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The Europeanization of Child Poverty Policies on the Local Level

Lisa Damaschke
University of Tübingen
Institute for Political Science
lisa.damaschke@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The risk of poverty is rising in Europe. Especially children and young adults represent a group that is increasingly affected by this negative trend: Eurostat data demonstrate that children in most EU countries are at greater risk of poverty than the overall population (Commission of the European Communities 2008).¹ However, most distributional state measures are not sufficient to overcome those trends. The European Union has tried to make aware of this growing social and political problem by announcing the year 2010 as “European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion” with special focus on children and the youth. Apart from finding better strategies against child poverty for the national level, the EU puts emphasis on the role of the local level for the fight against poverty and social exclusion.²

Child poverty has risen in Germany more rapidly than in any other industrialized country since the 1990s.³ The latest poverty data published by the German Institute for Economic Research (Deutschen Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung/DIW) are alerting because children and young adults still constitute the fastest growing at-risk group (Grabka/Frick 2010). Poverty of children and young adults is regionally divided and primarily constitutes an urban phenomenon concentrated in large cities. Initiatives to prevent and fight poverty as well as social exclusion take place on different political levels in Germany. In addition to (mostly financial) benefits by the national level for the abolition of income poverty, socio-educational and socio-environmental measures are mainly adopted on the local level to prevent and fight child poverty. Apart from the vertical division of poverty measures between the national and the subnational levels,

¹ In the European Union, 19% of children (0-17 years) are at risk of poverty against 16% of the whole population (EU 27 in 2005) (Commission of the European Union 2008: 1).

² Poverty does not necessarily mean financial needs but can also imply social disadvantages in spheres of life such as politics, culture or leisure times. The European Union therefore officially adopted the more encompassing notion “social exclusion” since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997). This shift from poverty towards social exclusion led to a shift of the perspective from lack of resources to aspects of participation.

³ The child poverty rate was 7-9% in the 1990s. In 2004, 13,3% of children (0-17 years) were already considered as poor (UNICEF Deutschland 2009).

there is a horizontal division on the local level between state and non-state/civic actors such as welfare organizations, church facilities or social partners. These non-state actors try to finance their social projects and measures with the help of different partners like municipalities, foundations or companies. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of socio-political competences in Germany.

Figure 1: Division of Socio-Political Competences in Germany

European Level	Federal Level	Regional Level „Länder“	Local Level	Other Actors
Recommendations and OMC	Shared competences in legislature	Shared competences in legislature and administration; ¼ financially responsible	Responsibility for the executive; ¾ financially responsible	Involvement of non-state actors, e.g. stakeholders, welfare organizations

Increasing cut-backs of national state funding have a great impact on the local level. As a reaction, there has been a rise of cooperation between state and non-state actors on the local level and the European level. Local actors extensively try to widen their confines of financial and ideational resources with EU support, such as the European Social Fund (ESF). One of the main objectives of the ESF-Funding is the fight against social exclusion (Kommission der Europäischen Union 2009). Hereby, social inclusion is primarily thought to be realized through a better educational and job integration. Programs for high school dropouts or job trainings were introduced within the German ESF-Funding. The EU-funding is bound to principles and procedures and the EU also often determines the areas, target groups and projects. Local actors must therefore plan and implement their projects according to EU-requirements in order to receive support.⁴ Thus, strategies, objectives and concepts of local actors change as well as the concrete political measures. These processes lead to new governance structures on the local level based on more non-formal settings and contractual cooperations

⁴ Cities have to apply for funding at the national ESF-management authority (ESF-Regiestelle).

instead of legally based standards. Additionally, the focus of EU-requirements on education and job measures has other tremendous consequences for Germany: New education settings emerge where social actors cooperate with educational (mostly school) institutions. These developments constitute a cut to the traditional division between the social sector and the education sector in Germany.

