

Thin and Thick Europeanization of Polish Local Politics and Policy Making

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The article discusses the impact of EU integration on the policies formulated and implemented by Polish local governments. Its analytical framework refers to Börzell & Risse's concept of the levels of Europeanization distinguishing between absorption, accommodation, and transformation. The article discusses the impact on administrative structures, goals of local policies, as well as on the styles of policy preparation and implementation. It concludes that the level of absorption is the most often found form of adaptation. However, sometimes changes initiated as a plain absorption evolve gradually into deeper transformation of local politics.

Key words: Europeanization, Poland, local government, local politics, policy making, policy implementation, structural funds

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1. Introduction

The nature of expected EU impact on the regional and local levels has been extensively discussed in the literature concerning Western European countries (Goldsmith, Klausen, 1997; Tofarides, 2003; Leonardi, 2005; Frank et al., 2006; Hamendinger, Wolfhardt, 2010, etc.).

Goldsmith and Klausen (1997) in their pioneering study of the impact of European integration on local governments indicate three levels of interaction. The first one, called direct impact is related to compulsory adaptation to the legal requirements produced by the European institutions: for example, rules of public procurement, labour code or application procedures related to European structural funds available for local governments. The second level, indirect impact, means local governments have to comply with requirements of European policies. This is related, for example, to environment protection (e.g. directives related to sewage and solid waste management), consumer protection etc. The third level (called by Goldsmith and Klausen third order impact) is related to the general change of environment in which urban governments operate as a result of European integration and globalization. Goldsmith and Klausen identified four types of local governments' attitude towards Europe: counter-active (sceptical), passive, proactive (innovative) and reactive (followers).

However, there has been much less systematic research to what extent the processes noted in New Member States (MS) recall earlier (and sometimes parallel) experience of the Western part of the continent. Existing analyses concentrate mostly on the impact on the state level (e.g. Grabbe, 2003) or on the pre-accession period and its relationship with regional policies (e.g. Keating, Hughes, 2003). There are very few case studies, such as Budapest (Tosics, 2010) and Ljubljana (Pichler-Milanović, 2010), or an interesting study of the impact EU on regionalization in South-Eastern Europe (Bache et al., 2011), but in the English language literature there is a lack of a more comprehensive reflection.¹

The paper refers to the extensive literature on the broader phenomenon of Europeanization, especially to the analysis of learning processes induced by the EU (Radaelli, 2003) and the level (depth) of the EU impact (Börzell, Risse, 2003; Bache, 2008).

In the literature about Europeanization, two streams of analysis can be distinguished (Bache, 2008; Börzell, Panke, 2010): (1) top-down, on how

¹ For such a conceptual reflection in the Polish language, see Lackowska, 2011.

European integration and EU policies influence the behaviour of national and sub-national institutions, and (2) bottom-up, on how national and sub-national institutions act at the European level, trying to influence European policies (e.g. Wolffhardt et al., 2005). The paper concentrates on the first understanding, thus leaving aside, for example, regional governments' activity in Brussels (e.g. Goldsmith, 2003), European networking of large cities (such as Eurocities) etc. In this paper the term Europeanization will be understood as transformation in (regional and local) institutions, including change in formal organizational structures, change in the ways of operation, but also change in the formulation of policy priorities or change of the system of values, which has been a result of the EU policies.

The paper focuses on the first two levels of the EU's impact (Goldsmith, Klausen, 1997), referring to the »third order« impact only sporadically. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive analysis of the processes in the whole region. Such an analysis would require an extensive international research project. The ambition of the paper is more modest: it indicates characteristic examples of Europeanization, showing the diverse characteristics of the multi-dimensional phenomenon. Although the author has made an effort to incorporate examples from various countries of the region, the main stock of empirical evidence is based on Polish experience.

2. Europeanization of Local Politics – Conceptual Framework for the Analysis

There is no doubt that the EU has an impact on sub-national governments. It may be noticed, for example, through the increasing importance of EU funds for local government investments. Such an observation does not indicate the depth of changes induced by the implementation of European cohesion policy at the regional and local levels. In order to present such an analysis, on a theoretical level the author will refer to the concepts of Europeanization discussed briefly in the introductory section. In particular, he refers to the distinction between thin and thick learning processes (Radaelli, 2003) as well as the distinction between absorption, accommodation and transformation (Börzel, Risse, 2003) as levels of Europeanization. The top-down Europeanization will be taken into account. One of the dimensions of Europeanization that has been extensively discussed in the academic literature concerns the promotion of partnership in European funded projects (e.g. Geddes, Bennington, 2001; Geddes,

Le Galès, 2001; Tofarides, 2003; Marshall, 2005). The creation of partnerships supporting local policies may be related to various levels of adaptation, as defined by Börzell and Risse. This article is going to look at policies of Polish local governments from that perspective. The analysis will take into account not only how much funds they absorb but also the depth of the impact of EU-funded projects on the ways local politicians formulate their policies and the extent to which they change the way policies are implemented. Some earlier research suggests that changes in local governments of Eastern Europe have often been limited to the level of absorption. Bernt (2009: 755–756) in his study of East German cities notices partnerships formed as »grant coalitions rather than growth coalitions«. Nikolova (2011: 681) made similar observations on building partnerships in Bulgaria. Marinov and Malhasian (2006) generalize the observation on most of new MS countries saying, »In new member states partnerships are essentially formalistic, an arrangement that emerged as a reaction to external requirements«. Tosics (2010: 138) in his analysis of changes in Budapest concludes: »The main driver of the changes is the aim to absorb as much project money as possible; less the modernization of the functioning of administration. The adaptational pressure coming from the EU institutions is not strong enough to modify significantly the institutional structures and power relationships ... The spread of new governance practices is very slow.«

