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European Integration from a Local Government Perspective Theoretical Considerations

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Introduction

Over the last two decades local governments across Europe have become increasingly involved in the European integration process. Every local authority of the member states is obliged to implement European legislation. However, Goldsmith and Klausen (1997:1 *et seq.*) point out that since the 1970s the European Structural Funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), have triggered local engagement with the EU's institutions. Furthermore, since the late 1980s, more and more local authorities and agents have started to lobby EU policy-making processes, and therefore established offices in Brussels.

Local governments have become significant players in the integration process and experience a growing attention from the EU. This is indicated by the upgrading developments of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) since the Maastricht Treaty. The recognition of subsidiarity introduced by Maastricht and then explicitly extended to the regional and local level by Article 5.3 of the Lisbon Treaty shows that subnational arrangements have gained acknowledgement within the Union's policy-making process and can now be legally protected by the Court of Justice. In addition, in Article 4.2 of the Lisbon Treaty, for the first time the EU includes the subnational level in relation to subsidiarity:

The Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and local self-government.

Another sign of the EU's greater acknowledgement of local government can be found in the new economic strategy of the Commission – Europe 2020:

Dialogue between national, regional and local government will bring the EU's priorities closer to people, strengthening the feeling of ownership needed to get everyone involved in moving Europe towards the 2020 targets.

In many EU countries, the regional or local authorities are responsible for policy areas linked to the Europe 2020 strategy such as education and training, entrepreneurship, labour market or infrastructure.

All these developments at the European level have supported vertical and horizontal mobilisation at the local level, whereby local institutions, networks and actors have started to shape the dynamics of integration with their own engagement. This reflects Goldsmith and Klausen's (1997:251) predictions, over ten years ago that there would be a new stage of local-supranational relations. From an academic point of view, however, the question is whether integration studies will or should shift their focus from the supra- and national to the local level of government.

A great variety of case studies look at individual local authorities, certain policy areas and specific aspects of local-supranational relations, such as the implementation of policies, the allocation of funding, local lobbying attempts or local governance networks. Except for the Multilevel Governance (MLG) approach, however, there are hardly any attempts to study integration from a local government perspective in its entirety. Not only would such an approach

have to enlighten single phenomena, such as the Europeanisation of local governments, but it would also have to link a macro-perspective of the EU's evolution with the micro-developments at the local level.

This paper provides a step towards a theoretical framework for the study of European integration from a local government perspective, in which empirical studies can be embedded. Therefore, the paper starts off with an overview of existing research with a particular focus on theoretical considerations. This is followed by a discussion of concepts that are potentially relevant for the subject, such as MLG, Europeanisation, and paradiplomacy and network approach. Finally, the paper explores the capabilities of the Fusion approach to link the evolution of the EU with its impact and responses at the local level. It further offers a set of empirical indicators deducted from different works on Fusion in order to operationalise theory of European integration for its application at local governments.

Theoretical Considerations of Existing Studies

Local authorities take a crucial role in the integration process, since it is their responsibility to implement an increasing quantity of EU legislation, and their policy implementation determines the speed and depth of integration (Goldsmith, 1997:5; 2003:121). Most studies on the EU and local governments focus either on the implementation of European policies and legislation through local authorities, or on local activities aiming at the allocation of funding and the making of policies. As early as 1993 Goldsmith (1993:683) predicted a shift in local governments' attention towards the EU to build European-wide partnerships and networks, to bypass their domestic levels of government and to engage directly with EU institutions.

Fifteen years later Heinelt and Niederhafner (2008) affirm Goldsmith's prophecy arguing that cities have entered the European 'multi-level game'

through specific points of access and partly bypass their domestic political structures. In their study, Heinelt and Niederhafner raise questions of the roles that cities play in decision-making and implementation, and how they organise their activities. Schultze (2003) also looked at the top-down impact of the EU on cities and its corresponding activities to influence different policy areas, such as cohesion, environmental and social policy. Cities, however, are not representative of local governments *per se*, since, as Schultze (2003:122) notes, major cities are far more likely to have the capacities to invest the required financial, political and organisational resources in order to promote their concerns, and to introduce specific departments and officers. Local authorities' economic interest in particular policies and their attention and attitude towards the EU determine the involvement of municipalities in European affairs.

With this in mind, Martin and Pearce (1999:33 *et seq.*) identified a lack in comprehensive studies of EU-related activities of local governments. They argued that instead of providing an overall understanding of differentiated integration processes at the local level, isolated case studies only offer partial insights, which might even deliver contradictory understandings of the phenomena. This view has also been expressed by Goldsmith and Klausen in their book *European Integration and Local Government* from 1997, which up to this point is the only comprehensive account of the subject that offers differentiated theoretical considerations underpinned by empirical studies of a great range of local governments across the EU. Goldsmith and Klausen (1997:5) expressed the need for a theoretical perspective in order to structure the knowledge about the dynamics of integration, which change the practise and arrangements of local government, as well as the relationships between their actors and institutions.

De Rooij's study on local authorities from 2002 provides a good example to illustrate the difference between an empirical framework for the research of local authorities and a theory of integration from a local government perspective. De Rooij (2002:449), similarly to Martin and Pearce, emphasises the different consequences of integration for municipalities dependent on their national context. First, the constitutional position of local authorities within a

member state and the degree of centralisation of competences determines the behaviour of municipalities in relation to the EU. Secondly, there are also differences between local authorities within a member state caused by a different distribution of resources, geographic location or access to relevant actors and institutions. Consequently, De Rooij seeks to establish a general explanatory and empirical context for developments at the local level.