Although there are vast numbers of local projects against poverty that are already initiated and supported by the European level, the political analysis of the EU's impact on the local level suffers from a deficit. With special focus on the case of Germany, my article discusses the Europeanization of poverty policies on the local level. The paper investigates to which extent European strategies have become prevalent locally, demonstrated by the European strategy to use education and job trainings as key instruments for the fight against youth poverty.

2. Concepts of Local Governance: A Rise of the Local Level in the EU?

Approaches of multi-Level governance describe the interactions of relevant actors on different political levels in the EU. These concepts highlight that European policy-making is shared between different levels of government: the subnational, the national, and the supranational level (Marks/Hooghe/Blank 1996). Furthermore, multi-level-governance concepts emphasize that the relevance and influence of non-state actors, such as of private and corporate actors, has risen (Grande 2000: 14). This EU multi-level system is characterized by its non-hierarchical form of governance, in which different actors share authority in policy-making and decision-making processes on different levels of governance. The multi-level system, as an "open" system of interactions and negotiations, favors new opportunities for local actors to gain more political influence. Local actors are not longer exclusively seen as "decision-takers" but also as "decision-makers" (Große-Hüttmann 2010: 119).

In the beginning of the 1990s, surveys showed that the EU's influence on the "political business" of cities was insignificant (Zimmermann 2008). However this has changed: The supranational level expands its scope to the local level. Today, the EU has an impact on almost every policy field in the cities (Knodt 2010):

In the field of **regulative policies**, the realization of the European Single Market and the creation of the European Union influenced the cities in regulations in the field of services of general interests, local promotion of trade and industry, environmental policy, transport policy, etc.

Cities can participate in the field of **distributive policies** in programs of the EU Structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund) and the Cohesion Fund. In the current funding period (2007-2013), the focus on economic growth and employment has risen especially within the ESF.

Recently, the European Commission has tried to implement strategies in the area of **local coordination**. Initiatives are adopted in different policy fields like climate policy (e.g. reduction of carbon dioxide).

Within the **European Urban Agenda**, the urban dimension has a “mainstreaming” character that has to be taken in consideration in different policy areas. Thus, different directorate generals deal with urban policy (Knodt 2010).

In order to adopt new EU policies, the European Commission has to comply with the **principle of subsidiarity**, which directs that matters have to be handled by the lowest competent political authority. The Treaty of Lisbon guarantees the subnational levels a considerate “upgrading” of subsidiarity by highlighting regional and local authority and self-government. Thus, new policies need to be examined for subsidiarity (Niederhafner 2010: 172).

The first question is, why does the EU foster the involvement and participation of local level actors? Scholars underline that the EU can use the local level as source of legitimacy and efficiency (Derenbach 2006). A better integration of cities in the European Union helps to draw attention to the citizens and thus contributes to the legitimacy of EU policies and to the EU system as such (Niederhafner 2010). A better integration also guarantees access into local policy making and helps to use local knowledge about policy procedures. Furthermore, the supranational level can directly address the relevant local actors and can avoid long “policy channels” with other political levels.

The second question is, how does Europe become a new relevant level of reference for local actors? Scholars like Beate Kohler-Koch emphasize that domestic

actors intentionally make Europe become a significant reference point in order to expand their scope of the relevant unit of policy-making and their repertoire for political actions (Kohler-Koch 2000:22). Local social actors are particularly dependent on European input and funding because of a growing pressure for action in the cities (intensifying child and youth poverty, lacking financial resources, etc.). Local actors can obtain new resources, options of action and competences through interaction with the supranational level and can bypass the regional and national levels.

