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EUROPEANISATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY: THE CASE OF POLISH  
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL  
DIALOGUE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	iv
Abstract .....	1
Sommario .....	2
List of abbreviations.....	3
Chapter 1	
INTRODUCTION.....	5
Chapter 2	
EUROPEANISATION AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.1 Conceptualizing Europeanisation: achievements and shortcomings .....	7
2.2 Mechanisms and outcomes of Europeanisation .....	10
2.3 Europeanisation and civil society in CEE.....	15
2.3.1 The concept of civil society .....	15
2.3.2 The third sector between subsidiarity and polarisation.....	18
2.4 The EU political discourse and policies for civil society.....	22
2.4.1 The late recognition of civil society in the EU political discourse .....	22
2.4.2 Whither Europeanisation of civil society? .....	25
2.5 Cultural diversity for dialogue in a “united in diversity” Europe .....	27
2.5.1 The intercultural dimension in the European Union official documents .....	30
2.6 The EU funding opportunities and other incentives for civil society consolidation...	31
2.7 The case of Poland: civil society and the EU conditionality rule .....	33
2.8 Europeanisation of Polish civil society .....	39
2.8.1 The EU influence on Poland’s third sector with regard to cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.....	44
Chapter 3	
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	47
3.1 Research design.....	47
3.2 Research hypotheses .....	49
3.3 Setting and participants .....	51
3.4 Data collection methods .....	55
3.5 Qualitative data processing and analysis.....	59
3.6 Validity and limitations of the research methods.....	62

Chapter 4	
RESULTS.....	65
4.1 Introduction .....	65
4.2 Analysis of official documents from EU institutions: cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.....	65
4.3 Pre-selection of the sample and electronic surveys.....	69
4.4 The case of <i>Interkulturalni</i> Association .....	70
4.4.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO’s website and publications .....	71
4.4.2 Content analysis of interview transcripts .....	75
4.5 The case of Borderland Foundation .....	80
4.5.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO’s website and publications .....	80
4.5.2 Content analysis of interview transcripts .....	86
4.6 The case of Other Space Foundation.....	92
4.6.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO’s website and publications .....	92
4.7 The case of Homo Faber Association .....	96
4.7.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO’s website and publications .....	96
4.7.2 Content analysis of interview transcripts .....	100
Chapter 5	
DISCUSSION .....	103
5.1 Introduction .....	103
5.2 The cognitive influence of the European Union – Hypothesis 1 .....	104
5.3 The normative influence of the European Union – Hypothesis 2 .....	106
5.4 Participation and representation at the EU level – Hypothesis 3 .....	108
5.5 Transnational cooperation and cross-loading – Hypothesis 4.....	111
5.6 The relationship between NGOs and the government – Hypothesis 5 .....	114
Chapter 6	
CONCLUSION .....	117
6.1 Introduction .....	117
References .....	125

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*I dedicate this thesis to my lovely mother  
whose good examples have taught me to work hard for  
all the things that I aspire to achieve...*





## **Abstract**

Europeanisation is conceptualised as a complex process of political, economic, cultural and societal transformations and it represents a relatively new field of research. The number of studies on the influence of European integration on civil society actors remains limited. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of the project of European integration on the mission and action of Polish non-governmental organisations in the area of intercultural dialogue. Top-down and bottom-up mechanisms of Europeanisation are explored in relation to five dimensions: the cognitive and normative influence of the EU, the participation in the EU political structures, transnational cooperation and the NGOs' relationship with the government. The empirical part of this study was conducted between June and July 2015 in Poland. Data for this research were collected with the help of qualitative research methods, namely a thematic content analysis of textual materials and interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leaders of each organisation and were recorded on audiotape. A purposive sample of four non-governmental organisations with access to EU funds was selected for this investigation. The process of European integration affects the system of values of non-governmental organisations through a process of socialisation. On the other hand, the EU funding policy tends to facilitate the participation of non-governmental organisations in transnational cooperative networks. Transnational cooperation produces indirect effects of Europeanisation through dynamics of cross-loading allowing inter-state transfer of values, practices and experience between countries. However, there is a strong evidence of limited interaction between EU political structures and Polish civil society, mainly because of a distrust of EU institutions and lack of close links with EU-based networks. These data support the view that the changing outcomes of Europeanisation are affected by a series of intervening variables which should be taken into account in future research.