Tosics indicates thin institutional changes, for example the creation of new organizational units dealing with EU funds, which do not lead to the more substantial evolution in the operation of local governments. Considering the classification of Börzell and Risse, it can be said that there is accommodation, not transformation. Similar observations are brought by Bache et al. studying process of absorption of EU funds in Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia, concluding that for what can be found in those countries »consultation is a more accurate description than partnership« and »that learning ... has generally been of the 'thin' or strategic variety. Domestic actors have complied with EU requirements primarily to ensure the continuing supply of funds and/or to enhance membership prospects«. (2011: 135, 137).

The framework used in this paper on the one hand refers to the concept of Börzell and Risse and at the same time tries to look on adaptation of local governments through three perspectives:

- Change in the structure of public administration (first of all at the local and regional tiers, but also at the national level, if this change has a significant impact on local governments);

- Change in hierarchy of goals and priorities in local government policies;
- Change in the style of policy preparation and policy implementation.

If both perspectives have been taken into account, the framework presented in Figure 1 can be designed.

The empirical part draws upon the results of several research projects conducted within 2008–2012 period.² The projects have been selected in the way that their results help to understand the evolution of various types of sub-national governments: regional and municipal, being both big urban and small, rural governments. The referred projects applied various research methods, including quantitative analysis of statistical data, discourse analysis of official documents, and case studies research using semi-structured in-depth interviews as well as surveys based on the questionnaires.

Figure 1: Europeanization of local and regional governments – analytical framework

	Structure of administration	Goals (priorities) of local policies	Styles of policy preparation and policy implementation
thin	Absorption		
	Accommodation		
thick learning	Transformation		

Source: Author's own development based on Börzell, Risse, 2003 and Radaelli, 2003

² The following research projects are referred to: (1) Distressed neighbourhoods in policies of big cities (grant No. N306053137 from the Polish Ministry for Academic Research and Higher Education, research conducted in 2009–2010); (2) Pre-school education in local government policies (within the framework of the research programme Improvement of strategic management of education at the local and regional levels, the study of pre-school education was conducted in 2011), (3) Local government beneficiaries of Sectoral Operating Programmes (grant No. DKS/BDG-II/POPT/179/11 from the Polish Ministry of Regional Development, research conducted in 2011–2012).

3. Europeanization and the Structure of Administration

The accession period and functioning within the EU have led to several organizational changes in all tiers of the Polish public administration. In 2005, the new Ministry of Regional Development was created, with its main goal to steer the proper absorption of EU structural and cohesion funds. At the regional level, separate units dealing with EU funds have been created in all regional government offices. The same applies to the most of medium-sized and big cities. The only exceptions are town halls in the smallest municipalities, which often employ only a dozen or less than a dozen of administrative staff. In such small organizations, there is no space for separate units focusing on EU funds. In the case of small municipalities, there is usually only one person who is responsible for preparing relevant applications and who also has some other duties in their job description.

This change is something more than absorption; its permanent character suggests the use of the term accommodation. However, it may also happen that the change in administration goes to the level of transformation. Implementation of the urban regeneration programme in Gdańsk financed by the EU structural funds provides a good example of such a situation.

Local authorities in Gdańsk realized that their administrative structures did not fit well with the management of integrated area-based initiatives (see discussion in Swianiewicz et al., 2011: 143–144, 217). The system of information collection had been traditionally organized along sector logic (roads, water-sewage, education etc.), but it had been very difficult to collect complex information on various sectors, which would be related to the selected fragments of the city. This difficulty resulted in an idea to appoint local coordinators responsible for individual parts (neighbourhoods) of the city. The decision by the Mayor of Gdańsk, introducing an apparently small organizational innovation, was made to respond to the EU programme-required integrated approach to policies towards distressed neighbourhoods. This approach has its roots in URBAN initiative implemented by the EU in 1994–2006 (see Frank et al., 2006). The ideas of integrated programmes addressed to particular parts of the city were present in Polish local governments before the EU accession as well. Nevertheless, only access to structural funds that could be used to implement those programmes allowed materializing the general idea and simultane-

ously showing the necessity of re-thinking the organizational structure of administration. This process might be described as transformation, according to definitions used in this article.

Changes in the structure of administration, influenced by the access to EU funds, are very common in Poland and most often may be interpreted as accommodation, but in some cases, one may also identify the elements of the thick learning or transformation.

