

Zimmermann, Katharina: *Active inclusion funded by Europe? The impact of the European Social Fund on local social and employment policies*. Paper to be presented at the 12th Annual ESPAnet Conference. Oslo, 4.06.-6.06.2014.

Abstract: During the last decades, scholars in Europeanisation research have intensively studied 'softer' forms of Europeanisation in less regulated fields such as social and employment policies (Lopez-Santana 2009, Heidenreich/Zeitlin 2009). 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 can truly be stated, the question arises whether the multi-level aspect and the relationship between the EU- and the subnational level have been underestimated within Europeanisation research. Here, the EU concept on active inclusion plays a key role, since it integrates three different aspects: unemployment benefits, labour market- and social services. These dimensions have traditionally been organised at different politico-administrative level in the majority of the member states, and are therefore highly sensitive to multi-level governance approaches.

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 structural funding leads to an increasing relevance of the EU active inclusion framework in subnational social and employment policies. The paper will build both on governance literature (among others: Bache 2008) and Europeanisation approaches (Woll/Jaquot 2010, Graziano 2012). The relevance of the ESF as an EU steering instrument for establishing a certain governance framework focusing especially on active inclusion will be analysed in 18 local cases in six different welfare systems (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Poland and Germany). A Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) on the basis of in-depth case study research conducted in the framework of a FP7-project (LOCALISE) will be applied.

Preliminary findings indicate that the ESF has achieved to become a crucial financial incentive for local actors in social- and employment policies for making use of the EU active inclusion framework. However, the role of the ESF especially for linking social and labour market services is strongly related to institutional factors and local governance traditions. The paper aims at further elaborating these results and identifying relevant conditions for local usages of EU active inclusion policies. 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 welfare state debates.