## Sommario

Il concetto di Europeizzazione viene definito come un complesso processo di trasformazioni a livello politico, economico, culturale e sociale, il quale rappresenta un ambito di ricerca relativamente nuovo. Il numero di studi sugli esiti dell'integrazione Europea in relazione agli attori della società civile rimane limitato. Lo scopo di questa ricerca è quello di determinare l'impatto del progetto di integrazione Europea sulla missione e l'azione delle organizzazioni non-governative Polacche nell'ambito del dialogo interculturale. La ricerca esplora meccanismi di Europeizzazione definiti come *top-down* e *bottom-up* in relazione a cinque dimensioni: l'influenza cognitiva e normativa esercitata dall'UE, la partecipazione nelle strutture politiche comunitarie, la cooperazione transnazionale e la relazione tra le ONG e il governo Polacco. La fase empirica di questo studio è stata condotta tra Giugno e Luglio 2015 in Polonia. I dati per questa ricerca sono stati raccolti con l'aiuto di metodi di ricerca qualitativa, vale a dire un'analisi tematica del contenuto di materiale elettronico e cartaceo ed interviste. Interviste semi-strutturate sono state condotte con i leader di ciascuna organizzazione e sono state registrate tramite l'uso di un registratore audio. Un campione ragionato di quattro organizzazioni non-governative con accesso ai fondi comunitari è stato scelto per questa indagine. Il processo di integrazione Europea influenza il sistema di valori delle organizzazioni non-governative attraverso un processo di socializzazione. D'altra parte, i programmi di finanziamento dell'UE tendono ad incoraggiare la partecipazione delle organizzazioni non-governative in reti di cooperazione transnazionale. La cooperazione transnazionale produce effetti indiretti di Europeizzazione attraverso dinamiche di *cross-loading* che consentono la diffusione di valori, pratiche ed esperienze tra diversi paesi. Tuttavia, l'evidenza suggerisce un'interazione limitata tra le strutture politiche dell'UE e la società civile in Polonia, in particolare a causa di un'elevata sfiducia nelle istituzioni dell'UE e l'assenza di solidi legami con reti sviluppatesi a livello Europeo. Questi dati supportano l'idea che gli esiti mutevoli del processo di Europeizzazione sono influenzati da una serie di variabili che future ricerche in questo campo dovrebbero tenere in stretta considerazione.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG	Directorate General
EC	European Commission
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EU	European Union
EYID	European Year of Intercultural Dialogue
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Dynamics of Europeanisation have become an increasingly relevant topic in the field of European Studies. Even though a universally accepted definition of Europeanisation is not available, several authors attempted to provide a meaningful account of its implications with regard to politics, economy and society. However, a large part of the existing literature on the topic tended to focus on the top-down dimension of Europeanisation, meant as synonym for the adoption of EU policies by Member States, while neglecting the role of subnational actors like non-governmental organisations in contributing to the process of European integration. The study focuses on a sample of four Polish non-governmental organisations operating in the field of intercultural dialogue in order to test empirically the effects of the project of European integration with respect to different dimensions.

The thesis is composed of six chapters, each of them dealing with different aspects of the Europeanisation of civil society and its relevance to the case of Polish NGOs promoting intercultural dialogue. Chapter Two examines relevant mechanisms and outcomes of Europeanisation in relation to the case of civil society in Poland, along with the concept of non-governmental organisation, the political discourse of the EU on intercultural dialogue and its actualization by the Polish non-governmental sector. Chapter Three provides an outline of the experimental design and methods used in the study, including a section on its limitations. Chapter Four concentrates on the results of the research with regard to each case study. Chapter Five aims at discussing the findings critically by providing an answer to the research hypotheses and explaining their theoretical implications, while formulating recommendations for future research. Conclusions are drawn in Chapter Six which summarises the arguments supported by the paper, the hypotheses that have been tested, the main results and their relevance against previous studies.

The main aim of the thesis is to expand the scope of the research on the Europeanisation of civil society by looking at the role played by subnational actors in giving further stimulus to European integration. Polish non-governmental organisations are particularly active in fields like culture and education where they act as important agents of social change. The paper explores the role of the EU in nurturing their vision on intercultural dialogue by providing a wide set of material and immaterial resources. On the other hand, NGOs tend to react to EU developments in different ways according to the role played by a series of intervening variables downplaying or boosting the influence of the EU.

