

SUMMARY

Milking the Brussels Sprout. On the Europeanization of Local Communities at the Borderlands

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Introduction

The research project which has resulted in this publication was based on the assumption that Poland's accession to the European Union not only meant legislative harmonization and adjustment of formal organization and centrally controlled politics, it also meant the beginning of a new phase of social and cultural change in Poland. It was felt that it would be particularly interesting and important to study social and cultural change near the borders of the Republic of Poland III and at the different borderlands.

The idea that it would be good to study the Europeanization of Polish borders and borderlands following EU accession was largely inspired by the project participants' certainty that the way people perceive and define boundaries within the multidimensional process of European integration is socially significant. The researchers believed that if we want to understand the EU accession process and its socio-cultural consequences for local communities we cannot focus on the problems of the

European Union alone, we must also pay attention to the complicated relations between Europe and Europeanism on the one hand and the European Union and European integration on the other hand.

We assumed that the processes outlined above and their interpretation would be reflected in the patterns and styles of *interpretation* of these changes by the local elites and this assumption was empirically supported. Moreover, these processes and interpretations are also reflected in the patterns and styles of *response* to these changes which are disseminating in local borderland communities. This dissemination is mediated by the elites who play a mixed role with respect to the local communities. On the one hand, they are “social ideologues” but on the other hand they are pragmatically oriented “instructors” on local realization of EU border and borderland projects. These politicians, journalists, teachers and culture animators play a number of different roles: they are “initiators”, “architects”, “helmsmen” or “controllers” of the socio-cultural changes stimulated by the processes of European integration.

Analyses of the various ways in which Europeanization is understood in the social sciences was an extremely important theoretical component of this project. As opposed to the economic, legal and political science interpretations of Europeanization which dominate in Poland and which usually focus on the most visible public, formal and legal aspects of institutional change, we assumed that Europeanization is a complex socio-cultural process which takes place not only on the objective (structural) plane but also on the subjective (consciousness) plane; not only at the level of states and nations but also at the regional and local community level. Hence we applied the Europeanization concept to the phenomena outlined above, phenomena which are to be found at the local community level and which are studied by analyzing ideologies and social practices produced by the local elites. We found that the ideologies and practices offered by various categories of local elite can be not only mutually complementary but also mutually competitive or even contradictory. Differences in interpretation are not only axiologically determined. They can also be pragmatically determined, e.g., by access to material incentives supplied by the EU.

The next assumption we made and was empirically confirmed was that although the adaptive pressure from the supranational “integration logic” affects all Polish borders and borderlands, it will assume various forms, proceed with varying speed, and may have very different local effects at the different Polish borders and borderlands. The analyses clearly demonstrate that such differences exist and that although they have many determinants, institutional practices and everyday rituals

deeply rooted in national, regional and local ideological structures are particularly important. These differences also reflect different historical and geographical determinants and different “border-related” traditions at the north, south east and west of Poland. We were able to identify the different dynamics and effects of Europeanization at the eastern and southern Polish borderlands and attempts were made to interpret these differences.

The research was conducted in medium-sized urban centres (district capitals) which have traditionally served as local centres of the studied borderlands. At the Polish-Belarussian borderland the investigation was conducted in Bielsk Podlaski, at the Polish-Ukrainian borderland – in Sanok, at the Polish-Slovakian borderland – in Gorlice and Nowy Targ, and at the Polish-Czech borderland – in Cieszyn.

All the studied communities had several things in common. Although not currently border towns in the strict sense¹, now as throughout their history, they are under the powerful influence of several boundaries: state, regional, ethnic, religious etc. and also within the range of influence of external boundaries (Belarussian, Ukrainian, Slovakian and Czech). They identify themselves and are identified by others as multi-cultural and multireligious communities. They are very active politically, culturally and educationally. They are involved at many different levels in transborder relations, both formal (e.g. Euroregions) and informal (performances of befriended artistic ensembles, visiting relatives etc.). They are also the site of realization of various projects funded by the EU. The dynamic of these spaces is clearly stimulated by activities undertaken by local elite groups.

Significant social actors, members of the local elites in the broad sense, were interviewed in each of the studied local communities. These actors had decisive influence on the shape and functioning of the borderland local communities’ public space. They included: representatives of the local government (self-government and state government); teachers, culture animators, representatives of the local media; as well as local politicians and officials.