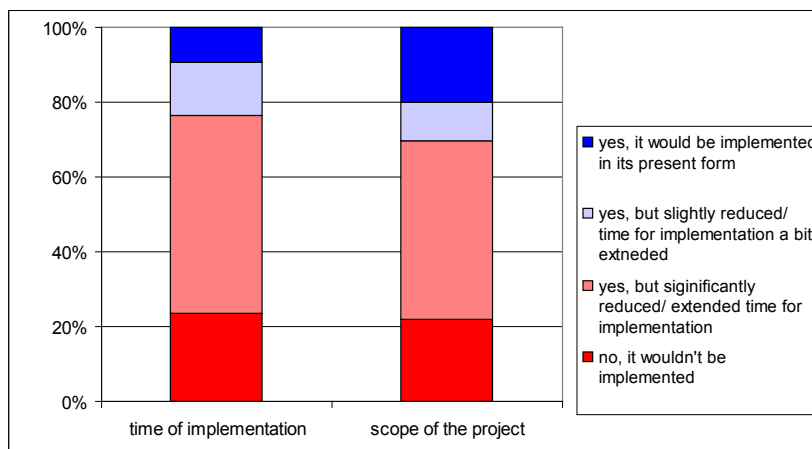
4. Goals (Priorities) of Local Policies

In this case, observed changes are related to various policies. They are discussed in relation to two cases: policies of urban regeneration and pre-school education.

4.1. Projects Seen as »the Most Important« by the City Mayors

Polish sub-national governments, similarly to the other new MS, are increasingly dependent in their investment policies on grants provided from EU funds. In the case of Poland, this »dependency ratio« has been growing, and in 2011 close to 30 per cent of all capital spending was funded by grants from the EU operating programmes (Swianiewicz et al., 2013). The dependency is much higher if those projects perceived as the most significant by the local mayors themselves are taken into account. In 2011 and 2012, 46 Polish mayors were asked to indicate projects that had been the most important for development of their cities (Swianiewicz et al., 2013). As many as 89 per cent of named projects were implemented with the support of grants from EU programmes (Regional Operating Programmes were mentioned most often). Mayors were also asked what would happen if no EU co-financing were available. Would projects be implemented on a smaller scale or in a longer time-span? Alternatively, would they be totally abandoned? The answers are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Expected changes in the priority project in case of lack of EU co-financing (N=132, answers of 46 Polish mayors)



Source: Świaniewicz et al., 2013

The material gathered through the survey of mayors and in-depth interview allows us to formulate the following conclusions.

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The availability of EU funds for the concrete priority lines formulated in the operating programmes, changes the perception of what priorities of local governments are. That explains why over 20 per cent of projects, which are nowadays seen as the most significant for the cities, would not be implemented at all, in case of the lack of support from EU funds. Reduced scale or slower pace of implementation of priority projects might be explained by the limited financial resources of local governments. However, such frequent declaration of the possible total resignation from the projects denoted as the most significant, suggests that the demand for them has been partially generated by the availability of EU funds allocation.

It can be concluded from the interviews that the sector structure of the priority projects has also been influenced by the availability of funds. In particular, some mayors declared that their city would not decide to implement some of the »soft projects« related to culture or education, if the funds in relevant lines of operating programmes were not available. Such an adaptation sounds like a very thin Europeanization (absorption level), but the fact that some of these projects are later perceived as very significant for the cities suggest a case of gradual change from thin to

thick learning processes. It reminds of the classic process described in the theories of top-down Europeanization: at the beginning, the modest adaptations are stimulated by the willingness to avoid penalty or to access the prize (EU funds). After some time, these adaptations become internalized by the way of thinking (consciousness) of beneficiaries. The process described above is well reflected in the following quotation from the interview with an employee of one of the institutions responsible for the management of one of the operating programmes:

»My dream related to submitted projects? Less money, but better quality of the projects.

But that depends on the potential beneficiaries and their applications ...

– Yes, to a large extent. But surprisingly, we may have a big impact on what they submit ... through the formal criteria ... Through the change of criteria we can often influence their priorities.«

4.2. Policies of Urban Regeneration

The first example of the impact of EU on priorities of local policies is provided by urban regeneration programmes. Although Muzioł-Węclawowicz (2010: 17) notices that »it does not seem appropriate to claim that urban regenerations has started in Poland only after EU accession«, there is no doubt that structural funds, especially allocated to the 2004–2006 Integrated Regional Operating Programme (IROP) and later to 2007–2013 Regional Operating Programmes (ROPs), have significantly contributed to making these programmes more popular, and especially to passing from the preparation of programmes to their actual implementation. Most big cities prepared their Local Revitalization Programmes (LRP) following the criteria formulated in IROP and ROPs and fitting with their time horizon. The authors of the programmes often admit that chances of their implementation are to a huge extent dependent on the EU funding. Those cities that decided not to prepare LRP (for example Gdynia) argued that they had not developed the programme due to the low amount of expected funding which could be obtained. This is a very powerful illustration how thinking about urban rehabilitation has become dominated by the logic of application for EU funding. Some of the developed programmes consist of the list and description of projects which have a form of applications almost ready to submit for external funding, and they openly admit that the programme will not be implemented in case of the failure of application. At the same time, these urban rehabil-

itation programmes are usually the only interventions aimed at supporting distressed neighbourhoods. Therefore, it can be said that bringing this topic into local political agenda has been related to the existence of the European funds.