The dimension of intercultural dialogue on which the study is focused has particular social significance given the re-emergence of confrontational attitudes between cultures and violent nationalisms, especially in Poland's bordering regions. These issues require the increased commitment of NGOs in tackling challenges of cultural diversity, human rights protection and social cohesion. The role played by the EU in this complex process of social change remains to be seen. The process of European integration provides NGOs both with challenges and new avenues for participation and development.

Accordingly, this study will introduce a new type of research on civil society organisations operating in a policy field where the EU does not play a major role. The major contribution of this research is that of filling a gap in the existing literature on Europeanisation and European integration, which has underestimated or neglected the influence of the EU system on civil actors. I suggest that further research should take into account the multifaceted relationship between Europeanisation and civil society, with particular attention to the impact of European integration on societal interests.

## CHAPTER 2

### EUROPEANISATION AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Conceptualizing Europeanisation: achievements and shortcomings

That of European Studies is an interdisciplinary field of research focusing on current developments in European integration and combining issues of political science, EU public policy and sociology. Europeanisation, which is only a small part of it, is a relatively new field of research. The concept of Europeanisation presents an evolving agenda and it is often adopted to describe a wide set of phenomena within the framework of the process of European integration. Given the manifold theoretical and empirical nature of the concept, according to Olsen, it is possible to speak about the “many faces of Europeanisation” (Olsen, 2002). Although the concept has been contested at its initial stage, it has been widely employed to explain the dynamic evolution of EU polity as well as the process through which the European Union decisions affect Member State policies and their political and social structures.

Many scholars contributed to clarify the theoretical challenges involved in the definition of Europeanisation. In this regard, Schmidt operated a clear distinction between Europeanisation, interpreted as a synonym for the effects of European influence on domestic structures on the one hand, and European integration, which stands for policy construction and formulation at the EU level on the other (2001, p.3). Even though the two processes present some important differences, they coexist within a dynamic dialectical process: the process of Europeanisation and its outcomes at the national level reflect the status of the project of European integration. It seems likewise important, as suggested by Wallace (2000), to make a distinction between the definitions of EU-ization and Europeanisation. While the former allows a narrower empirical focus and is mostly concerned with interactions between the EU and its Member States as transfers of institutional and organisational practices and policies, the latter is a process of diffusion and internalization of norms, values, beliefs, identities and behavioural practices, otherwise conceptualised as “cultural and political encounters” (Wallace, 2000). However, according to Radaelli, Europeanisation seems to be more a problem than the

solution to theoretical and empirical questions concerning the effects of EU influence (Radaelli, 2004, p.2). Radaelli has provided rather a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon:

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation 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 EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies (Radaelli, 2004, p.3).

His argument belongs to a second generation of Europeanisation studies, which mainly focus on the multidimensional impact of the process on the domestic sphere. From a broader perspective, the term may encompass processes of cultural change, identity building, policy and administrative change as well as the adoption of a series of shared habits, practices, routines and problem-solving approaches by domestic actors (Radaelli, 2000, p.4). Nonetheless, such an approach tended to underestimate the role of national endogenous variables and external factors in the process of institutional and political change.

In order to overcome the aforementioned weaknesses, some theoretical assumptions of International Relations and Comparative Politics, namely rationalist institutionalism and constructivist institutionalism, have been introduced by Europeanisation scholars. The rationalist institutionalism approach focuses on the role of EU policy of conditionality<sup>1</sup> as external source of pressure and incentives, while the perspective of constructivist institutionalism, drawing inspiration from social constructivism,<sup>2</sup> is centred on the notions of persuasion, socialisation and social learning, and suggests latent forms of indirect influence. These three models are included among those uses of the “Europe frame” where, according to a “logic of appropriateness”,

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<sup>1</sup> The European Union employs a policy of conditionality with respect to enlargement, according to which membership is conditional on candidate countries meeting the Copenhagen criteria and adopting the *acquis communautaire*. The Copenhagen criteria are the essential conditions all candidates must satisfy. They include the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities, a viable market economy, and administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the *acquis* and take on the obligations of membership.

