitimizing* usages related to inter-institutional games.

EU *institutional* and *cognitive* resources cover a special role in Poland as opposed to the other countries analysed in this report, due to the strong pressures for adaptation and the conditions that had to be met in order to be admitted into the European Union. The accession process in Poland, which ended in 2004 with the inclusion of the country in the EU, was preceded by carefully planned preparations. To this end, several training programmes took place: many of the interviewees declared to have participated to trainings to become acquainted with the complexity of the EU institutions, its directives, and fund management techniques. Furthermore, many projects were carried out within the PHARE<sup>20</sup> programme, which was an important experimental moment to become familiar with EU funds. Many interviewees spontaneously referred to their first contacts with the EU during the pre-accession period, talking about the concerns and hopes they had at that time: the former were mainly connected to the arduous bureaucratic procedures imposed by the EU and/or a resistance to change due to the difficulty to modify deeply entrenched working habits; the latter were related to the socio-economic opportunities that the accession to the EU would open. The role of EU *cognitive* resources has never been so crucial in Poland as in that moment in which “we were all learning”.

Despite the groundwork, when Poland accessed to the EU the bureaucrats found themselves thrown into a new reality which implied a large involvement in several EU projects. In this sense, the “appearance” of the EU *financial* resources, and their further increase after the accession, have deepened even further the pressure to acquire new skills and cognitive resources, and develop institutional capacities. Indeed, the “project-method” to which the apportionment of EU funds is linked is said by interviewees to have strongly enlarged the cognitive and institutional challenges at the local level. In particular, the development of the knowhow and the introduction of organizational changes at the local level are often referred to as being *strategically* indispensable especially to mature a viable method to deal with EU projects in order to further enhance the possibilities to gather EU financial resources.

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<sup>20</sup> The PHARE programme, originally created in 1989, is one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the EU to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union.



Nevertheless, the EU *financial* resources are far from being considered uniquely as an opportunity. By contrast, many local actors underscore the extent to which these resources come with many negative side effects, first and foremost linked to the bureaucratic rigidity associated to EU projects<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, the latter are often referred to as being a source of additional obligations, assignments and responsibilities for the bureaucrats who have to manage them without being released from their ordinary tasks and without being rewarded with an extra remuneration. Additionally, EU projects are often considered as temporary and their effects impermanent. In this sense, it often happens that the new programmes and activities launched with the EU funds have to be suspended once the project ends and someone also expresses the opinion that “had the EU resources been given to us without being linked to these projects, the results would have been exactly the same”.

Therefore, a certain frustration and *scepticism* towards the EU emerges. Many respondents denounce that the expected changes which the accession to the EU seemed to disclose, especially with respect to the social and employment fields, are far from having been fulfilled. Despite most of the interviewees recognize that EU funds are very noticeable, especially with respect to social policies and acknowledge that “if the EU funds were not available it would have been even worse because we would not have been able to help all the people we helped”, there is also a mounting awareness that having more money is not a sufficient condition for doing more and better: “money by itself does not solve all the problems” but also other ingredients, such as good ideas and institutional capacity, just to name a few, are crucial to implementing effective social cohesion policies. Nevertheless, it is also worth underscoring that interviewees rarely consider their (limited) competences or the inefficiencies of the Polish administrative structure a source of shortcomings; by contrast, the EU is often designated as the main cause of problems, especially due to its rigid bureaucratization.

Summing up, the influence of the EU at the Polish local level is perceived as being quite observable and it is mainly related to *financial* resources. Despite knowledge of European guidelines and directives is in fact very limited, the pre-accession and the relatively recent accession has made and continues to make relevant European resources other than financial and especially *cognitive* and *institutional* resources. Beyond the obligation to learn and/or build new administrative structures imposed by the accession process, these resources are often deployed according to *strategic usages* in order to gather even more financial resources. One interesting aspect that emerged in the Polish case is that Europe is often referred to as a *political* resource for blame avoidance mechanisms that are displayed not only towards the general public but also between institutions in multi-level games. In this sense, *cognitive*

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<sup>21</sup> It is not a case that, even the bureaucrats who cover an important role in the management of the EU projects often distance themselves from their performed tasks, which are described as something external.





resources (e.g. EU guidelines), as well as *financial* resources (especially budgetary constraints) and *institutional* resources (especially monitoring and control rules) are often used strategically as political tools to increase one's room for manoeuvre in multi-level games, which make it crucial also the *legitimizing usages* at the Polish local level.