This may be illustrated by the research results in the cities of Gdańsk and Bydgoszcz. Urban rehabilitation programmes have been prepared exactly to apply for European funds, and their time horizon has fit with the EU financial perspectives. The interventions planned within the programmes have reflected the criteria written down in the IROP and RPO. It also concerns delimitation of neighbourhoods that would be the subjects of policy intervention. Possibility to absorb the structural funds can be seen as the crucial motive for developing and implementing the programme. It is especially clear in the case of Bydgoszcz, where the council resolution changing the Local Urban Rehabilitation Programme³ directly admits that the programme has been prepared to apply for funds available in Priority Axis 7 »Support for changes in cities and areas requiring rehabilitation« within the Regional Operating Programme for 2007–2013. In Gdańsk, the preparation of the urban rehabilitation programme was influenced by RPO and its practical implementation was dependent on successful applications for EU funds. What we could hear in one of the interviews is quite telling: »Let's be sincere. As in other Polish cities, only after EU funds had been released, something concrete started to happen.« (An employee of the local government administration in Gdańsk).

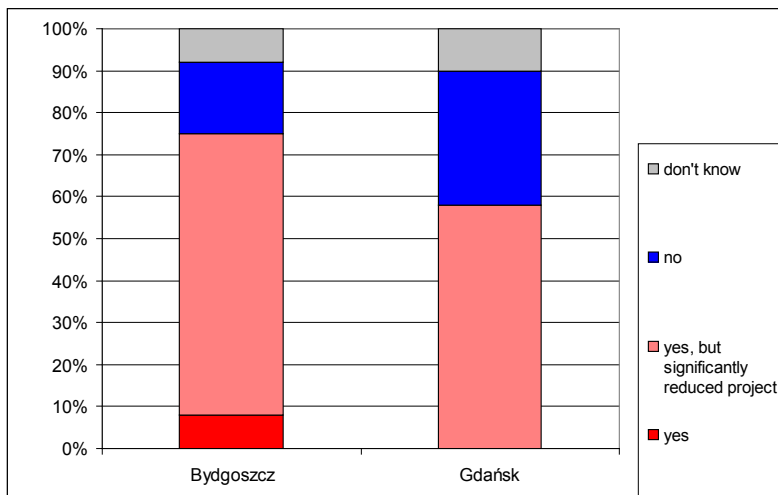
This observation is also confirmed by the results of the questionnaire conducted with local politicians, administration and other people involved in the development and implementation of urban rehabilitation programmes. Most of them admit that in case no EU funds were available, the programme would not be implemented, or it would be seriously reduced (see Figure 3.).

Comparing regeneration programmes implemented with the support of IROP and later ROP funds with our theoretical framework, it can be seen that in many cases opportunity to obtain grants was the primary motive of the programme. This is the absorption level of the process of Europeanization. It also happened quite often that applying for EU funds was a beginning of the process in which the role of issues related to urban re-

³ Uchwała nr LXVI/1018/10 Rady Miasta Bydgoszczy z dnia 26 maja 2010 r. zmieniająca uchwałę w sprawie Lokalnego Programu Rewitalizacji dla Miasta Bydgoszczy na lata 2007–2015.

generation was gaining its political importance, which marks the gradual shift from the absorption to transformation level.

Figure 3: Would city decide to finance similar regeneration programme without support from the EU structural funds? (per cent of answers)



Source: Swianiewicz et al., 2011: 188

4.3. Policies Related to Pre-School Education

The second example is related to pre-school education in rural areas. The starting point of the observation can be described in the following way:

- (a) Access to pre-school education was very poor. In 2009, only 1/3 of children in Polish rural areas attended any kindergarten (Swianiewicz et al., 2012);
- (b) parents' interest in pre-school education was rather low, but it was growing. Media information indicating positive correlation between attending kindergartens and development of children was among the factors of that social change;
- (c) the place of pre-school education in the ranking of political priorities of rural governments was very low. The issues of local roads' network, water provision, and primary schools were seen as much more important. This claim is confirmed by the results of the survey conducted in 2011 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Intensity of discussions on various issues in the local councils: opinions of mayors and councillors

	Mean score of the »temperature« of discussions (1–4 scale)	% answers »discussions are very intense«
Local Road – construction and maintenance	3.80	81
Charge for communal services	3.04	37
Decisions related to land-use planning	2.81	27
Changes in primary schools' network	2.45	33
<i>Operation of kindergartens</i>	2.73	22
Operation of local culture institutions	2.58	13

Source: Swianiewicz et al., 2012

(N = 100, sample of local governments from five Polish regions).