<sup>2</sup> Constructivists, as opposed to neofunctionalists and intergovernmentalists, focus their attention on the contextual factors, i.e. rules, traditions and culture that inform the behaviour of Member States rather than their preferences and actions.



domestic actors spontaneously adopt certain ways of doing things and internalise European values and policy paradigms, which in turn affect their discourses and identities. Socialisation and persuasion, which are two dimensions that were largely neglected by the first studies on Europeanisation, require soft instruments rather than strict pressure to be effective (Sedelmeier, 2011, p.15). Whenever the EU-related pressures or opportunities are vague or the costs/benefits associated to change are not clear, constructivism may be the most relevant model. The main condition for Europeanisation with regard to socialisation<sup>3</sup> and persuasion processes is the understanding of the EU as a cognitive and normative framework.<sup>4</sup> Radaelli argues that, however, socialisation processes seem to be neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for Europeanisation to take place (2004, p.10). Indeed, this is more likely to occur when such processes are followed by domestic policy change. I claim that it is relatively difficult to test these processes empirically, but they have important repercussions at the domestic level, especially among non-state actors.

These two approaches are particularly relevant for the present research, since they may help explain the scope of the change brought about by European integration on Polish NGOs in the perspective of both rational factors and cognitive and relational terms.

As it is well known, one of the main outcomes of EU pre-accession conditionality has been a process of socialisation experienced by the post-communist countries of Eastern enlargement, i.e. Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, within the framework of perceiving good compliance practices with regard to EU obligations as a precondition for their status of good European members. Accordingly, Olsen investigated the nature of this adaptational process by adopting the notion of “experiential learning”<sup>5</sup> or learn-by-doing approach (2002, p.932). At the same time, Europeanisation can be conceived as ideational diffusion and identity constructions

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<sup>3</sup>Socialisation is defined as a lifelong process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behaviour and social skills appropriate to his or her social position. It allows individuals to create bonds between the cultural system (values interiorization) and the social system (role interiorization). The communicative approach, instead, describes it as the constant creation and revision of identity, world images and knowledge.

<sup>4</sup>Deriving from sociological institutionalist theories, a focus on cognitive and normative structures concerns the EU influence on domestic values, norms, principles and discourses characterising the national context. “Cognitive” is related to the mental processes of perception, reasoning, understanding and learning. A cognitive framework is the basis of a system of meaning and a set of values and beliefs functioning as a frame of reference to interpret reality.

<sup>5</sup>According to the notion of experiential learning, domestic institutions and actors’ behaviours change according to the changes in organisation, governance and behaviours experienced at the domestic level.

linked to the idea of Europe as a culture based on values of freedom, democracy and tolerance. This has been particularly evident in Central and Eastern European countries, where Europeanisation largely corresponded to a “return to Europe”<sup>6</sup> (Katzenstein, 1997, p.39). Generally, this phenomenon has been conceived as equivalent to “becoming more European like” in many respects, but it is the source of both opportunities and constraints for the new Member States of the Union.

According to Bulmer, Europeanisation does not constitute itself a theory, but it is a complex process of political, economic, cultural and societal transformations, which several theories have attempted to explain (2007, p.47). Equally, it is not a status, but a process that leads to uncertain outcomes. Taking a similar view, Börzel rightly claimed that European integration theories might not be able to fully explain the dynamics of Europeanisation as they are more focused on the balance of power and do not put enough attention on the domestic effects of the process of European integration (2004).

Among the shortcomings of the existing literature, it is worth to point out that extensive studies on policy areas in which the Member States are the main decision-makers remain rather limited (Graziano & Vink, 2006, p.3). Similarly, the redundant character of research designs represents another weakness. As a consequence, Vink and Graziano suggested to look at the potential of further empirical tests as a means to provide new theoretical intuitions (2006, p.8).

On the other hand, they acknowledged the complexity of capturing indirect effects of Europeanisation deriving from diffusion and learning processes, while anticipating the significant role played by non-state actors in this framework (Vink & Graziano, 2006, p.12).

## 2.2 Mechanisms and outcomes of Europeanisation

The main assumption of this section is that Europeanisation does not represent a linear phenomenon. The different dynamics triggered by the integration project include direct and indirect, vertical and horizontal effects as a consequence of Europeanisation developing through *top-down* (downloading) and *bottom-up* (uploading) mechanisms.

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<sup>6</sup> The reference to Europe has been a legitimizing factor for domestic democratization and integration with EU structures as it was mainly based on a strong identification with Western values and norms. However, the “return to Europe” of these countries required deep transformations of their domestic polity.