Additional interviews were conducted with representatives of selected central (ministries) and regional (voivodeship and/or district offices) institutions whose competencies covered the following areas: culture and media, education, European integration and regional development with special focus on activities and programs addressed to

¹ With the exception of Cieszyn which we chose to study at the Polish-Czech border as a control for the other towns.

borderland areas. These interviews were conducted in Białystok, Rzeszów, Przemyśl and Katowice.

A qualitative methodology was the methodology of choice. The basic method was an in-depth, carefully structured individual interview, lasting several hours. Several variants were prepared for various categories of respondents and specific local communities. Separate scenarios, taking into account the specific nature of the respective offices, were also prepared for the interviews in voivodeship and central institutions.

The final product of this research project is a large edited book "MILKING THE BRUSSELS SPROUT. On the Europeanization of Local Communities at the Borderlands"

This project and publication have several objectives. First, they strive to capture the effects of integration processes relating to EU border and borderland policy on the ideologies and social practices of social actors who are participating in specific ways in the Europeanization of local communities at Poland's eastern and southern borderlands. Second, they strive to identify the similarities and differences between various ideological proposals and social practices promoted by various categories of local elites. i.e., teachers, journalists, culture animators, local officials and politicians who operate at Poland's eastern and southern borderlands. Third, they strive to identify the similarities and differences between sets of ideas and social practices which are typical for local communities at the eastern and southern borderlands and also within these borderlands (the Polish-Belarusian borderland vs. the Polish-Ukrainian borderland; the Polish-Slovakian borderland vs. the Polish-Czech borderland). Fourth, they enabled us to confront the sets of ideological proposals and social practices coming in from national and international sources with the patterns of practices identified in the teachers, culture animators, journalists and politicians who operate in borderland local communities. We could therefore try to determine the extent to which representatives of the local elites play the role of legislator or interpreter, the spheres of local space they occupy, and the role they play. Fifth, we hope that the analyses in this book will support researchers in their theoretical and methodological efforts to refine the "Europeanization" concept understood as a complex socio-cultural process involving not only grand social structures and institutional systems but also "played out" on the subjective plane, in various types of collective and individual consciousness at the regional and local community level. These analyses also suggest that it should be possible to apply the concept of Europeanization, understood more broadly, in cultural and social terms rather than economic ones, in future research on local Poland.

The book is organized into three thematic blocks. The first block, entitled **Polish offices and officials and the Europeanization process**, contains articles on changes in the institutional dimension of state administration offices in Poland in response to the European integration process and on the opinions of central, voivodeship and local officials concerning the European Union, Europe and the Europeanization process. This block also includes articles identifying the style of work of local officials and politicians in the context of Europeanization and analyses of the various types of relations between various institutional levels, manifested in models of EU project management.

The articles in this part of the book show that important changes have taken place and are still taking place in Polish public offices on both the objective-institutional plane and officials' consciousness. These changes are due to their adoption of EU standards and rules of conduct on the one hand and to domestic impulses coming from the practices of central and local offices of a domestic orientation on the other hand.

The second block entitled **The local dimension of culture, education and the media in Europeanization processes** contains articles in which the protagonists are representatives of those categories of local elite which we found to be most model setting. In other words, the analyses in this block focus on local culture animators, teachers and journalists who – basing on specific historical and social experiences – produce discourses and practices relating to “the situation of being at the border” or who, by means of their local redefinitions and realizations, process national and EU discourses.

The third block entitled **Europe and the European Union in the collective experience of local borderland communities** contains articles which, rather than referring to specific categories of social actors, their ideas and actions and to specific dimensions of the Europeanization of local communities, try to offer more global interpretations of regionally heterogeneous ideological projects and social practices developed by the studied local communities at the eastern and southern borderlands.

This part of the book puts particular emphasis on analysis of the cultural and social contexts of Europeanization processes treated both holistically and comparatively. The articles in this block pay a lot of attention in their analyses of Europeanization processes to both the role of the different historical experiences of entire local communities and future developmental potentials which are currently largely determined by the status of the different state borders. The analyses in this part of the book also suggest that the invalidation of certain types of borders and

borderlands and creation or restitution of other types of borders (e.g., transformation of social borders into political borders), combined with heterogeneous traditions of being “in a borderland situation” in different local communities, paint an extremely diverse picture of the specific collective consciousness of various types of borderland communities and of the role and place which these references play and the references they have to Europe and the European Union.