De Rooij derives his empirical concept from three opportunities that integration offered local authorities to promote their interests and influence policies. First, the establishment of the CoR has strengthened the position of local government within the Union's institutional structure. Secondly, European Structural Funds (ESF) have triggered active engagement of local authorities with the EU institutions in order to influence the distribution of funding. Thirdly, municipal associations and informal networks have emerged as instruments for effective interest promotion within the EU's policy-making processes (De Rooij, 2002:450).

According to De Rooij (2002:452 *et seq.*), these features have triggered three dimensions of local responses within this process. First, the EU has a top-down impact on local authorities in the form of policies and funding that have to be implemented. Secondly, there are bottom-up attempts of municipalities to influence European legislation and the distribution of funds via representations in Brussels, lobbying agents and national and European actors. Thirdly, interlinked with the top-down and bottom-up dimension, there has been organisational adaptation within the politico-administrative structure of local authorities.

In summary, De Rooij identifies the main integrative processes at the local level, namely absorption of policies and legislation, pro-active engagement and organisational adaptation. He also provides three causal links for these developments: CoR, ESF and municipal associations and networks. However, he does not attempt to explain the systemic linkages between the macro-developments of integration and the consequential developments at the local level. In other words, even though he offers a well-reasoned set of empirical

indicators, but he does not provide a theoretical framework of integration from a local government perspective.

Such theory would not only have to consider the Europeanisation of local practice and institutions, but it would also have to explore comprehensively how local governments relate to the new system of governance. For Goldsmith and Klausen (1997:5 *et seq.*) integration theories represent a modern version of studies on the building and transformation of states, whereby different approaches need to be combined. Thus, the study of integration from a local government perspective also needs to account for potential loyalties between European and local actors, which may emerge out of mutual exchange and socialising processes through European networks, programmes and projects. In line with Schultze (2003:122), this approach also requires considering the attention and attitude of local actors towards the integration process.

Even though local governments and their agents and networks are far from being the major actors in shaping the future evolution of the EU, in comparison with national governments, their involvement affects certain policy areas and incrementally advances the Union's institutional structure. Examples hereof include the increasing influence of the CoR and the extension of subsidiarity to the regional and local level. Furthermore, local authorities contribute to European multilevel governance by implementing and shaping common policies. Therefore, the next section explores the explanatory and operational capacities of the Multilevel Governance (MLG) approach for the study of integration from a local government perspective.

Multilevel Governance

Contrary to state-centric approaches, Hooghe and Marks (1996, 2001, 2003) argue that in the course of European integration interconnected political

arenas have evolved, whereby power and competencies are allocated at multiple centres of governance. MLG assumes that national governments remain the key players, but that their influence has partly shifted to the supranational and the subnational levels of government, whereby EU institutions, particularly the Commission, have fostered growing involvement of subnational authorities within European policy-making (Hooghe & Marks, 2001:77 *et seq.*).

Before this section looks at the usefulness of MLG to theorise integration for local governments, it should be noted that the idea of multilevel governance has been challenged. First, whilst the *role* of the supranational layer seems to be unquestioned, the *influence* of subnational governments varies across the member states. For Britain, for example, Martin and Pearce (1999:46) stress that local authorities are responsible for the implementation of legislation and may be active when it comes to the acquisition of funding, but only few authorities engage in EU affairs and can expect to have an impact. Considering the strong centralisation of power in Britain, Bache (1998) consequently suggests the term 'multi-level participation' rather than multi-level governance.

Secondly, Jeffery (2000:3) criticises the MLG approach for its failure to address the actual influence that subnational governments exert in EU policy-making, and the motivation and attitudes of subnational mobilisation. For Jeffery, MLG describes the 'physical manifestation' of subnational involvement in EU business, but argues that an approach that accounts for the rationales of subnational mobilisation has to consider intrastate factors, such as the constitutional position. Furthermore, for Jordan (2001:201), MLG offers a description of changing modes of governance but does not provide causal explanations for the existence of governance that can be tested against clear hypotheses.

Overall, there is evidence to suggest that to varying degrees regional and local authorities have become arenas through which important dynamics of political integration take place, and thus, multilevel governance is part of the EU's politico-administrative system. However, though the observations of

MLG inform essential characteristics of the position of local authorities within the EU, a differentiated framework to explain integration from a local perspective needs to take account of the motivations and attitudes behind certain dynamics, determining intrastate factors through comparative moments, and a set of hypotheses at which causal explanations can be verified and falsified. In the following section, the paper examines three concepts, which are valuable as operational tools to capture specific dynamics of integration at the local level – Europeanisation, network approach and paradiplomacy, although less useful in providing comprehensive analysis of the overall subject.