## 8. The Swedish Case

In Sweden, labour market policy is a centralized policy field; policies are articulated by the national government and implemented by the local offices of the Public Employment Service (PES). However, municipalities are also engaged in activation, mainly related to clients on social assistance. This means that in fact a dual system of policies activation exists (Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2013; Garsten, Hollertz, Jacobsson 2013). A constitutional right to local autonomy also counteracts any attempts to make municipalities mere implementers of national policy. Due to local variations, it is also interesting to compare local policy approaches in municipalities within Sweden.

Previous research (e.g. Jacobsson 2005) has emphasized the good “fit” between the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the Swedish labour market policy approaches. The European strategies have brought little new in terms of policy thinking. Also the ambition of policy integration, organizational partnerships and coordinated policy delivery has a long tradition in Sweden at the local level. As a result, there is no reason to see the EU as driving these developments or as spurring organizational or policy change locally.

Empirical analysis<sup>22</sup> confirms that the European dimension of activation and social cohesion is by and large invisible at local level in Sweden, which of course does not mean that it is non-existent or non-influential. Indeed, the impact of the EU on the local level is mainly mediated by the national level. Thus, local actors can be more influenced by Europe than they are aware of. Anyway, most of the interviewees clearly showed a quite manifest “distance” from Europe and lack of awareness about it. Just to illustrate, when asked if she was aware of any European processes or European initiatives that affect their work locally, one informant responded: “What do you mean?”. Another one said: “I never thought about that”. In addition, many did not understand the questions about integration, and they typically found the European level irrelevant for policy coordination. Most of them seemed not to have thought about it before. Their focus of attention was national policy as well as their local challenges and work.

The EU is mainly present at the local level through its *financial resources* and, more precisely, as

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<sup>22</sup> The analysis is based on qualitative interviews with practitioners and policy-makers in Nacka (well performing city), Trollhättan (under-performing city) and Örebro (average performing city).





a provider of funding through the ESF. ESF projects are perceived by local practitioners as useful, mainly for introducing new methods and new ways of working, but with a too high administrative “price tag” attached to them. Another advantage stated is the fact that ESF projects force various parties to cooperate, which that may have not done otherwise. The flipside, again, is the “extreme administration” and “Stalin-like control”; this is considered so disproportionate that some actors “seriously consider never to apply for ESF money again because it is not worth the work effort”. Another problem reported with ESF projects is that only those with benefits can take part in EU-projects since the benefit lifted by the client is counted as co-financing and the payment from the ESF is related to the number of participants. If a client gets a job and disappears, this is perceived as a problem and not a success (because of the financial loss). Moreover ESF-projects require almost full-time participation in order to be economically sustainable, and participants (with health-related and other complex problems) are often able to get involved so little time as not to make ends and means meet. Furthermore, EU projects are often too costly and staff-intensive to be implemented in the regular work afterwards, which decreases their potential relevance for local practice.

The ESF-funded projects seem primarily to compensate for the lack of resources in the regular work of the organizations in question. Because they have more resources at their disposal, ESF-projects enable more individualized approaches in relation to the selected target groups and allow to fund somehow more costly activities which the ordinary work cannot afford to finance. The target groups are mostly persons with complex problems and little attachment to the labour market, such as people with psychological problems. For this group, the standardized interventions of the PES are less suitable. However, the “projectification” of these measures means that there is a risk of reduced continuity, and the typically run projects have little effects on the regular work after the project period (as they are typically more staff-intensive and costly).