Access to EU funds available for opening new kindergartens should be seen considering the background described above. As many as 800 projects related to the development of kindergartens had been financed from the Operating Programme Human Capital (OPHC) by the end of 2011. The total value of the EU grants was close to 500 million Polish złoty (ca. €125 million). Over 80 per cent of these projects were implemented in rural areas (see also Table 2). The pressure related to the willingness to use available funds, as well as the pressure of parents who learned that similar funds had been obtained in neighbouring municipalities, led to the increasing number of applications from rural governments. The applications were often prepared in partnership with societal organizations (foundations, local associations), so the programme also stimulated the change in the style of local policy making (this issue will be further discussed in the following chapter). However, the new kindergartens often imply a change in parents' attitudes. Even 10–15 years ago, it happened that rural kindergartens were closed because of parents' lack of interest in pre-school education. In the recent years, the situation has changed dramatically, and even parents staying at home (for example unemployed) are interested in having their children in the kindergarten. The mayor of a small, mountain rural government described that change in the following way: »The main reason to close the kindergarten was that there were only 10–12 children attending, three-, four-, and five-year-olds together ... Nowadays, in the same village there are several times more parents who are interested in having their children enrolled. This confirms the change in parents' consciousness.«

The change of parents' attitude has also led to the change in the hierarchy of local government priorities. Even if grants from OPHC allow financing the operation of kindergarten in a relatively short period (usually two years), the closure of a newly opened institution is hard to imagine. A considerable share of local governments declares that future maintenance of the institutions may be a problem (see Table 3). Nevertheless, most of them are determined to continue the functioning of new kindergartens. It means that the EU grants have irreversibly changed the priorities of local policies. One of the mayors (from the region with one of the lowest kindergarten attendance rate) describes the process in the following way: »Looking from today's perspective and demands, I cannot imagine not having a kindergarten in our municipality. We will conduct relevant analysis after the vacation period. Most probably, we cannot afford the kindergarten in every village, but we need to maintain at least one. The question is, and we need to discuss it with the council: Which one?«

Table 2: Projects related to new kindergartens (financed from OPHC, April 2011)

	Size of grants (million zloty)	Number of projects
Total	488.97	805
Cities of county status	50.01	47
Rother cities	43.09	74
Mixed, Urban-rural municipalities	92.11	189
Rural local governments	299.63	495

1 euro = ca. 4.1 Polish zloty

Source: Author's calculations based on the database of EU funded projects, available at www.mrr.gov.pl

Table 3: In some local governments, kindergartens are financed by grants from EU funds and there might be difficulties with further financing after the end of the EU-funded project. Does this problem concern your municipality? (Answers from rural local governments)

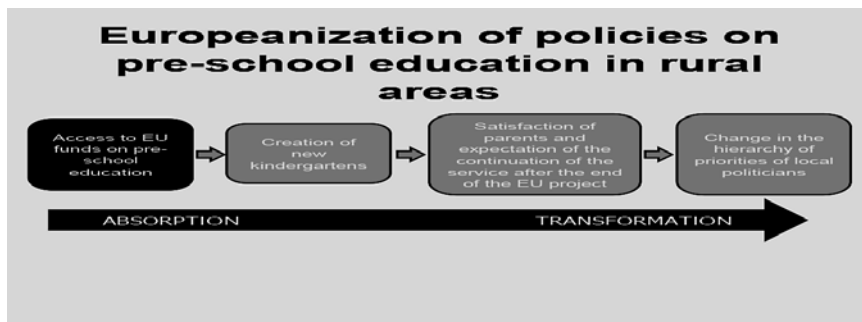
Yes, it may be a serious problem	14%
Yes, but this is a minor problem	22%
No, I do not think it might be a problem	64%

Source: Survey of local government politicians and staff (N = 194) (Swianiewicz et al., 2012)

The change initiated by the structural funds seems to be irreversible, although the attitudes of local governments towards the future pre-school education policies are diversified. They vary from »we hope that there will be the next EU programme which will provide further financial support« through »we do not know what is going to happen next« to »we have to find resources in our own budget«. To be precise, there is another attitude that has been noted during the field research: we do not apply for EU grants for kindergartens because parents would get used to the new service and we would have problems with its maintenance in the more distant future. In some regions, the available funds have not been disbursed exactly for that reason.

Similarly as it was in the case of urban regeneration projects, at the beginning the absorption level of Europeanization (the funds are available, so we apply for them) can be seen. However, the long-term effect of the projects is the durable change of priorities of local governments, which can be interpreted as transformation of the policy. The process of change may be summarized as in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Europeanization of policies on pre-school education in rural areas



Source: Author

5. Styles of Local Government Policy Making and Policy Implementation

Implementation of EU-funded projects often requires adaptation to the EU-promoted model of policy making and policy implementation. The source of these rules may be found in horizontal policies of the EU and/or in various documents adopted by the EU Commission. For example, in

relation to urban policies one may indicate methodological assumptions of the URBAN initiative and several EU level documents, such as the 2000 Lille Agenda. This paper has referred to some of the dimensions of the promoted model:

- Integrated strategic planning: Necessity to demonstrate the relationship between the planned activity and wider strategic goals, which requires earlier preparation of strategic documents. In the case of urban regeneration projects, the specific kind of such a strategic approach is concentration on the integrated neighbourhood projects, promoted since URBAN initiative. Such an integrated approach includes complex interventions covering economic, social, environment and physical infrastructure aspects of neighbourhood regeneration;
- The style of policy preparation including wide social consultations and various forms of community involvement;
- Partnership in project implementation. It involves partnership of public institutions (which includes cooperation among tiers of governments, going along with the concept of multi-level governance) and non-public actors (both local businesses and societal organizations).