Europeanisation

The Europeanisation discourse links with the analysis of the EU's multilevel governance, as it regards Europeanisation is a means through which multilevel governance is accomplished (Pollack, 2005:348). Although a single definition of Europeanisation has not been established, its terminology commonly refers to the impact of European integration and the corresponding adaptation of activities and institutions within the member states (Vink & Graziano, 2007:3 *et seq.*; Börzel & Risse, 2000:1). Ladrech (2010:9 *et seq.*) for example offers a distinction between three types of Europeanisation of domestic political activity. First, the 'politics of Europeanisation' (Börzel & Risse, 2003:60) means the expression, support or resistance of political actors towards European policies and actions. Secondly, the 'polity of Europeanisation' (*op. cit.*:60) addresses the adaptation of national and subnational institutions, administrations, and judicial and constitutional arrangements to the integration process. Thirdly, the 'Europeanisation of policies' refers to policy instruments that are developed by the member states to deal with European affairs. Shifts of domestic policy style and paradigms are included in this definition.

Another way to conceptualise Europeanisation is by differentiating between top-down and bottom-up processes, which do not stop at the national level, but also shape the relations between the EU and local authorities (Schultze, 2003; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009:312). For the study of cities, Marshall (2005:672) defines 'download Europeanisation' as the changes in policies, practice and preferences or participants within local governance, and 'upload Europeanisation' as the transfer of innovative urban practices to the supranational arena. Whereas top-down or download Europeanisation refers to the impact of the EU's legal and financial instruments, lobbying attempts of local authorities fall under bottom-up or upload Europeanisation (Heinelt & Niederhafner, 2008; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009:312; Rechlin, 2004). Whilst these two forms of Europeanisation describe vertical processes, Marshall (2005:673), as well as Kern and Bulkeley (2009:312) also identify a horizontal Europeanisation of local governments, which means that there is cooperation and mutual exchange of best practice and innovations through transnational networks.

The differentiation between top-down, bottom-up and horizontal Europeanisation as well as between the Europeanisation of politics, polity and policy, gives an understanding of important processes that are part of integration at the local level. However, as Olsen (2002:921 *et seq.*) stresses, Europeanisation represents more of an 'attention-directing device' than an explanatory theory itself, Europeanisation concepts need to be embedded within a wider theoretical context of integration to be able to draw causal explanations of these processes (Bulmer, 2007:46 *et seq.*). Radaelli (2003:33) notes that European integration is an ontological matter, and encompasses the evolution of the EU's political system and the reasons for the pooling of sovereignty. Europeanisation, on the other hand, is a post-ontological phenomenon that comprises specific processes that follow integration. Therefore, he (2003:27 *et seq.*) states: 'concepts are relevant in the context of analytical frameworks, mechanisms of explanation, and theories. Thus, the next step is to make the concept of Europeanisation amenable to empirical analysis and to connect it to the explanation...'

The intention of this paper is to place Europeanisation within a theoretical framework as a specific concept beyond the definition of a general phenomenon that refers to a range of different processes. In doing so Europeanisation would represent a systemised concept with explicit formulations and definitions as advocated by Radaelli and Pasquier (2007:36).

Paradiplomacy and Policy Network Approach

In order to deal with the economic challenges of increasing global interdependencies, subnational governments are building collective capacities, which allow them to operate within transnational regimes, like the EU. The concept of paradiplomacy looks at international activities of subnational authorities outside the control of their central governments. Paradiplomatic activity, thus, is a significant phenomenon in the context of this paper, because Europe's multilevel realities offer local governments opportunities to engage with policies beyond their national borders, for example through the CoR and local government networks.

Supranational and national institutions and actors remain the key players within the decision-making process, and the influence of subnational governments may mostly be limited to the initial preparation of EU policies. However, central governments have lost their monopoly over European policy-making, as they cannot exclude subnational authorities from these processes any longer (Jeffery, 2000:5). Consequently, despite their privileged agenda-setting and decision-making powers, central governments' dominating position within supranational policy-making is challenged.

Schultze (2003:135), for example, argues that cities should promote their interests independently from their national governments and should deploy a 'participative mode of governance' by engaging at the European, national and

subnational levels of government. Schultze (*ibid.*) further suggests: 'this participative mode of governance, which has superseded earlier forms of hierarchical and cooperative governance, implies significant changes to the 'logic of influence' in EU decision-making and a triangulation of relationships in the evolving EU polity.'

Although usually paradiplomacy refers to the involvement of regional authorities in international relations (Aldecoa & Keating, 1999), similar developments also happen at the local level. Therefore, dynamics assumed by the concept of paradiplomacy are relevant to local governments. Keating (1999:8 *et seq.*) identifies two aspects of paradiplomacy, which can be found at the local level. The most common form of paradiplomacy involves to cross-border cooperation based on the common problems and opportunities of subnational authorities. An example is the joint projects funded by the Commission's INTERREG programme, whereby subnational actors can escape the control of their central governments. Secondly, subnational authorities, as well as subnational multi-purpose associations such as the CEMR, develop transnational links and partnerships to identify common interests, which they can promote vis-à-vis the EU. An example of this linkage is the establishment of offices in Brussels by single local authorities and municipal associations, which provide their stakeholders with access to the Union's institutions. (De Rooij, 2002:450).

Paradiplomatic activities of local actors also rely on informal contacts and personal networks, which can hardly be controlled by the state and therefore provide a means to increase local autonomy. Paradiplomacy is subject to a functional logic and to the experiences of effective and cost-efficient practice. Overall, a theoretical framework for the study of integration from a local government perspective would need to consider different forms of paradiplomatic activities of local authorities in relation to EU policies. This would involve vertical and horizontal dynamics, as well as activities that directly address supranational institutions and actors, and indirect activities through regional and national governments, and through transnational networks.