There are different ways for local actors to cooperate with the EU (Knodt 2010):

- Establishment of an EU-office in the city
- Direct representation of interests on the European level by local stakeholders
- Committee of the Regions (3 local representatives)
- Interregional networks of local actors
- Participation in programs of the European Social Fund and Regional Fund

According to Claudio M. Radaelli, the described Europeanization of the (sub-) national level is a process of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of new policies and politics (Radaelli 2004: 3). Changes of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms and norms emerge in subnational discourse, political structures and public policies. These developments lead to the transformation of institutions, changes in the implementation of policies, new constellations of relevant actors and new resources of actors. In fields, in which the EU has only limited regulating power, such as in child and youth poverty policy, the EU tries to influence the local level by “framing” the problems and the policy solutions in order to strengthen the support for European reform objectives. The EU’s financial support is bound to procedures and principles, and the EU determines which areas, target groups or projects are eligible or worthy of sponsorship. Local actors must therefore change their objectives, strategies and measures. Radaelli argues that these soft framing mechanisms “can provide a new dimension to (...) policy problems and trigger learning dynamics and or different political logic” (Radaelli 2006: 43).

However, the process of Europeanization does not lead to convergence or harmonization of cities: There are significant differences to which extent local actors “turn” to the European level, mainly dependent on local resources and local institutional structures. Thus, the EU-induced changes vary and there is a growing asymmetry between cities in the degree of Europeanization.

3. Europeanization of Local Child Poverty Policies in Germany

3.1 Child Poverty in the German Welfare State

In Germany, a public and political debate about child poverty started rather late compared to other countries like the USA, Great Britain or the Nordic States (Becker/Hauser 2003: 25). (Child-) poverty was not an issue for a long time because it was thought to be combated by the welfare state. Until the late 1990s, the conservative government addressed the topic of poverty very hesitantly, claiming that (child-) poverty did not exist in Germany. A debate about poverty began in Germany, simultaneously to an increasing political discussion at the EU-level, at the end of the 1990s. The new coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party introduced national poverty research for the first time in German history. The Federal government presented the first Poverty and Wealth Report (Armut- und Reichtumsbericht) in 2001, at the same time as the first National Action Plan (NAPincl) for the EU. Another catalyst to the debate was the publication of the 10th child and youth report (Kinder- und Jugendbericht) in 1998, which showed that the German government neither recognized nor approached the problem of child poverty.

Germany has been categorized as a corporatist-conservative welfare-state type (Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi/Palme 1998). The German type of welfare is based on a “conservative model of marriage and family life, which traditionally assumes that women do not work, or only work part-time...” (Bäcker et al. 2003: 8). The mother was thought to stay at home in order to ensure the best care of the children. The marginalized public childcare has been characteristic for the German welfare state: Since the Weimar Republic (1920s), there has been a division between child care (*Erziehung*) and education

(*Bildung*). In this “male-breadwinner” system, the mother was responsible for the child care in the private sector while the state had the responsibility for education (schooling) in the public sector. The rejection of state intervention in *Erziehung* was reconfirmed after the 2nd World War based on the experience with the instrumentalization of children and young adults during the National Socialism (Gottschall 2003: 150).⁵ Until today, the school and education sector has just marginal responsibilities to intervene in the raising of children apart from its schooling function. Only local social actors have a restricted public responsibility for *Erziehung* within the child and youth services outside of school. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, social state and non-state actors (e.g. welfare organizations) on the local level have been granted the responsibility for children on a voluntary basis (for leisure time) or for families that do not fulfill their responsibilities in child care. However, local social actors have no right to intervene in school, where the federal states are in charge. The consequence of the division between schooling and social youth services is the marginalized support at school for individual care and cultural as well as societal questions (e.g. there are limited offerings for extra-curricular activities at school).

The separation between social policies and education policies is manifested in the federal structure of Germany. Education policy in Germany is not part of social policy (in contrast to e.g. Scandinavia, Anglo-Saxon countries and the European Union). While the national level has the responsibility for social policy (e.g. unemployment benefits) and health policy, the federal states (*Länder*) are responsible for education policy. Since there are 16 different German *Länder*, this segmentation has led to a great diversity of education policies and to differences of educational outcomes within Germany. (van Ackeren/Klemm 2009: 88; 12th Child and Youth report 2005).

