

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: counteractive (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.