With respect to the important role of transnational networks for paradiplomatic activities (Keating, 1999:14) of local governments, the paper turns now to considerations relevant to the study of local government that are summarised under the policy network approach. European-wide networks are extremely useful for local authorities in order to exert joint control over EU policies by introducing proposals that may serve as references within the policy-making process (Schultze, 2003:135). From 1951, with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), municipal associations of the member states have founded a so-called transnational municipal network. Since the middle of the 1980s, a range of new networks, like EUROCITIES, with direct membership of local authorities have emerged. Kern and Bulkeley (2009:312 *et seq.*) argue that such municipal networks are potential constituents of the dynamics of multilevel governance in Europe. In particular, the Commission has supported local government networks to improve policy implementation, as well as maintaining networks for specific purposes (Goldsmith, 2003:121 *et seq.*). Thus, the policy network approach, which is closely linked to MLG (Fleurke & Willemse, 2006:85) and to paradiplomacy, offers insights for the study of the informal relations between the EU's institutions and actors and local government agents (Goldsmith & Klausen, 1997:9).

Policy networks serve specific actors with common interests as arenas through which their preferences are intermediated. For Eising and Koch (1999:5, 25), the EU represents a network mode of governance, since it follows the logic of problem-solving and consociation for a collective purpose. Hooghe (1996:368) describes this environment in which networks operates as:

The links between central government, interest groups (...), and subnational governmental agencies is a 'game' in which all participants manoeuvre for advantage. Each uses its resources, whether constitutional-legal, organizational, financial, political, or informational, to maximize influence over outcomes while trying to avoid becoming dependent on other players. It is a complex game in which the pattern of links within the policy network can range from the tightly integrated policy community to a loosely coupled issue network.

At first sight, the involvement of local governments within networks depends upon the availability of resources to engage in networks and upon

gatekeepers, such as national governments, that can determine which actors may enter certain networks (Kohler-Koch, 1999:30 *et seq.*). While in some member states, local authorities enjoy greater freedoms and autonomy, in others, their counterparts are more constrained by their central governments (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009:313). Nonetheless, Jeffery (2000:5) suggests:

that a central state monopoly over European policy in a climate of deeper European integration and growing sub-national mobilization is unsustainable and liable to be breached. The maintenance of such a monopoly would presuppose that it is possible to exclude SNAs from European policy-making processes, or at the very least to control their conditions of entry to such processes. This is not the case.

The policy network approach is valuable for the purpose of this paper as it emphasises the role of networks for local governments and provides a context in which activities of local actors take place. Kern and Bulkeley (2009:313 *et seq.*), however, view a network approach as inadequate for the analysis of the role and impact of transnational municipal networks because these networks comprise a more homogeneous mix of actors than other policy networks do. Furthermore, local government networks work in a cognitive rather than a bargaining cooperation style, while policy networks are characterised by resource interdependencies. Finally, they argue that the activities of transnational municipal networks go beyond lobbying attempts and that they include a strong horizontal dimension.

Overall, the network approach provides insights into important processes of the relation between integration and local governments, namely the vertical and horizontal activities of local actors. Nevertheless, the approach only delivers partial insights, because the network mode of governance is not an ever-present phenomenon (Radaelli, 2003:29). Similar to concepts of Europeanisation, Kassim (1993:3 *et seq.*) emphasises that although a wider theoretical concept would need to account for the role intermediate groups and networks, 'the utility of the policy network approach is conditioned by the availability of a macro theory'.

The Fusion Approach and Local Government

The discussion of MLG, Europeanisation, and paradiplomacy and network approach shows that all of these concepts and approaches provide explanations for significant partial aspects of the integration of local government into the EU. Nonetheless, none of the concepts supply sufficient proof for a differentiated theoretical framework that explains integration from a local perspective in its entirety and links it to the evolution of the EU. Whilst the literature on Europeanisation, paradiplomacy and policy networks need to be underpinned by a 'bigger' theoretical approach, MLG provides more of a description of the EU's structure than a causal explanation for the procedural dynamics that drive integration from a multilevel perspective. The intended theoretical framework needs to consider the motivations and attitudes behind the dynamics of integration and offer hypotheses against which its assumptions can be tested. Therefore, the focus of this paper turns to theories of integration to look for the applicability for local-supranational relations.

Although neo-functionalism may explain an increasing involvement of local authorities in the integration process by means of spill-over logic, it largely ignores the dynamics within and amongst member states that shape the EU's political system. Intergovernmentalism, in contrast, focuses on the role of member states within the evolution of the EU, but it lacks in a sufficient explanation as to why member states decide to address their problems through common supranational institutions (Wessels, 1992:38 *et seq.*). More importantly, intergovernmentalism also ignores the role of subnational governments within the integration process and its assumption of the existence of sovereign states does not meet the reality of the complex sub-state structure of local authorities. With respect to the traditional state-centred theories, Wessels (1997:270) argues that the open-end dynamics of European integration have been underestimated. Therefore, even though the academic debate of the Union's federal nature is picked up to some degree at a later point, federalism is not considered as a relevant theory for the paper's

purpose, since there is an absence of developments that lead towards the finalité of an European federal state.