One of the concerns of the Europeanisation research has been to explain which experiences and developments at the EU level domestic actors are exposed to, how they interpret them and react to them. Many scholars have differentiated between a definition of Europeanisation as the domestic impact *of* the EU, i.e. *downloading*, and its definition as the domestic impact *on* the EU or *uploading* (Börzel, 2002; Wong, 2005). While the downloading consists of processes of national adaptation and policy convergence, the uploading allows the projection of national preferences and policy models into the EU (Wong, 2005, p.154). A third dimension of Europeanisation is the *cross-loading* or transfer of ideas, norms and habits between domestic actors from different Member States by means of transnational cooperation.

Generally, the top-down perspective, taking European policies and politics as the independent variable, has been one of the most researched subjects in the existing literature on European integration and Europeanisation. Several scholars have emphasised the mechanism of downloading because of its clarity as regards the determination of cause and effect. Accordingly, the EU makes use of adaptational pressure as a coercive measure to force Member States to conform with its policies and regulation (Risse, Cowles & Caporaso, 2001).

The combination of top-down and bottom-up perspectives allows to introduce a new insight in Europeanisation studies. For instance, the “usage” dimension shows how the EU is not only a hierarchical structure of normative production, but it is an intertwined system of governance. Likewise, Europeanisation is more than a mere reactive process: the European Union is also instrumentalised by national actors. The study by Liebert and Trezn on related processes of civil society participation in the European policy-making and its role in the construction of a “European public sphere” relates to bottom-up mechanisms of influence (2008, p.9).<sup>7</sup> Their study is relatively innovative as it combines normative democratic theory, political and sociological analysis and empirical case studies. Their main contribution is the recognition of civil society’s role in building good governance at the EU level, which is reflected in the concept of deliberative democracy.<sup>8</sup> Taking a similar perspective, in her research on civil society and democratic governance,

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<sup>7</sup> However, unless it is possible to speak about a European popular sovereignty or European people, a European public sphere requires a feeling of commonality and belonging that in the EU is relatively weak.

<sup>8</sup> Deliberative democracy allows citizens to strengthen their voice in governance through their inclusion in deliberations that directly affect public decisions, so they can see the result of their influence on the policies and decisions that affect their daily lives. What is crucial is the chance of participate while being well informed.

Kohler-Koch focused on the function of societal actors in fostering the Union's input and output legitimacy (2008, p.11).

The EU represents the source of a wide range of material and immaterial resources associated to a policy area, which largely determine how Member States react to Europeanisation processes. Domestic actors may generally exploit different "uses" of the Europe frame in order to benefit from European integration developments in terms of financial support, social cohesion, partnerships, human rights protection and economic progress (Radaelli, 2004, p.5). The strategic usage, as described by Jacquot in *Usage of European Integration*, is common to all actors from all levels and enables them to influence policy decisions or, more important, to get access to European funds (2003, p.6). The second usage in her classification is a cognitive one, as the frame of Europe may serve to interpret policies at the national level.

By exploring both causal dynamics in a broader perspective, it is possible to overcome rigid deterministic approaches of fit and misfit or convergence and harmonisation limited to changes in national political and social structure (Börzel, 2003, p.57). Particularly, this may allow to avoid risks linked to the phenomenon of conceptual stretching (Radaelli, 2000). Similarly to what affirmed by Börzel and Risse in *Conceptualising the Domestic Impact of Europe*, Grabbe opposed the view on the process as synonym of homogenisation, especially with regard to civil society (Börzel and Risse, 2003, p.17). Retaining a focus exclusively on the top-down approach does not fully explain the complex changes experienced by national and subnational actors in other directions. The study by Börzel is particularly valuable for the present research because it is in line with constructivist theories according to which national and subnational actors are both rule makers and rule takers (2003). Similarly, the combination of top-down and bottom-up conceptual discussions is instrumental to highlight the shortcomings of classical European integration theories.

First, Europeanisation may interest also the meaning and practices of good governance<sup>9</sup> that is what it represents and how to implement it. Olsen described the

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of governance is difficult to include in a single definition. Generally, it determines who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered. For instance in voluntary sector organisations decision-making responsibility is in the hands of the board of directors. Its conceptualisation is complicated by the fact that it involves multiple actors. The process and practices vary according to the environment in which they are applied. In the non-governmental sector, representing stakeholder interests is a determining factor in its application. In general, participation, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, transparency, equity and rule of law represent the main principles of good governance.

process as adaptation of national and subnational systems of governance to EU political system and norms (2002, p.924). In these terms, bottom-up processes of Europeanisation activated at the national level by a large spectrum of actors should take into account the quality aspect of governance processes. This is to say, with Schmidt's words, that governance works as a bridge to legitimacy and democracy in the EU when, besides the output and input<sup>10</sup>, the *throughput*, i.e. the efficiency, accountability and transparency of forms of EU governance, is taken into account (2013, p.2). As an example, it corresponds to the transparency and inclusiveness of consultations between EU institutions, mostly the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and civil society representatives. Gašior-Niemec and Gliński, in particular, investigated the domestic adaptation to EU best practices in terms of governance, such as cooperation between NGOs and local government, and the principles of subsidiarity and partnership (2007a).