It would be unjust to suggest that these ideas have appeared in Polish local and regional governments exclusively because of their involvement in the implementation of EU cohesion policy. However, there is no doubt that the appearance of EU funds has contributed to wider popularity of the promoted model, and sometimes the application process was the main engine of their implementation. The examples of similar changes may be found in other countries of the region. Sootla and Kattai (2011: 591) describe how the access to EU funds facilitated partnership style of policy making and professionalization of local government administration in Estonia. Similarly, in Bulgaria, the EU integration has promoted the idea of inclusive policy making (Nikolova, 2011).

Nevertheless, the depth of the changes was diversified. One may ask to what extent these ideas influence the consciousness of local staff and politicians and how durable may be the changes in the styles of local governments' operation? As it is suggested by the cases discussed in following paragraphs of this paper, the thin learning process (term suggested by Radaelli, 2003) has been dominant so far. Referring to Börzell and Risse (2003) concept: the most typical is the absorption level, in which

local governments try to access EU funds, but without a deeper change in modes of operation and goals of institutions that implement the projects. However, there are also exceptions to this rule, demonstrating deeper transformations in policy making and implementation.

5.1. Policies of Urban Neighbourhood Regeneration

It does happen that city governments try to tailor the language used in their neighbourhood regeneration programmes to the expectations of the EU Commission (and related formal requirements of operating programmes) in a way that does not reflect the real transformation of policy making. The language and content of the programmes are totally subordinated to the tactics of application for funds. Such a phenomenon often concerns the rules of neighbourhood selection, public consultations, the principle of partnership in policy making and implementation, as well as the requirement of integrated strategy (including physical, social, economic, and environment dimensions of regeneration).

When we start to read the Local Neighbourhood Regeneration Programmes, the basic approach to revitalization looks very comprehensive. General goals usually include economic, physical and social dimensions. For example, the starting definition of the Regeneration Programme of Bydgoszcz says that it is »a multi-year programme of actions related to technical, social, economic and ecological dimensions, aiming at liquidation of crisis situations and providing a ground for the development of the selected areas«. ⁴ However, this comprehensive approach to the regeneration of Bydgoszcz neighbourhoods is not confirmed in practice later in the document. The concrete projects included in the programme are almost exclusively physical investments in infrastructure and housing renovation. There are very few social projects. Moreover, their connection with the goals of regeneration is very doubtful; in fact, these are not area-based interventions, since they cover the whole territory of the city. ⁵ It seems that the city government has added several social projects,

⁴ LPR-B, Local Revitalisation Programme of the City of Bydgoszcz, 2009.

⁵ In Bydgoszcz, it is difficult to find additional programmes focused on the social dimension of revitalization of the »priority areas«. We were able to identify one such programme focused on the support for the schools with the poorest results in the final exams (such schools are located in the »problem districts« of the city). Nevertheless, this programme was one-time intervention implemented during one year only, with no intention to be continued (the leaders of the education department in the city explained to us that

which it wanted to be co-financed by EU funds, but their relevance for social regeneration of the concrete areas is almost negligible. Interestingly enough, Bydgoszcz has a clear set of indicators for monitoring the revitalization process, and this set includes variables related to social change, but it is never explained in the documents how the physical change alone can influence the values of these indicators. Is it a silent assumption that more attractive urban land will be purchased by private investors, more affluent residents will move in and current citizens will be re-located elsewhere? Or is it an assumption that nicer urban environment will have a »magic« influence on people, who would not be willing to commit any crimes or drink alcohol in such a nice place? One can only guess, since the authors of the programme neither discuss the possible impact nor try to address the social problems directly by their policies.⁶

Nevertheless, the above conclusion should not be generalized. The situation in Gdańsk is significantly different.⁷ An analysis of the projects written in the Gdańsk Urban Regeneration Programme shows there seems to be a similar bias towards the investment in infrastructural and housing projects, but there is the social component as well. Moreover, since most of the investment funds have been eaten-up by the new priority Letnica neighbourhood (which is located close to the major Euro 2012 investment and is important in the city's promotion strategy), the actual implementation of the programmes in remaining priority areas is unexpectedly focused on soft, social projects.

It is widely (at least verbally) accepted that programmes addressed to specific areas should be prepared in a way which involves various stakeholders. Despite the fact, that both Regeneration Programmes contain information on public consultation, only in Gdansk we managed to get

their intention was to focus on the best schools and the most talented pupils in the following years).

⁶ One of these »social projects« is the creation of a new faculty at the local university. One of the city hall officers asked about the expected positive influence of the project on social condition of the neighbourhood told us that the effect is obvious »students will come to the neighbourhood, they will need some services, they will be doing shopping at local groceries ...«. This is a good example of the neo-liberal way of thinking about »social« initiatives, very typical for the political elite in Bydgoszcz.

⁷ In June 2010, there was a big »Congress of Cities Revitalization« organized in Kraków, during which several cities presented their programmes. It is very telling that both presentations from Bydgoszcz did not mention the social dimension at all, concentrating exclusively on physical investments in public space and infrastructure. It is a clear contrast with Gdańsk, which had as many as four presentations on the same congress, and all of them either focused on, or at least considered the social dimension.

some reports on the outcomes of the consultation (e.g., data from surveys conducted with residents of areas covered by the programme, documents referring to the discussions with relevant NGOs, etc.).