With regard to the study of local governments in the context of integration, Goldsmith and Klausen (1997:10) stated: 'In our eyes the future of integration studies lies in the combination of a number of theories and approaches and in a broadening of the scope of analysis rather than narrowing them down.' Consequently, Goldsmith and Klausen (1997:10) suggested combining a variety of approaches to capture the relationship between structures and actors. Theories of nation- and state-building assume a structural logic to explain the behaviour of actors, whilst integration theories, in contrast, argue that actors develop interests, strategies and activities that determine an institutional dynamic. At the hand of the Fusion Thesis, Wessels (1992:38 *et seq.*) sought to combine the analysis of the change of states (structural logic) with studies on European integration (deterministic, functional logic). The following section provides an outline of selected works on the Fusion approach and links them to the study of local governments. This serves as the basis for the assessment of Fusion's adequacy to deliver the intended framework. Subsequently, the paper explains how the previously discussed concepts are linked to the Fusion approach.

Fusion Thesis

In 1992 Wessels introduced the Fusion Thesis for the first time to explain macro-trajectories of European integration and to link it to the evolution of the West European state. Instead of having isolated, partial concepts dealing with different institutional or policy features of integration, Wessels searched for a 'global' approach through different research fields. Such an attempt is in line with the purpose of this paper for the local level. The notion of fusion aims at a process that goes beyond the mere pooling of sovereignty, and describes patterns of growth and differentiation, through which public resources from several levels of government merge together. Thereby accountability and responsibilities for policy outcomes become blurred (Wessels, 1997:274). Thus, the following considerations explore the to what degree the assumption

of the Fusion approach can be applied for the study of local governments by assessing whether the latter are part of the EU's system of joint resources and blurred responsibilities.

As the impact of integration does not stop at the national level, but also transforms local authorities (as shown above), a framework for the study of the latter increases its theoretical validity by extending its means of a perspective on the macro-trajectories of integration. The Fusion Thesis identifies three major hypotheses or trends on the evolution of the EU and the transformation of the west European states (Wessels, 1997:285).

The dilemma of the welfare state (Fusion I) explains how West European welfare states had become unable to generate the level of economic performance on their own sufficient to provide welfare for their citizens. As a result, states opened up their economies, whereby they lost national sovereignty and became interdependent with regional and global developments. In order to regain sovereignty and control over economic and political influence, states established supranational institutions with adequate problem-solving instruments. By this account, the evolution of the EU is not an exclusively voluntary process and therefore represents a sup-optimal solution. With the transfer of sovereignty to the European level, states (indirectly) promote their own *de facto* and *de jure* erosion. The 'virtuous circle' of the mutual reinforcement of economic growth, the evolution of the welfare state and political stability was turned into a 'vicious' one (Wessels, 1992:41 *et seq.*; 1997:273, 285 *et seq.*).

The dilemma of the welfare state may not be particularly new, but it is supplemented by the multilevel dilemma (Fusion II) which analyses how the EU evolves in a 'third way' between intergovernmental cooperation and a federal solution. This second dilemma suggests that national governments have subscribed to a 'fused federal state' beyond intergovernmental cooperation in order to create effective means of implementation and control of common decisions. Without binding mechanisms, it would not be possible to establish reliable and predictable relations between the actions and policies of actors. Whereas mere intergovernmental cooperation would lead to a *de*

facto erosion, a federal solution, as expected by traditional federalists, would cause a *constitutional* erosion. The notion of a multilevel dilemma implies that national politicians would seek to keep a high level of autonomy and sovereignty, and stay the 'masters of the treaties'. The 'third way' solution with strong supranational institutions and procedures leads to long-term trends of structural growth and differentiation, whereby public instruments fuse and Europeanisation processes take place (Wessels, 1992:43 *et seq.*; 1997:187, 273).

The third hypothesis of the Fusion Thesis is informed by the logic of functional spill-over (Fusion III) as assumed by neo-functionalism. In order to compensate the *de facto* and *de jure* loss of sovereignty, national governments push for new procedures to enable them to participate in supranational policy-making. In addition to the expansion of formal arrangements, the scope of common activities and binding outputs spill over to further policy fields, as national governments, as well as intermediary groups, build consensus and make package deals for the purpose of promoting their own interests (Wessels, 1992:45 *et seq.*; 1997:288). The tension between efficient problem-solving strategies and a 'fair' balance of national influence and participation creates a constant need for institutional reform leading to new more complex packages. Nevertheless, the Fusion Thesis does not expect that these reforms are part of an irreversible, ever-evolving development towards a European federal state with optimal procedural solutions (Wessels, 1992:47 *et seq.*).

The three macro-political hypotheses of the Fusion Thesis are informed by five indicators that mark the major characteristics of European integration: the output of binding decisions; the scope of public policies; the transfer of competencies; institutional and procedural patterns; and lastly, the involvement in and influence of intermediary groups.

Wessels, (1997:277 *et seq.*). notes that first, the growth of binding decisions is an essential dynamic of the integration process, This indicator is highly relevant to local authorities since, because they have to implement a major

part of the EU's decisions, it shows how much they are involved in the integration process,

Secondly, Wessels (*op. cit.*:278) points out that, in addition to the growing number of binding outputs, the scope of policy areas where the EU makes decisions have widened over time and cover not only competition law, but also environmental policy, consumer protection and citizenship issues, monetary autonomy, external defence and internal order. Evidence for this indicator is the increasing number of formations of the Council (*ibid.*). Like the growth of binding outputs, the widening scope of policy areas also affects the practice of local authorities.