Evaluations by the European Union demonstrate that the German education system is deficient compared to many other EU countries. Additionally, the alerting results of Germany in the UNESCO PISA-study (Programme for International Student Assessment) point out the need for action to support especially poor children and youth.

⁵ There was a different development in the GDR: Here, the institutional division of *Bildung* and *Erziehung* was abolished and the child and youth services were integrated in the resort “Volksbildung” (Gottschall 2003: 151).

This relates to the fact that children and young adults from poor and underprivileged families are especially endangered to be excluded from the education sector (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005). In Germany, the social background of a child determines his/her educational attainment more severely than in any other industrial nation. The deficiencies in the German education system contribute to massive social problems, like “exclusion from normal modes of integration by formal and vocational training and labour market entry” (Allmendinger/Leibfried 2003: 63).

3.2 Policy Reforms for Children: Blocked between the Political Levels?

The alarming results of Germany in the PISA studies (2000-2006) led to a public “shock” and to an extensive public debate about the causes of educational poverty. Furthermore, various newspaper articles highlighted that the poverty risk rate of children in Germany was at the highest level since World War II (25.2 percent in 2007), which put additional pressure on the government for political action (e.g. Meyer-Timpe 2007: 17). The German government commissioned studies and reports to evaluate causes and consequences of child (educational) poverty and to identify necessary political measures and instruments. The conducted studies and reports (e.g. 3rd Report on Poverty and Wealth, 12th Child and Youth Report, National Action Plan “*Für ein kindgerechtes Deutschland*”) highlight that new child poverty policies as well as new education and childcare reforms in Germany are needed (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008, Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005, Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005a). Aspects of the reports concerning causes, affected groups and policy solutions are pointed out in the following.

The studies reveal that the risks of poverty and social exclusion have increased in the last years. Causes for the rising problem of social exclusion are recognized especially in insufficient education, difficult access to the labor market and unemployment. Furthermore, the importance of education in today’s knowledge society is emphasized and the studies document that particularly low-educated persons are at high risk of unemployment and social exclusion. The demand for low-skilled labor is on the decline in Germany. Therefore education and access to the job market are considered to be the key

for social inclusion. However, especially young adults are at risk to be excluded: the share of young adults with only low formal qualifications has been steadily rising since 1996 (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008). Additionally, there is a high rate of early school leavers without any qualifications (7.9% in 2006) (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008). A further critical issue is the persistent “clear correlation between the educational achievements of parents and their children” (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008: XVIII). Children from a low-skilled family background and in particular from low-skilled migrant families are at risk not to obtain a degree from regular school (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008, Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005a).

In the studies, another point of criticism is the existing separation between educational institutions and local social youth services in Germany. The responsible actors only focus on one of the dimensions of either education or social care, although both have the same objective to support children and the youth in their development, to help them in the process of integration into society and to avoid social exclusion. The 12th Child and Youth Report points out that integrated, concerted concepts and strategies of schooling and social youth service need to be implemented (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005). Furthermore, an overarching, mainstreamed strategy involving all players in society on all political levels is necessary to overcome the “pillarization” of technical responsibilities. According to the 3rd poverty report (published by the federal government), a concerted poverty elimination policy must be adopted (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008). Due to the federal structure of Germany, the fight against social exclusion can only be achieved with the involvement of sub-national actors and social partners: “the objective of social integration can only be achieved jointly and with all players from society” (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2008: XXXII).

An additional demand of the reports is that the municipalities as central actors must gain more legal competences and more regulatory responsibilities from the regional and national level (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005). The 12th Child and Youth Report calls for the establishment of “coordination offices” (*Koordinationsstellen*) in the cities, which allow for a better cooperation between the

different actors (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2005). However, the mid-term report of the National Action Plan "*Für ein kindgerechtes Deutschland*" (2008) demonstrates that those objectives have not yet been put into policy actions (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2008).