As pointed out by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, there can be three main models explaining the adaptation of Member States to EU requirements: the external incentives model<sup>11</sup> linked to the EU policy of conditionality, the model of social learning and the lesson-drawing approach, which are not mutually exclusive (2004, p.671). They allow new perspectives to overcome the conceptualisation of Europeanisation as mere policy transfer or EU-led vertical pressure to institutional adaptation. The conditionality approach has very often been associated with the concept of Europeanisation in the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where it seems to have played a crucial role (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2006). In a recent study, Trezz defined Europeanisation as a process of transformation of political culture and identities, besides law and policies, integration and social change at the national level (2014, p.1). Accordingly, an effective response to the EU norms and values requires the socialisation of all citizens in a common political culture. Particularly, Sedelmeier looked at the role played by "cultural resonance" or the correspondence between EU standards in a policy field on the one hand, and domestic culture and political discourse on the other (2011, p.16).

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<sup>10</sup> The input legitimacy relates to the notion of people's rule: political decisions are legitimate whenever they reflect the people's will. The concept of output stands for the government for the people and corresponds to the government's ability to solve collective problems effectively.

<sup>11</sup> The External Incentives Model is based on the rationalist bargaining model, where actors seek to maximise their own power in the exchange of information, threats and promises. Its effectiveness depends on adoption costs, determinacy of conditions, size and speed of reward and credibility of conditionality.

It is particularly important to take into consideration that the penetration of domestic structures by the EU may take place in some policy areas only, whereas in other fields resistance is stronger and Europeanisation fails to occur. Likely, there is not always a direct relationship between Europeanisation forces and structural changes at the domestic level. Radaelli made a distinction between Europeanisation on the one hand, and integration, convergence and harmonization on the other (2004, p.3). Interestingly, the assumption by Di Maggio and Powell is that convergence is more likely to occur when a policy area appears to be strongly “Europeanised”, that means whenever interactions between national and European political structures are more frequent (1991). As regards the object of this research, it refers to a field of national competence in which exchange of national views with EU institutions are rather sporadic.<sup>12</sup>

A focus of the literature on absolute impacts of Europeanisation as well as an over-determination of the “Europe” factor is misleading; changes at the domestic level can be the result of several factors, including domestic variables and international pressure (Radaelli, 2004, p.5). Besides the material factors, Börzel claimed, what informs the countries’ ability to take and shape<sup>13</sup> EU policies is the existence of specific political factors, such as political and administrative capacity (2003, p.6). While political capacity depends on the presence of veto players,<sup>14</sup> political resources and cultural variables like public awareness and readiness to take collective action, the latter is determined by financial and human resources and coalition-building skills.

This section has provided an insight into the ontological stage of the research explaining how Europeanisation theories seek to illustrate why Europeanisation is happening and opened the way to the post-ontological stage aiming to investigate the possible outcomes of the process. The purpose of the present study is to see which among these theoretical and conceptual approaches can be tested empirically in the case of a small group of Polish NGOs, both in terms of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms of EU influence.

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<sup>12</sup> Culture as a policy field belongs to the Union’s supporting competencies (art. 6 TFEU) in which the EU can only intervene to complement the action of Member States. Therefore, it has no legislative power in this field.

<sup>13</sup> The attribute “shapers” referred to EU Member States describes the countries’ capacity to inform the policy outcomes in the EU decision-making process, while their actions as “takers” correspond to the implementation of EU policies at the domestic level.

<sup>14</sup> The concept of “veto players” has been formalized as a synonym for an individual or collective actor who has to give its agreement for any change to the (legislative) status quo. The difficulty related to policy changes increases according to the number of veto players.