Thirdly, Wessels (*op. cit.*:270 *et seq.*) argues that the transfer of competences from the national to the European level through European Treaties and legal decisions indicates the progress of integration. Despite the principle of subsidiarity and the attempts of the Lisbon Treaty to establish clearer divisions between national and supranational competences, the latter are hard to clearly separate between the two levels, and more competences have been actually allocated at the supranational level than are laid out in the treaties. The transfer of competences is not an issue for local governments, but rather for national governments, which decide over the local level. However, the EU increasingly takes decisions that regulate local practice and are potentially subject to the 'new' subsidiarity of the Lisbon Treaty, although this is more a matter of legislative outputs than of a transfer of competences.

Fourthly, according to Wessels (*op. cit.*:280 *et seq.*), the institutional and procedural differentiation of the EU's decision-making structures is a clear indication of the long-term trends of integration. New institutional and procedural arrangements are introduced to deal with the increasing number of policy-makers that seek access to supranational decision-making. The complexity of the committee and working group structure illustrates the intensification of the relationships between national governments and administrations and supranational institutions, whilst an expansion of procedures and bureaucracy goes with it. An example here, relevant for local governments, is the establishment of the CoR and the corresponding

consultation within the initiation of proposals. As local representatives push for access to European policy-making, institutional and procedural differentiation is a potential feature for the study of integration of the local level.

Lastly, the fifth indicator suggests that the increasing involvement intermediary groups, such parties, economic and non-profit interest groups and media within the EU's policy-cycle constitutes another trend of integration. Depending on the policy area, semi-official and informal networks and regional and local authorities push for channels of access to the European level. Regulatory and distributive policies are particularly attractive targets of lobbying attempts (Wessels, 1997:282 *et seq.*). With respect to the deep impact of European policies on local practice and the opportunities to receive funding, local government associations and transnational municipal networks have a particular interest in promoting their concern vis-à-vis the EU's institutions and especially through the Commission, which is encouraging towards them.

Institutional Fusion

Whereas the Fusion Thesis¹ looks at the macro-trajectories of integration and the evolution of the EU's political system, Institutional Fusion focuses on national adaptation processes and responsive activities to integration. Institutional Fusion assumes that, in a 'loop' of adaptation, national governments have pushed for the Union's institutional set-up, which in turn has created a 'pull' from the supranational level to change the politico-administrative arrangements of the member states. As with neo-institutionalism and path-dependency approaches, Institutional Fusion assumes that institutions 'lock in' national interest formation and influence policy outcomes (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag, 2003:3 *et seq.*). The EU's binding outputs lead to a Europeanisation of national institutions and actors, who subsequently adapt their structures and activities to participate effectively in EU decision-making. Additionally, the interests and beliefs of national

¹ Also referred to as the Macro-Fusion Thesis

actors become socialised according to the values, norms and principles of the new political system (Rometsch & Wessels, 1996:351; Wessels, Maurer & Mittag, 2003:14). In a second step, national and European institutions extend and intensify their cooperation, and fuse vertically and horizontally in a common policy-cycle, whereby they jointly exert competences over the use of state instruments, and the responsibilities for policy outcome become blurred. Europeanisation and fusion national institutions, however, do not lead to convergence of domestic polities towards one common model. (Rometsch & Wessels, 1996:328 *et seq.*; Wessels, Maurer & Mittag, 2003:444 *et seq.*).

For regional and local authorities, Rometsch and Wessels (1996:362) predicted that, 'although they cannot really be counted as the 'winners' of the integration process, they can be considered as forceful 'latecomers' who are slowly approaching an institutionalized status in EC decision-making. It will to a large extent depend on their own creativity and effectiveness in the upcoming years to extend this position.' Although Institutional Fusion initially sought to explain developments at the national level, institutional adaptation and the Europeanisation of actors' attention and actions towards policy-developments can also be the response of local governments. The application of Institutional Fusion to the local level would require looking for the links between the challenges of the EU's political system and the adaptation and mobilisation processes of local authorities. Furthermore, the Europeanisation of local actors' attention and the fusion of local authorities into the vertical and horizontal policy processes would have to be considered. Overall, it would need to be considered whether cooperation from the local to the European level intensifies over time so that the responsibilities for policy outcomes become blurred.

Fusion Perspective and the Micro-Fusion Framework

Miles (2007) takes on board the ideas of Institutional Fusion and his own work on Fusion Perspective, which seeks to explain the attitudes of national policy-makers towards European integration, and introduces the Micro-Fusion

Framework. Thereby, he identifies five operational tools to apply the Fusion approach for empirical micro-studies of national governments.

The first indicator of the Micro-Fusion Framework (Institutional Fusion I) focuses on the Europeanisation of actors' attentions and activities. Secondly, Institutional Fusion II seeks to grasp horizontal and vertical adaptation processes of national institutions and procedures in response to integration. The next three differing, yet complementary concepts are based on Miles (2005) work on Fusion Perspective: Performance Fusion (Fusion Perspective I), Political Fusion (Fusion Perspective II), and Compound Fusion (Fusion Perspective III).