The stakeholders in Nacka have deliberately decided to stay out of ESF-projects<sup>23</sup>, while in Örebro they are engaged in ESF projects but express doubts as to whether it is really worthwhile and in Trollhättan they are slightly more positive as to their participation in ESF projects, based on long experience of such participation. In order to be able to make use of this potential financial resource, previous experience and skills in project administration is needed, which is available in some of the studied municipalities (Trollhättan) more than others (Nacka). Another variable explaining the difference of involvement in ESF-projects between the case

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<sup>23</sup> The main reason stated is that the EU projects are too bureaucratic and time-consuming an exercise to be worthwhile. Another reason for opting out of EU funds is the fact that their requirements are not well adapted to the target group in question; more precisely, the EU projects require full-time participation in the programmes while the target groups typically do not have full work capacity and do not fulfil the requirement.



studies is the socio-economic context: for example, since economic resources are not perceived to be a major problem for the local work, Nacka does not have enough incentive to participate in EU projects as opposed to Trollhättan.

As it was mentioned before, the European dimension of activation and social cohesion policies is quite negligible at the Swedish local level. Indeed, the three case studies show that knowledge about the EES has only to a little extent “trickled down” to the local level (and the OMC social inclusion even less so). Local actors are by and large not aware of EU processes or initiatives. Nevertheless, there are examples of local actors participating in trans-national learning exercises and exchanges of experiences, knowledge and ideas that can be directly or indirectly related to the EU, which indicate cognitive usages. Also related to cognitive or discursive impact and usage, labour migration and mobility are two issues that informants associate to the European level. Generally speaking, the capacity for making use of the European cognitive resources available seems dependent on individuals with interest and knowledge about the EU system.

European labour market policy discourses, however, have limited impact on the day-to-day work locally. For instance, employability is not a policy concept used locally but rather “work capacity” and “to be in activity”, “to be active” or “to participate in activities”. As one informant said: “we talk about activities. Not to be passive but to be active, those terms we use”. Activation as used in academic discourse is not a practitioner’s concept in Sweden. Even so, stricter activation principles have been implemented in Sweden the last decade across policy fields, in the unemployment insurance, as well as in the health insurance and the Social Service Act (see Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2013). However, in the local work and discourse, to be active in one way or another is what is important, as a first step to get closer to the labour market. Likewise, partnership is not a practitioner’s concept in Sweden; the established term is *samverkan*, understood as something in between coordination and cooperation. This has a long tradition in Sweden, preceding the EU membership and processes. At national level in Sweden, there have been recent reforms to achieve coordination across policy fields and to avoid that individuals “fall between the cracks” and to foster inter-agency cooperation and partnerships (see Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2013), such as the coordination unions (see Garsten, Hollertz, Jacobsson 2013). This is in line with EU policy but not necessarily driven by EU policy; rather, we would argue that national policy needs have been the decisive factor for this.

Summing up, despite it was found little evidence of the EU playing a role in policy development at local level, the EU, through the ESF-projects, do fill a role in policy delivery. This role is mainly to cover up for failures in regular service delivery and to provide additional resources which can be spent as to pursue more individualized policies than it would be possible otherwise. In this



sense, EU *financial* resources and *strategic usages* are the most crucial at the Swedish local level. Nevertheless, as approaches developed in ESF-projects typically are not implemented in the regular work afterwards, the impact of the EU on day-to-day work remains limited. Furthermore, the usage of EU financial resources mainly occurs when a possibility arises and when one has a specific problem to solve. By contrast, if the resources do not match an identified need (such as the identified target-group), other domestic avenues and resources are used instead.

As for *cognitive* resources, there is some evidence of ideational inspiration from Europe, as some local actors participate in transnational learning networks. By and large, however, the EU is not very present in discourses locally and it has been found no evidence of blaming the EU, neither of justification or legitimation with reference to the EU. Furthermore, it has not been detected any use of the EU as political or institutional resource. The local level is where the informants consider policy integration and coordination useful and appropriate, and the EU level seems to them too abstract and distant from their daily work and, with only a few exceptional voices, the EU is considered as irrelevant for policy integration and coordination. The national policy level, on the other hand, is seen as relevant, besides the local level and, in this sense, the European impact on the local level is mainly mediated by the national level. Therefore, local actors can be more influenced by “Europe” than they are aware of.

