

Project title: The concept of absorptive and transformational Europeanization of subnational entities on an example of the Local Action Groups in Poland

The project is primarily related to the theoretical and empirical issues concerning the ambiguous concept of Europeanization, defined as “*processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies*” [Radaelli 2004]. This project makes explicit reference to the two extreme types of Europeanization – transformational (or “deep,” associated with “thick learning” – understood in this the project as a change of practices and preferences for new ones resulting from the priorities and recommendations included in the EU programming documents) and absorptive (or “shallow,” related to “thin learning,” understood in this project as adjusting the structures only to the necessary minimum to use financial aid, without the willingness to accept these changes permanently, potentially encouraging the practice of tokenism, i.e. 'pretending' to meet all EU standards).

The main subject of the research in question is territorial partnerships, so called Local Action Groups created to support participative local development and financed with EU funds (there were 322 LGDs registered in Poland, covering almost the entire area country in 2019, usually excluding large cities). The main objectives of this research project are defined as follows:

- 1) engaging in the discourse on clarifying the definition of Europeanization at a sub-state level, particularly in terms of political geography;
- 2) developing a typology of Europeanization, in this project preliminarily based on the concepts of transformational (deep) and absorptive (shallow) Europeanization, in its top-down (downloading), and bottom-up (uploading) approaches;
- 3) developing a methodology for the quantitative measurement of Europeanisation levels (e.g. number of European partners, using good practices from other European countries, level of dependence on EU funds, involvement of local stakeholders, assuming targets related to the Europe 2020 strategy etc.);
- 4) conducting research on the heretofore neglected issue of sub-national actors Europeanization, using the example of associations referred to as 'Local Action Groups,' operating within 'Community-Led Local Development' (which can boast a very rich comparative literature in other theoretical approaches);
- 5) performing a multivariate classification of analysed subjects, based on their 'Europeanization' level (making use of the definition established in the theoretical analysis at the beginning of the project) and the scientific relevance of the analytical efficiency of these measurement methods; performing a regional comparison and original spatial comparison of surveyed LAGs in terms of their Europeanization level, in order to assess the geographical differences involved, along with an attempt to explain their local socio-economic (also cultural) conditioning.

The main discourse will be related to the institutional theory, which explains the phenomena of social and economic processes through research conducted on social institutions (including norms and customs, but also specific organisational forms, such as LAGs). According to Lackowska-Madurowicz [2011], it is the most common way of analysing Europeanization processes. In the discussion of theoretical issues, it also seems necessary to refer to the theory of modernisation, convergence and diffusion of innovation.

The empirical stage will involve an analysis of all LAGs across Poland (nearly 322 units), using: 1) a content analysis of secondary materials (LAGs strategies; statistics from the institutions supervising the functioning of LAGs, the Local Database of the Central Statistical Office, and 2) original questionnaire surveys carried out at the offices of existing LAGs.

Research will be carried out in cooperation of scientists from the University of Environmental and Life Sciences in Wrocław, the University of Wrocław (Poland) and the University of Leeds (Great Britain).