Performance Fusion assumes that instead of an idealistic vision of an integrated Europe, policy-makers adopt a pragmatic 'performance-related integration mentality'. Consequently, they accept pooling sovereignty in a common problem-solving arena and the obligations of EU membership to benefit from stronger, supranational policy instruments (Miles, 2005:28 *et seq.*). The same assumption may also apply for local actors, who may support further integration, if they expect it to deliver the desired political and economic results.

Political Fusion seeks to explain actors' preferences for the future evolution of the EU. Based on the Macro-Fusion Thesis, it suggests that national policy-makers are 'pro-supranational integration, yet federo-sceptic.' Thus, they prefer a third way between insufficiently effective intergovernmental cooperation (*de facto* erosion) and a federal solution that would threaten national sovereignty (constitutional erosion) (Miles, 2005:34 *et seq.*). Local actors are largely excluded from the major decisions of the EU's future development, and therefore Political Fusion may be of marginal interest for the local governments. However, particular municipal associations and networks develop positions on the future role of local authorities within the EU, which indicates that the concept has some relevance.

Compound Fusion argues that policy-makers, agencies and relatively low elite specialists from multiple institutions perceive the EU as a compound system that works in conjunction with the member states rather than replacing them.

This system offers public and private actors and networks channels of access and instruments that serve their interests. The acceptance of the compound fusion of competencies and resource relies upon the Union's ability to deliver the expected outcomes without interfering with key national interests (Miles, 2005:38 *et seq.*). Local representatives in participating in the European policy-cycle and do so not only through the CoR, but especially through municipal associations and networks that enable them to communicate directly with the Commission. The question here is to what degree local actors actually perceive the EU as an inclusive system that will promote their concerns.

Fusion, MLG, Europeanisation, networks and paradiplomacy

In this section, the paper discusses the assumption of the Fusion approach in relation to the previously outlined concepts of MLG, Europeanisation, network approach and paradiplomacy. For the latter two, it has been argued that a wider theoretical approach would need to account for the role of intermediate groups and networks, but the explanatory capacities of both concepts depends on a macro-approach towards European integration. Fusion meets these requirements by accounting for the role of intermediary groups and policy networks and by allowing for flexibility to integrate insights of the network approach within its own capacities. Even though Fusion approaches initially focused on the European and the national levels rather than on subnational governments, it has since considered the involvement of subnational actors in the integration process. As horizontal and vertical paradiplomatic activities have increased in time, new works on Fusion have shifted their focus on subnational authorities have acknowledged the notion of paradiplomacy (Lindh, M., Miles, L., Räftegard, C., Lödén, H., 2007). In this approach, bypassing of central governments is an essential feature of a blurred system of multi-level governance (Lindh Lödén, Miles *et al.*: 2009:37), which in turn is an integral part of the Fusion approach.

Fusion and MLG both assume that European integration and the transformation of the member states leads to a shift of powers from the national to the European and to the subnational levels of government. Lindh,

Lödén, Miles *et al.* (*ibid.*) suggest: 'it is not a question of MLG or Fusion...MLG is rather to be viewed implicitly as a part of Fusion.' Like Fusion, MLG argues against a strict separation between domestic and international politics in the context of European policies, since both policy arenas have become interconnected with subnational actors operating outside their national borders (Hooghe & Marks, 2001:4). The Fusion approach, however, takes a more dynamic perspective by assuming that the transfer of competencies between different levels of government leads to a functional blurring of policy arenas and levels.

Furthermore, Fusion addresses themes of integration that are not tackled by MLG, such as the origins and driving forces of integration; the differentiation between policy fields; the constitutional and normative settings determining multi-level governance. Though the entirety of Fusion approaches may provide richer theoretical context to study integration from a local government perspective, the ideas of MLG are present within Fusion. Nonetheless, Fusion's places greater emphasis on the blurring of competencies and resources across multiple centres of governance. Thus, the affirmation of Fusion processes at the local level would not only look at the empowerment of local authorities, but also at their politico-administrative transformation.

Europeanisation as a general phenomenon conditions the fusion of competencies and structures amongst different levels of government (Miles, 2007:9). However, as it has been argued above, Europeanisation as a systemised concept needs to be embedded in a theoretical framework with explicit formulations and definitions in order to link it to the dynamics of the overall integration process (Radaelli & Pasquier, 2007:36). Fusion provides such a framework and defines Europeanisation as the domestic implementation of EU policies and the responsive adaption to integration in general (Lindh, Löden, Miles *et al.*, 2009:38). Even more explicitly, Europeanisation refers to the shift of local actors' attention, whereby there are 'a growing number of national actors experiencing and acknowledging the significance of EU business, leading to a desire to seek 'voice' and for improved participation in EU for national policy-makers' (Miles, 2007:8 *et seq.*).

Conclusion

In the light of a lack in comprehensive studies that include the integrative dynamics of local-supranational relations (Goldsmith & Klausen, 1997:5; Martin & Pearce, 1999:33), this paper has sought to stimulate the theoretical considerations on European integration from a local government perspective. It argues that the Fusion approach provides a valuable theoretical basis for this purpose, since the evolving work on Fusion accounts for politics, polity and policy dynamics and adaption within differentiated and asymmetrical integrative processes Miles (2007:8).