## 2.3 Europeanisation and civil society in CEE

### 2.3.1 The concept of civil society

In the last decades, there has been a revival of civil society in public debates and research both globally and regionally. In 2003 the Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan defined civil society as “the new superpower” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, trying to convey the message that in public life citizens remain the ultimate sovereign (2000).

However, the existing literature on civil society has failed to provide a solution to the lack of conceptual and terminological clarity and it usually employs a narrow definition of the term. As a result, there is neither a universally accepted definition of civil society nor a research developing a systematic theory of it. In addition, sociological theories have largely ignored it as a major component of contemporary society. Civil society can stand for labour movements, social movements and forms of associationism or the empowerment of masses in socialist and communist regimes as well (Laville, Young & Eynaud, 2015). It is usually supposed to include a multitude of NGOs and other civic groups, such as clubs, professional associations, interest groups, ethnic and cultural associations and religious organizations. In the first place, the attribute “civil” indicates the presence of a set of political and social institutions benefitting the citizen and distinguished from military, legal or ecclesiastic affairs. A broad distinction between analytical and normative dimensions of civil society helps to redefine the boundaries of the research on the sector and to understand the possible usages of the concept.

The analytical dimension considers the evolution of civil society since the crisis of the nation state resulting from the crisis of the welfare state during the 1980s, the communist dictatorships in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) in the 1990s, the process of European integration and the rise of non-governmental and non-commercial service providers. The growing disenchantment with the state and the market has gradually led to the emergence of a civil society envisaged as solution to the need for civic values, active citizenship and watchdogs, as well as a stronger focus on human and civil rights.

In a normative sense, the main assumption is that civil society has a political rather than a moral dimension. The Greek philosopher Aristoteles first introduced the notion of civil society in political philosophy defining it as the relationships between equal citizens under the law. Among 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, Hegel introduced the concept of civil

society as a sphere that mediates between public and private life. Alexis De Tocqueville, in his analysis of American democracy, for the first time has made the concept popular as a typically Western idea linked to voluntary and apolitical social associations and community organisations. Notably, those were understood as the most effective means to dispose of an accountable government, participatory democracy and active citizenship (De Tocqueville, 2010).

Civil society generally embraces formal and informal institutions, bodies and activities with a voluntary character, autonomous governance procedures and minimal sustainability, which do not perform coercive government tasks and are not mainly interested in making profits (Salamon & Anheier, 1999; Anheier, 2013). For a long time, the concept of civil society has not fit the two-sector worldview prevailing at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. The current modern perspective sees the uniqueness of organised civil society in its intermediary role as sphere between the state and the market, the official affairs of the state and the logic of profit. One of the main functions of civil society organisations (CSOs) is to respond to public concerns of different nature. While some voluntary organisations work in close cooperation with public authorities, others are completely independent from governmental supervision and sometimes even show a revolutionary attitude with respect to specific social goals (Glenn, 2008). Civil society expects the state to provide a stable legal framework, funding for public interest programmes and recognition of the sector's advocacy. On the other hand, when conceived as having a civilising mission, civil society is supposed to encourage trust, solidarity and accountability, to adopt social justice as its guiding principle and to inspire social reform (European Commission, 1997; Kohler-Koch, 2008; Liebert & Trenz, 2008). It also fosters social inclusion and cohesion. For example, the democratic transition and the influence of economic liberalism in former socialist countries of CEE are strongly connected to civil society's transformative potential.

Particularly, the case of former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and their struggle against totalitarianism fit well into the definition of civil society provided by Gramsci as a sphere of contestation and opposition to ideological domination (1992). What's more, sometimes the empowerment of civil society is simply the result of anti-political sentiments and the organised opposition to the prevailing political ideology. However, although being purpose-driven and acting for the public interest, civil society can be also violent, characterised by inequality and lead to increased conflict. In CEE, for instance, it failed to be the guarantor of peace in ethnic conflicts. Although, civil society



remains the place of spontaneous collective action allowing the empowerment of citizens and the provision of social services in many areas independently from the state, such as health, leisure, culture and political advocacy.