Bydgoszcz is an example of a more common approach, where the information on results of public consultation process boils down to several press releases presented in the appendix to the Regeneration Programme. In Appendix 2 to the Bydgoszcz Regeneration Programme, we see identification of provision of information to citizens with consultation («a wide information campaign, i.e. the consultation» – as we read in the document). If we locate such an approach on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, we deal with »open authoritarian style«, which is not considered as »interactive style« of policy making. The main element of »consultation« was recruitment of local businesspeople and other potential beneficiaries of the projects, who could provide their own matching funds and develop the application for the relevant component of the EU-funded Regional Operating Programmes. During this stage, the city organized training for potential beneficiaries, which was treated as an important element of the consultation phase. There was also a public meeting with citizens but it was organized after the selection of the main areas of intervention. The meeting was of a more informative than consultative character. The other attempts at consultation were made in a very simplistic way; in the best case, there was a public announcement that the city was awaiting opinions, with no organized way of encouraging different stakeholders to express them.

It seems that the main motivation for organizing any consultations was the formal requirement of the EU programmes. As it was explained in one of the articles in the local press: »because the funding has been provided by the EU, it was necessary to conduct public consultations« (Rewitalizacja Dworcowej, 2009). One of the top-level politicians told us in an interview: »To be frank, we do not need them (consultations with NGO), because we know exactly what should be done.« Referring to theoretical concepts mentioned in the introductory section, this is a clear example of thin Europeanization or absorption.

Once again, the approach of Gdańsk is quite different. The preparation of the programme was accompanied by massive public consultations (including survey of citizens, focus group interviews and meetings with citizens), conducted with the support of sociologists from Gdańsk University. In addition to the urban regeneration programme, the city is also involved in the separate social programme »Open Dolne Miasto«, which

is a partnership of 18 NGOs and the city government. The programme is in fact a bottom-up initiative of NGOs, and the role of the city is facilitation and coordination as well as financial support for proposed projects, rather than initiation of the programme. More precisely, this role of the city has been mostly performed by an employee of the city's »unit for urban regeneration«, who has taken a lead in the programme. Her activity has been passively supported (or rather accepted?) by the administrative and political leaders of the city. It is difficult to assess whether social and cultural focus would be present in the programme if not for the NGOs' initiatives. It is not to say that the process of public consultation in Gdańsk has been fully successful. According to the survey of citizens (see Swianiewicz et al., 2011), a significant number of citizens do not feel that they are well informed about city government's policies towards their neighbourhood and many citizens do not trust that the plans would be actually implemented. Many residents complain that »there have been too many of these consultations, but nothing concrete is going on. We do not want more surveys but actual investments in our neighbourhood.«

In both cases, the role of city administration is strong. The dominant role in policy formulation is attributed to city hall departments or main political leaders. This domination is rarely questioned by other actors. At least in the case of policy areas that consume much money (investment, infrastructure etc.), the government approach is clearly dominating over governance and partnerships. As mentioned above, only in Gdańsk and only in one part of the Programme, we may observe the crucial role societal organizations have played in policy preparation and implementation. Referring to the context of Europeanization – as revitalisation programmes are most frequently seen as bureaucratic requirement for applying for external funds – strong political leadership, strategic vision and promotion of the area-based approach seem to be unnecessary.

Having in mind the dynamics of the Gdańsk Urban Regeneration Programme, there seems to be a gradual change from the absorption to the transformation level of Europeanization. It may be noted in the gradually increasing attention placed on partnership with local societal actors and change in the focus of the programme – from focusing on physical regeneration only to a more comprehensive approach (including »soft« social interventions). This change has been partially initiated by the city hall, but it is also a reaction to bottom-up initiatives. However, that deep level of Europeanization can be found in few Polish cities only. Absorption and accommodation seem to be dominant, which can be identified with the thin learning process. Some earlier studies concerning the URBAN

initiative (Frank et al., 2006) made the distinction between Northern European countries in which URBAN methodology corresponded with earlier practices of national policies, and Southern Europe in which the promoted approach was a difficult innovation. Following this distinction, one may say that most Polish cities resemble Southern rather than Northern Europe.

5.2. Policies on Pre-School Education

It often happens that a partnership between local governments and societal organization is required to apply for the funds allocated for pre-school education. Such partnership agreements are often initiated by associations or foundations operating at the national (or regional) scale and are not a part of local community. There are the examples of Association »Elementarz« from Katowice or »Edukator« from Łomża, both operating in a couple of regions. It also happens that the funds from the Human Capital Operating Programme act as a catalyst for emergence of new, local associations. One such example is provided by the Foundation »Wzrastanie« (Growth), which has been created with an active involvement of local politicians in one of the counties of south-eastern Poland and which concentrates its activity in the same region. The long-term effect of the projects co-financed by the structural funds is the emergence of new forms of formal co-operation between public and non-public institutions. However, our research suggests that such cooperation is usually superficial and it rarely initiates a deeper transformation in local government operation. The research suggests that absorption of EU funds has rarely led to the increased willingness of local authorities to consult their decisions with local communities. Neither has it initiated new forms of community involvement in local policy making and implementation. In this case, there is the accommodation level of Europeanization (involving formal institutional change), but not transformation.