MLG, concepts of Europeanisation, the acknowledgement of paradiplomacy and policy networks are all integral parts of a dynamic framework based on the Fusion literature. Fusion theory supplies a differentiated account for the top-down impact of policies and legislation: the corresponding vertical and horizontal engagement within European integration: institutional adaptation processes at different levels of government (De Rooij, 2002:449; Heinelt & Niederhafner, 2008; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009:312; Marshall, 2005:672 *et seq.*; Rechlin, 2004), as well as the Europeanisation of actors' attention and their attitudes towards integration (Schultze, 2003:122). Through the explanatory capabilities of Fusion, these micro-processes relevant for the local level can be systemically linked to the macro-trajectories of integration and may explore comprehensively how local governments relate to the new system of governance, whereby the intended theoretical framework gains validity. With respect to the developments of the CoR, the involvement of local authorities potentially changes the institutional set-up of the EU, and thereby even shapes the dynamics of integration.

Finally, the previous discussion allows deducing five indicators for a comprehensive empirical assessment of integration from a local perspective: 1) the *binding output* and decisions of EU institutions that affect local government, 2) the Europeanisation of local actors' *attention* towards supranational policies and legislation, 3) *institutional and procedural adaptation* processes at all relevant levels of government, 4) vertical and

horizontal, as well as direct and indirect *action* of municipal authorities in relation to EU policies, 5) local actors' *attitudes* and perceptions in the context of European integration.

At the hand of these indicators comprehensive studies across different member states and different types of local authorities can be conducted.

1) As Wessels, Maurer and Mittag (2003:9) state, the growing number of binding outputs that have to be implemented by local governments is a major indicator for the integration of the local level within the EU. Binding decisions taken by EU institutions, such as treaty articles, directives and regulations or decisions by the European Court of Justice provide a useful starting point from which to draw causal linkages between top-down and the corresponding bottom-up and adaptation processes.

2) The Europeanisation of local actors' attentions towards EU policies (Hanf & Soetendorp, 1998:1; Miles, 2007:8 *et seq.*) can explain the causal relation between top-down, bottom-up and adaptive dynamics. Kohler-Koch (1999:29) suggest that the implementation of European policies lead to a socialisation of practice and to vertical and horizontal mobilisation. Thus, this indicator would work as an analytical bridge.

3) Institutional and procedural adaptation relating to the involvement of local authorities in the integration process occurs at multiple levels and shapes the structure of Europe's multilevel governance. At the European level the CoR, for example, is the result of push-pull dynamic of multi-level governance (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag, 2003:3 *et seq.*), whereby subnational actors seek access to supranational policy-making. At national and regional levels, the institution of new structures and procedures to deal effectively with EU business represents a form of indirect vertical adaptation. Eventually, local administrations and political arrangements initiate changes, such as the announcement of so-called European officers, the introduction of offices in Brussels, or the adaptation of the committee structure within local councils. Most changes at the local level are not part of a push-pull logic, as it is the case for the national level, but depend on the Europeanisation of local actors as assumed by the second indicator. Thus, it may prove useful to distinguish

between voluntary and enforced adaptation processes within local authorities. Furthermore, it is possible to aim for a distinction between horizontal and vertical adaptation.

4) The attention of local actors towards the EU also determines whether local mobilisation takes place or not, as, except for a few local representatives in the CoR, local governments are not formally included in the European policy-cycle. Dependent on their national constraints and the relevance of a policy field for the local practice, local authorities initiate a variety of horizontal and vertical activities to develop common positions and promote their interests at the European level (Lindh, Löden, Miles *et al.*, 2009:39). While indirect activities may address regional and national governments to push for certain the desired developments, local authorities are also bypassing their national arrangements to engage directly with European institutions and actors, such as the CoR, MEPs and civil servants of the Commission. These paradiplomatic strategies involve the participation in municipal associations and informal networks.

5) The last indicator draws on Fusion Perspective (Miles, 2005) in order to understand some rationales of local actors' to engage or withdraw from European integration. Nonetheless, as this approach has been developed to explain the attitudes of national policy-makers, not all of the underlying assumptions are equally relevant for the study of local governments.

In line with Performance Fusion, local actors are expected to adopt a pragmatic view on integration and to support the overall process and accept its obligations as long as it proves beneficial for them. Besides the 'macro-benefits' for local economies and for stability on the continent, funding opportunities and EU schemes to support the exchange of practice have been positively perceived by local actors. Additionally, some cities welcome the EU's instruments to enable them to push for innovative policies in the areas of urban development, climate change and public transport. Although of minor relevance, some local actors, particularly in major cities, municipal associations and networks, have developed partial preferences for the future development of the EU. Thus, it is worth testing Political Fusion at the local

level. Regarding Compound Fusion, the engagement with the EU may not be a local preference *per se*, but a range of local actors appreciates the messy and inclusive structures of the EU, because it offers them flexible channels by which to participate in EU policy-making. Although Fusion Perspective informs significant aspect of local actors' attitudes, this indicator would also have to go beyond explanations at the hand of a performance-related mentality, towards exploring questions of a European identity and loyalty, which may gradually emerge out of mutual learning processes and social and cultural exchange through the participation in European networks, programmes and projects (Goldsmith, 1997:8).

All of the five indicators provide a valuable set of criteria to assess whether local authorities across the EU are on their way to integrate into a wider system of joint resources and blurred responsibilities as assumed by the Fusion approach. Nonetheless, although this paper explored the potential means of Fusion as a theoretical framework to link the micro-developments at the local level with the macro-trajectories of integration, the actual value of Fusion for the study of local governments have to be validated by its empirical application.

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