Apart from these national reports, the European level also criticizes Germany for the lack of cooperation and missing harmonization of tasks between the relevant actors. In the 2004 and 2007 "EU Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion", the EU Commission disapproved of the gap between the reporting of higher goals and the actors' actual effort to operationalize them and put them into policy actions. Furthermore, the Commission criticizes that the responsibility for measures between different governmental levels is not sufficiently solved. Although Germany highlights that all relevant actors and levels of governance shall be included in the fight against social exclusion, this target is not realized: "The strategy does not lead to an 'action plan', but rather to a conglomerate of measures" (Commission of the European Communities 2004: 160).

The presented documents all illustrate the same "picture" in Germany: There is a conflict about social competences due to Germany's federal structure. The so-called "joint-decision-trap" between the responsible actors has led to insufficient policy actions in the fight against social exclusion. Hence, there is the need to adopt overarching, concerted policy concepts against social exclusion.

However, the barrier is slowly beginning to dissolve with the growing impact of the EU. In the field of child and youth poverty policy, in which the EU has only limited regulating powers, the EU supports local social actors in order to realize its policy concepts and strategies with the financial support of the European Social Fund. Thus, the EU can circumvent a protracted, difficult transformation of education and social policies on the regional and national level.

3.3 Local Child Poverty Policy: The EU-Program “School Absenteeism – A Second Chance”

Social workers of child and youth services confirmed in interviews that it used to be difficult for them to cooperate with schools and to induce changes in the school system due to their lacking competences. Scarce finances and insufficient cooperation and agreements with other actors on different political levels made it difficult to realize an overarching approach and to put strategies into policy actions. Therefore, the focus of the welfare organizations was directed mainly on poverty measures outside of school. However, the interviewed persons emphasized that this is starting to change, partially due to the EU’s involvement.

Since the EU’s social policy is an integrated strategy of educational and social measures, the EU-influence leads to the dissolution of “technical responsibilities” between educational and social actors. “Thinking in pillars” becomes gradually obsolete on the local level. Social workers emphasized that some EU-funded projects have led to an increased cooperation with schools. Furthermore, the interviewees underlined that the participation in EU-programs often helps to avoid long policy chains with the regional and the national level.

Several (especially local) projects have been implemented to increase inclusion. This engagement led to an improvement (on a small scale) in the cities where the projects, such as the ESF-program “school absenteeism – a second chance”, were realized.

The exemplary program “school absenteeism – a second chance” is based on cooperation with different social partners on the local level. The project is run by welfare organizations, church organizations or municipalities in partnerships with schools. Thus it represents a “best-practice” example of a harmonized policy approach on the local level. The program is realized with the support of the European Social Fund and local co-financing (duration 2008-2011 with the chance of extension). The program is targeted at students at the age of twelve years and older and is intended to increase their chances to finish school and find a job later. So-called “case-managers” help young “school-drop-

outs” to become reintegrated into regular school (basic secondary school). In about 200 local projects throughout Germany, case-managers support young people on an individual basis. The lead partner of the project sets up so-called “coordination offices”. The coordination offices send social workers into schools in order help students that dropped out or are in danger to drop out of school. The social workers try to take intensive care of these young people. They help students with family problems, homework, career planning, agree on personal reintegration plans with the student, the school and parents and monitor the success of the implementation (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth 2008a).

The interviewed social workers emphasized that the causes for school absenteeism are multilayered. They do not only perceive young people in their student role but they try to help them in their whole everyday life. Hence, the problem of school-absenteeism can only be solved with the help of all social partners – the school, youth services and parents. A positive aspect is that, according to the involved actors, the help can take place without high administrative barriers.

Another positive aspect mentioned was that perceptions of the educational partners have changed. Schools and teachers have become more open-minded towards cooperation with local social partners. EU-knowledge and input within the project make schools become more sensitive towards the multidimensionality of the problem of school-absenteeism. And since teachers do not have the time or resources to help the students on an individual base, they become more open towards an integrated strategy with social workers. This leads to more support at school for individual care as well as for cultural and societal questions.

