

## Europeanization at the subnational level: chances and challenges

Panel at the 54th Annual Conference of the UACES 2024

1-4 September 2024, University of Trento, Italy

<https://www.uaces.org/trento>

The sub-national level in the EU is often seen as pioneering for Europeanization processes and, in particular, border regions are referred to as "living labs for European integration" (European Commission 2021). Regions and cities can be well-suited entities to try out Europeanization on a small scale, e.g. in the form of town twinning, since they are apparently more flexible units than nation states. Via such activities and projects, a dense network of contacts and interactions emerges at the subnational level, which can be captured by the sociological concept of "horizontal Europeanization" (Heidenreich 2019). European funding programs such as Interreg, ERDF and Leader etc. take local and regional disparities into account and thus also lay important framework conditions for small-scale cooperation. Moreover, the sub-national level is often considered to be particularly close to the citizens and thus able to involve them in cross-border projects and make horizontal Europeanization tangible in lifeworldly contexts. In addition to these top-down activities, border regions in particular have always represented areas of Europeanization, which can be characterized by close networks of interaction and activity on both sides of the border. The European Union, through its political framework and financial support, has set accents that further promote this exchange and intertwine top-down and bottom-up integration. The closing of borders during the pandemic impressively demonstrated the dense interconnectedness of regions across borders (Opilowska 2023).

Nevertheless, this cooperation cannot always be described as smooth (Durand, Decoville, Knippschild 2017, Decoville& Durand 2018, Klatt 2017). Asymmetries between regions and cities can lead to competition and can evoke push and pull factors resulting in an uneven distribution of funds or immigration and brain-drain. Additionally, many funded projects are not designed for long-term cooperation and run the risk of being limited to symbolic actions. On part of the administration, cooperation can cause substantial effort and might lead to a "clash of bureaucracy". On the citizens' side, language barriers and socio-economic factors are still major barriers to cross-border activities (Salamonska& Recchi 2019). Perceptions of inequalities can lead to dissatisfaction, hostility and low trust through cross-border activities, if these programs and activities are not accompanied by appropriate measures (Decoville& Durand 2018). Besides, loosening borders requires long-term approaches (Bürkner 2020) in order not to overwhelm stakeholders and reignite old conflicts (Katja& Opilowska2023).

In this sense, the panel is also intended to encourage a critical discussion of the challenges of cross-border cooperation and activities can face: What resentments and well-founded concerns can cross-border projects encounter at the sub-national level? Does cross-border cooperation automatically lead to a deepening of European integration and the promotion of interregional solidarity, or are there examples of conflictual cooperation or an increase in resentment? Where does it possibly not make sense to cooperate from the point of view of the actors involved, where are the hurdles too great or perhaps insurmountable? Do cross-border projects and activities promote regional disparities and inequalities, or do they contribute to reducing them? Which population groups and actors participate in such activities, and which do not? Where in regions and cities does everyday life Europeanization take place apart from political programs and initiatives? How does cross-border cooperation develop under the conditions of a social crisis? And what are the implications of horizontal Europeanization for regional, national and European identities?

Our panel aims to take stock of current research on horizontal Europeanization at the sub-national level. We invite researchers working on issues of horizontal Europeanization at the local or regional level, reporting either from a top-down perspective (policy programmes and funding) and/or a bottom-up perspective (activities and interactions of citizens, civil society actors, businesses). Theoretical contributions are welcome as well as empirical research, which can also bring in an applied perspective. In particular (but not only) we are interested in the role and use of new/social media in the context of sub-national Europeanization, as well as a geographical focus on CEE countries or Nordic countries which can be identified as “blind spots” in this regard. In addition to case studies of cooperation between regions and/or cities, we also invite research using qualitative or quantitative methods to submit proposals. In line with the orientation of the section (see below) for which we are submitting the panel, it is important to us that the sociological perspective on Europeanization is taken into account in all contributions.

Please send your abstracts (250 words, max. 5 keywords) until the **17<sup>th</sup> of January 2024** to the organizers of this panel (below). Please include the following contact details and information to your submission:

- Full Name
- University/Institution
- Postal Address
- Email Address
- The name of any co-authors
- The Title of the Paper
- Research Discipline

Participants will be informed by 19th of January 2024 by us on whether we can include their contribution in the panel.

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