## 9. The “Local Usages” of Europe

From the analysis which has been made so far it clearly emerged that the EU *financial resources* are by far perceived to be the most crucial EU resources at the local level. In particular, the structural funds, and more specifically the ESF, hold the most significant share among the EU financial resources.

Despite *strategic usages* were found to be the most important usages at the local level they appear prevalently related to the effort to increase the amount of financial tools available rather than to that of influencing policy decisions by expanding the local level access to the policy process. Indeed, the predominant centralization of social cohesion policies formulation, and the consequent involvement of the local level especially in policy implementation and/or service delivery leaves this level with low margin of manoeuvre for influencing policy decisions at the upper levels (being them regional, national or European).

The cases of the UK, Italy and France are noteworthy in this respect. Indeed, the fact that funding for local programmes delivered from structural funds comes from the upper levels



(national and regional levels) has often *overshadowed* the local actors degree of freedoms at the subordinate levels with the consequence that in some cases they might arrive to perceive themselves as mere “resource recipients”.

As a result, local actors have few possibilities to directly interact with the EU level, and what is more, they do not feel directly influenced by Europe because they are “overwhelmed” by national and regional policy prescriptions and strategic orientations – despite these might come as a result of an alignment to EU guidelines, directives or “soft” regulations. In France, EU resources, including the financial ones, are often considered as constraints rather than opportunities also because local actors have to implement national policies, which are influenced by EU policy prescriptions; in turn, these national policies are often perceived as being related to the increase of controls and evaluation mechanisms.

Summing up, the fact that the central level acts as *gatekeeper* of the EU financial resources and policy decisions, might contribute to amplifying the *power asymmetry* between the central and the local level and reduces not only the influence of the local level over the other levels of government, but also, the “perceived” impact of the EU over the local level.

Many factors determine the ability to effectively use and the extent to which the EU financial resources are used: socio-economic factors, the amount of available funding, the extent of the necessary *co-funding* an organization has to contribute out of its own budget, institutional factors (e.g. availability of administrative support structures and knowhow).

Nevertheless, the *policy configuration* plays a role as well, and, in some cases, it also determines the extent to which the EU is perceived as impacting on the national and local levels of government. For example, the case of Germany is very peculiar because the use of the ESF is also facilitated by a policy alignment between the programmatic aims of the ESF and the overall approach of the German minimum income scheme.

Instead, with respect to the way in which EU financial resources are employed it emerged a remarkable difference between Italy and Sweden. Indeed, while in Italy local policy makers often “go after EU calls through a senseless race” in order to gather money, in Sweden, the EU financial resources are especially devoted to pursue more individualized approaches and if they do not match a specific need or an identified target-group, other domestic avenues and resources are used instead. This different approach to EU resources is likely to stem from the different availability of national resources as well as the different local socio-economic characteristics and needs which eventually cause the ESF to play a smaller or larger role.

Also EU *legal, institutional* and *cognitive* resources, rather than being considered important *per se*, are often deemed essential in order to *instrumentally* gather money from the EU. Local



actors deem useful and, thus, might have an incentive to acquire knowledge of the EU policy prescriptions, guidelines, communications and programmes in order to ensure that their projects fit them so as to increase their chances to obtain financial tools, achieve their agenda and realize their goals. This instrumental learning process is especially displayed in the French case where, as already mentioned above, some local actors arrive to consider the European influence at the local level as an “influence under obligation” mainly “forced” by the lack of financial resources: this influence is thus mostly perceived as a burden and/or a constraint rather than an opportunity.