6. Conclusion: Thick Europeanization as Unintended Effect?

The data provided in the paper prove that the change in local governments resulting from the EU integration and access to EU funds is tremendous. Sub-national investments have become heavily dependent upon grants

from the structural funds and this process concerns not only Poland but most of the new MS. The vast majority of new projects seen as the most significant by the mayors would not be started in the current form without the access to EU funds.

It is clear from several examples described in this article that the change induced by the EU funded projects usually starts as absorption. Willingness to access the available funds is the main motive, but the goals and the ways of their achieving should remain the same. Some evidence from other countries in the region (e.g. Tosics, 2010; Bernt, 2009) suggests that Poland is not a unique but rather a typical case in that respect. However, during the project implementation, the evolution to the transformation level as defined in the Börzell and Risse's concept has been observed. Sometimes this change is unintended. By trying to utilize opportunities related to available funds and undertaking steps necessary to obtain grants, local governments gradually change their way of thinking about the main issue of the project, ways of achieving their goals and sometimes even about the importance of various policy goals. So even if the processes of absorption and sometimes accommodation (where we note durable change of institutional structures) are the dominant levels of Europeanization, there are cases where a more complex transformation is observable. Referring to Radaelli's concept, we may talk about the gradual change from thin to thick learning in the process of Europeanization.

The discussed cases clearly suggest that describing the Europeanization of local policies in Poland through one level of Europeanization (as defined by Börzell and Risse) would be a simplification. In fact, the situation varies depending on the sectors of sub-national governments' operation, and depending on individual city. Some of these variations are illustrated in Figure 5. In the case of pre-school education policies, there is the change from absorption to transformation reflected in the way of formulating local priorities. Similar evolution could be noted in the style of urban regeneration policy implementation in Gdańsk (although in the city of Bydgoszcz the same change is hard to notice). The reasons for the variation between cities and regions might be the focus of a separate, comprehensive research. Some of the observations made during the research projects that have been referred to in this paper, suggest that the transformation might be easier in cities (regions) with more developed civic society institutions and higher level of social capital.

Figure 5: Levels of Europeanization in the described cases

	Structures	Goals	Modes of operation
thin		Bydgoszcz & Gdańsk urban regeneration Pre-school education	Bydgoszcz urban regeneration
	Bydgoszcz regeneration, Gdansk regeneration		Pre-school education
thick learning			Gdansk urban regeneration

Source: Author's development

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THIN AND THICK EUROPEANIZATION OF POLISH LOCAL POLITICS AND POLICY-MAKING

Summary

The article concentrates on top-down dimension of Europeanization and discusses impact of EU integration on the policies formulated and implemented by Polish local governments. Its analytical framework refers to Börzell and Risse's concept of the levels of Europeanization distinguishing between absorption, accommodation, and transformation as well as to Radaelli's concept of thin and thick learning process. The empirical base of the paper is based on the results of research projects concerning: (i) urban regeneration programmes in Polish cities, (ii) local government policies on pre-school education, (iii) local government beneficiaries of various Operating Programmes financed by the EU's structural funds. The article discusses the impact on administrative structures, goals of local policies, as well as styles of policy preparation and implementation. In terms of the impact on the styles of policy making, the analysis includes the impact on strategic management, partnership style of policy preparation and implementation, and the role of public consultation. The conclusion is that the level of absorption is the most frequently found form of adaptation. However, sometimes changes initiated as plain absorption gradually evolve into deeper transformation of local politics.

Key words: Europeanization, Poland, local government, local politics, policy making, policy implementation, structural funds

JEDNOSLOJNA I VIŠESLOJNA EUROPEIZACIJA LOKALNE POLITIKE I LOKALNIH JAVNIH POLITIKA U POLJSKOJ

Sažetak

Rad je usredotočen na vertikalnu europeizaciju odozgo prema dolje te raspravlja o učincima eurointegracije na javne politike koje oblikuju i provode poljske lokalne jedinice. Analitički okvir temelji se na konceptu razina europeizacije T. Börzell i T. Rissea, koji razlikuju apsorpciju, prilagodbu te transformaciju, te na Radaellijevom konceptu jednoslojnog i višeslojnog procesa učenja. Empirijski, uzima u obzir rezultate istraživačkih projekata o a) programima urbane regeneracije u poljskim gradovima, b) lokalnim javnim politikama predškolskog obrazovanja te c) lokalnim jedinicama koje koriste različite operative programe financirane iz strukturnih fondova Europske unije. Raspravlja se o utjecaju europeizacije na upravne strukture, ciljeve lokalnih javnih politika te na stilove priprema i primjene javnih politika. Što se tiče utjecaja na stilove priprema javnih politika, analiziraju se učinci na strateško upravljanje i partnerski stil pripreme i primjene javnih politika te na ulogu javne rasprave. Zaključuje se da je apsorpcija najčešći oblik prilagodbe, ali katkad promjene koje su započele kao obična apsorpcija postupno evoluiraju u dublju transformaciju lokalne politike.

Ključne riječi: europeizacija, Poljska, lokalna samouprava, lokalna politika, stvaranje javnih politika, implementacija javnih politika, strukturni fondovi