EU-funding of the project is bound to principles and procedures. Therefore, the social partners must implement the project according to requirements of the EU-program: Target groups, objectives and concrete political measures are fixed. Local actors confirmed that their strategies in the project are restricted and directed by the program. Additional criticism by some interviewed social workers is concerned with the length and complexity of the application process for the project. In many cases, welfare organizations do not have the resources or “know-how” to apply.

4. Conclusion

The fight against poverty and social exclusion is crucial for the stability and solidarity in Europe. For a long time, the European Community has put its focus exclusively on the national level of the member states. This perception has gradually started to change in the last few years: The EU has begun to realize that sub-national levels are essential for the maintenance of a united and stable Europe. Especially in fields like social and poverty policy, the EU has established new channels to pursue its policy strategies in the member states with the participation of the local level. The EU is able to “frame” policy objectives and strategies of local actors within the EU-funded projects against social exclusion and thus can promote its particular political logic.

In addition to that, these projects allow the EU to “frame” the national state level to a certain extent: Since the management authorities of the ESF are located at the federal level, the EU can exchange with the national level. This “soft framing” procedure can provide new dimensions to policy problems; produce learning effects and divergent political perceptions. In most cases, member states do not object to this procedure because they are not restricted in their formal regulative competences.

The mentioned governmental reports (in chapter 3.2) show that one major challenge in the fight against child and youth poverty is the lack of sufficient cooperation between educational and social actors in Germany. The presented project “school absenteeism – a second chance” has demonstrated that the EU-input led to changes in the traditional division of education and child care on the local level. The project has allowed for a comprehensive, joint approach of school and social youth services. Hence, cooperation of different social and school actors does not have to be blocked by a joint-decision trap.

Although the EU fosters the participation of the local level, it does not involve local actors in the decision-making process of the ESF-program. Local actors are bound to the restrictive requirements of the program. It can be assumed that the EU just wants to “buy” the implementation of its policy aims through the financing of projects without the interference of local actors. More cooperation and interaction of the local level is needed

in the agenda-setting and decision-making processes of EU-programs in order push local knowledge and strategies.

Another critical point concerns the lack of formal policies as a basis for the installed projects. This leads to more non-formal, contractual cooperations on the local level. Hence, the local fight against child (educational) poverty is mainly based on temporary projects on a small scale instead of legally based standards. Furthermore, rising social exclusion shows that individual local projects are not able to provide a comprehensive solution to combat the major problem of poverty and social exclusion in Germany.

Another question is concerned with the sustainability of adapted measures. What will happen when the duration of the projects is running out? The policy measures might be abolished due to the lack of finances. Despite these concerns, one has to consider the alternatives: Many projects can only be implemented because of the help of the EU, since most municipalities do not have sufficient resources to initiate and finance projects on their own.

As it was shown in this paper, a reform of the education system is necessary in Germany. Yet, educational measures are not sufficient to combat the multidimensional problem of poverty in the welfare state. Thus, the main focus of EU-requirements on education and job measures may imply that other social areas become neglected. This focus on education and employment measures leads to circumstances, in which those groups of society that are unable to work (such as older people, single mothers, small children, handicapped persons, etc.), cannot benefit from EU measures. Thus, the adopted EU measures for social inclusion can cause new selection mechanisms and new situations of exclusion for those marginalized people outside the labor market who especially need the help of the welfare state. Therefore, poverty policies must incorporate a mixture of social and educational policies in order to combat the multidimensional mechanisms of poverty and social exclusion in society.

Apart from these critics, one has to consider that the EU-projects contribute to more receptiveness in politics and society for social inclusion processes. The presented governmental reports indicate that political actors have started to realize the need for a better integration of educational and social services for kids. Additionally, the former

division of child care in the private sector and education in the public sector is starting to dissolve, e.g. the national government decided to expand the public care for children between the ages 0-3. And after the latest regional elections, the new government of the largest German federal state, North-Rhine-Westphalia, declared that the education system will be reformed in the state in order to help to overcome the institutionalized segregation of students from poor families.

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