Generally speaking, while actors at the local level might be virtually aware of the relevance that EU *cognitive* and *legal* resources hold, they are mostly not concretely able to effectively make precise references or provide specific examples for these EU resources. To be sure, the effective and concrete knowledge of this kind of EU resources is *de facto* quite negligible at the local level. In particular, the capacity of making use of EU cognitive resources seems dependent on individuals’ background and *leadership* factors (France, Italy, Sweden). Nevertheless, in all the cases analysed many local actors are conscious that it is quite difficult to track down the EU “cognitive influence” at the local level. Indeed, especially in UK, Italy and France many respondents spontaneously recognized that this kind of influence mainly occurs through the intermediation of the national and regional levels, which are the main “legislation-makers” and “policy-makers”. As a result, also the cognitive usages mainly befall at these levels and the biggest portion of EU cognitive and legal resources is handed over the local level through a top-down “legislative” and “policy” transmission.

The perceived impact of the EU cognitive resources (as well as the economic resources) at the local level is also strongly related to the national *policy structure*, as is well exemplified in Sweden and UK. In the British case it emerged that the EU seems to be following the UK in terms of policy directions, particularly as for labour market policies and welfare-to-work reforms; if this might, on one side, facilitate the fit of local programmes with structural funding requirements, on the other side, it contributes to decreasing the European impact of EU principles and guidelines. Likewise, in the Swedish case, the “fit” between the European Employment Strategy and the Swedish labour market policy, seems to have brought little new in terms of policy thinking, thus making almost invisible the European dimension of activation and social cohesion at the local level.

Therefore, the *alignment* between national and EU policy structures seems to cause a twofold effect: on one side, it can facilitate the employment of the EU *financial* resources (Germany, and, to a less extent UK); on the other, it can contribute to increase the perceived insignificance of the EU cognitive resources at the local level (Sweden and UK). And also, in policy misfit cases



(such as Italy and Poland), the outcomes may be different, depending on the degree of available funds (making, for example, Naples more similar to Polish cities than to Milan).

EU financial resources are the main vehicles to disseminate the EU policy perspective and spread the EU cognitive resources. Indeed, not only, as mentioned before, local actors might have an incentive to acquire EU cognitive resources in order to gather money, but also, by participating to EU projects (and thus, spending EU money) local actors can “absorb” new ideas, develop new working methods, managerial styles, policy approaches, etc. Nevertheless, with no exception in all the cases analysed the respondents emphasized the extent to which the effects of these projects are often impermanent and temporary rather than structural, and participating to them often results into a huge (and unpaid) work and responsibilities overload for bureaucrats. Indeed, EU procedures and monitoring mechanisms are almost unanimously considered too rigid and were defined with a variety of negative adjectives (e.g. cogent, burdensome, prosaic, pedestrian, ridiculous, disproportionate, etc.). Therefore, EU excessive bureaucratization and “burden of formality” contributes to make Europe a distant, abstract, far away, if not “inaccessible”, entity.

EU *political* resources, and consequently, *legitimizing* usages, did not come out as relevant at the local level, with the only exceptions of the Italian and the Polish cases. In particular, in Poland, financial and cognitive resources are often played as political resources to increase the role and significance of the regional political level against the others (sub-regional and municipal) in inter-institutional multi-level games; accordingly, blame avoidance mechanisms are employed into *legitimizing* usages to augment the inter-institutional weight of the regional level over the others. Likewise, in Italy, they are often displayed blame avoidance mechanisms and discursive references to the EU, as well as to the Italian government, as weighty constraints which impact negatively especially on the local spending ability.

It is possible to infer that the use of the European resources and their corresponding usages (especially other than strategic) appear to be strongly linked to the phase of the policy cycle. Indeed, policy development is likely to cover a much broader spectrum of resources and usages than policy implementation and service delivery. As a result, due to the centralization of the policy formulation as for social cohesion policies, national and, to some extent, also regional actors mobilize more European resources, and with a stronger intensity, than subnational actors. In this sense, the overwhelming importance of the EU financial resources and the strategic usages detected at the EU local level should not come as a surprise.



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