

KULL, Michael (2014)

European integration and rural development. Actors, institutions and power

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While multi-level governance was the first concept through which to scrutinise the position of local levels of public administration and other actors within the EU polity, it overestimates the degree of influence it ascribes to local levels, particularly as far as the rural is concerned. Rural areas and the local level are very heterogeneous and include the public sector in addition to private and social actors, while the impact of European integration and local-level response are ambivalent. In fact, and with some exceptions, theories of European integration have for a long time neglected the study of sub-national and local levels although, for instance, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and interest groups gain access to policy-making processes and increasingly interact with government institutions at all levels. Accordingly and in addition to the 'classical' multi-level structure of legitimised institutions, new forms of governance, that is, formal or informal networks or functional units of cooperation, have been set up to foster efficiency and democracy in policy-making. Michael Kull, the author of this book, considers that the concept of multi-level governance is dynamic and open to further theoretical debate about its conceptualisation. In fact, this book analyses the status of local-level actors in policy-making and the integration of Europe's rural areas and its local and sub-national levels into the EU as seen through the eyes of Europeans. Focusing on Germany and Finland, with country-specific information from all EU member states, this book combines multi-level governance with the concept of structural constructivism, in order to reveal some of the hidden aspects of EU integration. This new approach offers a more accu-

rate picture of multi-level interaction in rural policy to respond to some questions and observations. First, if the public sector develops and takes part in new inter-institutional relations while the public administration seeks the involvement of private and social partners in policy-making and implementation, what is the status of these new actors in multi-level governance? Second, if horizontal cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as the inclusion of social partners, has been fostered by different EU policies, what is the position of higher levels of government within new governance units? Third, if institutional structures of each member state determine the degree of involvement of non-public actors, how can the role of individuals be analysed in order to explain the distribution of power in multi-level governance and rural policy? To deal with these questions and observations, this book looks at the challenges, opportunities and policy options that are available and have been implemented in rural development.

The book contains 11 chapters along with an Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter 1 – *Theories and concepts of European integration* – reflects on different European integration theories that have contributed to the development of current approaches for analysing European integration. That is, on analysing European integration theory, four phenomena stand out: 1) since the 1990s older 'grand theories' such as federalism or functionalism have had to compete with new mid-range theories and concepts, such as multi-level governance, social constructivism or structural constructivism; 2) there is a move from prediction to description to try to anticipate the overall result of a successful integra-

tion process; 3) the descriptive approach narrows the focus of analysis and fosters specialisation after having accumulated a great deal of technical expertise, and 4) the conventional theories have neglected to include the sub-national level and especially local-level actors in their analytical frame, being unable or unwilling to cover developments that are not central. Chapter 2 – *Multi-level governance and structural constructivism: Understanding multilevel politics in the European Union* – discusses multi-level governance and structural constructivism. It also critiques mainstream European integration theory and proposes its replacement with multi-level governance theory and structural constructivist methodology as a way towards a more accurate picture of multi-level interaction in rural policy. Through this combined approach, one can identify problems and mistakes that have been made and that should be avoided in the future in rural ‘multi-level governance in practice’. Chapter 3 – *Governing the rural: Actors, institutions and power structures* – briefly reviews earlier studies of LEADER and introduces actors, institutions and power structures through a discussion of the historical and institutional transformations of the EU’s structural funds in general and the Community Initiative LEADER+ in particular. In addition, an intensive study of policy documents and some interview material from policy makers and key stakeholders is provided. Chapter 4 – *Studying the status of local actors in the Community Initiative LEADER+. A methodology for an empirical analysis of Germany and Finland* – presents the research approach and methodology applied for the study of the status of local actors in the Community Initiative LEADER+, where empirical data was first gathered through exploratory, unstructured interviews and by visiting projects financed and implemented by so-called local action groups.

The next chapters (from 5 to 11) are a detailed analysis critically discussing specific characteristics, advantages and shortcomings of rural policy. Chapter 5 – *LEADER+. Actors, local action groups and power relations* – starts at the bottom of the program decision-making and implementation structure and analyses different issues regarding the internal structures of Finnish and German local action groups, together with the diverse forms of social and cultural capital of the members of the local community, and their power relations in terms of gender, age and motivation issues. The ultimate aim of this section is to unmask the ‘inequalities and power relations between social actors within a “community” the territorial approach tends to mask by employing a consensus perspective’. Chapter 6 – *LAGs in the administrative structures of LEADER+. Vertical power relations* – contains three sections and begins with local action group members’ perception of their cooperation with other social actors within the LEADER+ structure. Actors and authorities play different roles in decision making and management processes and they are able to comment on the interactions that take place in the LEADER program, based on the empirical results of the analysis of surveys and networking tools. In Chapter 7 – *Local action groups and the public* – the local and regional contexts of the local action groups are analysed, by shedding some light on the relations between local action groups and other individuals and groups. First, the local action groups’ openness in terms of their readiness to accept new members is looked at. Second, the information policies and strategies local action groups use to inform the public about their work is discussed. Third, the mobilisation of local residents to become members is analysed, including the extent local residents have been interested in the work of the local action groups. And finally,

differences between Germany and Finland in terms of the local action groups' success in bringing the EU closer to local residents are shown. Chapter 8 – *Cooperation beyond local action groups. Decision-making and managing authorities* – sheds some light on the interaction and cooperation between decision-making and managing authorities, and it discusses whether the managing authorities were in a dominant position or whether the relations were, as some multi-level governance scholars perceive the EU's multi-level system of governance, structured without hierarchies or an accumulation of power at the top-end in the national LEADER+ setting. To that end, interviewees from several Employment and Economic Development Centres and German decision-making authorities were asked to characterise their cooperation with the managing authority. The question is: did the managing authority act as a superior or as a colleague? Were there any serious problems in these relationships? If so, what were the reasons for them? Chapter 9 – *Efficiency and Decentralisation* – assesses the efficiency of the administrative structures of LEADER+ and the local action group actors' satisfaction with the duration of application procedures. Furthermore, pros and cons of further decentralisation are discussed. Chapter 10 – *LEADER+ Local action groups on the move to the next programmatic period. Hopes and expectations for 2007–2013* – presents the differences between the member states as far as the launching of the new programming period was concerned. In some countries, for example, the selection of new local action groups took place very early, and this procedure was completed before many other member states. Finally, Chapter 11 – *Empirical findings and discussion* – summarizes and discusses the main findings from Chapters 5 to

10, such as new and additional empirical knowledge on local dimensions of EU policy-making and new input to theorizing on European integration to better understand how individuals construct and implement rural policy.

In order to fully understand the process of European integration it is of paramount importance to consider developments at the sub-national and local levels of the EU. Yet, the rural has been largely absent from scholarly debates in the context of European integration and in EU Studies. Neglecting the inclusion of the local level, as some of the mainstream or 'grand theories' of European integration do, leads to the exclusion of the most important level of governance within the EU. This book proposes a new approach – the combination of multi-level governance and structural constructivism – which is better equipped for the study of the impact of European integration on the local level and in rural contexts. This replacement is necessary because local public administrations implement EU legislation and policies. Being the lowest functional level of the EU, they are the closest to the people and have the potential to make the EU visible to the people, and it is at the local level where local residents have access to and participate in policy-making. In addition, this novel combination of theory and empirics provides valuable insights into the power dynamics of local policymaking within the framework of EU governance.

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