More in general, in Europe, the associational dimension is characterised by considerable activism and dynamism, even though its intensity varies considerably from country to country. CSOs do not perform all the same functions, but they are often crucial actors of dissemination of knowledge and expertise. They can be national and international in scope but also regional and rather locally focused. As a result, those that are labelled as service providers, whether of social services, health care, training, information, advice or support, tend to be opposed to those created for advocacy purposes.<sup>15</sup> From a neo-liberalist point of view, self-management and the performance of social services are often the immediate response to the weaknesses of government or public administrations' provision of certain collective goods and not only to a common desire for human solidarity. Therefore, beyond its contested definitions, civil society can be described either by focusing more on social capital and social cohesion or by looking at its connections with welfare and economic functions (Anheier, 2004, p.20). However, in general, CSOs have to face similar challenges in their interactions with other actors and in trying to obtain legitimacy and support for their activities, such as the research for suitable partners, trust, different political cultures and preferences. On the other hand, civil society tends to be unequally organised as some privileged groups dispose of more resources while weaker groups are marginalised in their ineffective attempts to support their members (Liebert and Trenz, 2008, p.41).

In the realm of political theory, given that a proactive civic sphere is deemed to be the main catalyst for citizens' participation as well as social and cultural integration, most of the literature considers a strong civil society to be the best avenue for democracy (Kohler-Koch, 2008; Szabó, 2004). In modern states, it usually takes the form of an autonomous sphere of opinion and public discourse on issues of public concern enforcing tolerance<sup>16</sup> and solidarity (Lang, 2012). The influence of patterns of Western democracy are visible in the general definition of civil society as the social and communicative sphere of democratic countries (Liebert and Trenz, 2008, p.9).

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<sup>15</sup> The purpose of advocacy groups is to campaign, lobby, and otherwise argue on behalf of some cause or group with the aim of changing a public perception or policy.

<sup>16</sup> Tolerance, not as frequently invoked, is a normative element implicit in the idea of civility and has become the connecting link between the private and the public in civil society.

According to Ruzza, civil society can be both an ideal concept suggesting the broader political participation of all citizens and a descriptive concept comprising various entities such as NGOs, social movements and business groups (2008, p.303). Civil society stands for a wide set of “more or less spontaneous created associations, organisations and movements that find, take up and amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it onto the political realm or public sphere” (Habermas, 1992, p.443). Habermas put civil society in the public sphere outfit in which citizens come together for deliberation about common concerns for the public. His model helps understand how members of civil society can participate in order to influence decisions and defend democratic ideals.

As noted by Forbrig, a major concern regards the diversity of civil societies in terms of historical political, economic and cultural legacy (2004, p.65). To a certain extent, a too much diversified picture of political cultures, languages and national legacies risks downplaying the attempts to use a unique theoretical framework to analyse civil societies and jeopardizes the emergence of a transnational civil society as well (Kohler-Koch, 2008).

Civil society does not correspond neither to the society itself nor to the third sector, even though organisations may overlap, given that some NGOs can share some features with the market or that they can be instrumentalised by the state. Non-profit organisations represent complex social and political phenomena that deserve particular attention, especially in the context of deepening European integration and accentuated globalisation dynamics.

### 2.3.2 The third sector between subsidiarity and polarisation

Everywhere, in Europe and beyond, an extraordinary increase in the number and type of civil society organisations can be observed. Some scholars tend to look at civil society as the equivalent of the non-profit sector and empirical research tends to use the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or non-profit organisations (NPOs) as a synonym for the strength of civil society. This is not exactly the approach used in the present research on civil society in Poland, as I will consider the third sector only as a component of civil society rather than its surrogate.

The third sector or “third way”, a term coined by Etzioni in *The Third Sector and Domestic Missions*, presents a mixed and pluralistic nature and is based on a certain degree of independence from government and other public authorities, self-management, a disinterested commitment to the public good, voluntary engagement and value-driven action (1973, p.315). The label generally includes a wide range of social actors such as social movements, NPOs, social economy organisations, and so forth (European Commission, 1997, p.16). In turn, NPOs take the form of private organisations providing public services, such as voluntary associations, charities, foundations and NGOs (Anheier, 2004, p.9). They present both institutional and individual components. Individuals, for example, embrace personal attitudes, preferences, beliefs, skills and values, which inform civil society activities to a different extent. As argued by Salamon and Anheier, these are the main features of third sector organisations in nutshell:

Firstly, they are organized, i.e., they possess some institutional reality. They are private, i.e., institutionally separate from government. They are non-profit-distributing, i.e., not returning any profits generated to their owners or directors. They are self-governing, i.e., equipped to control their own activities. They are voluntary, at least in part, i.e., they involve some meaningful degree of voluntary participation, either in the actual conduct of the agency’s activities or in the management of its affairs (1999, p.3).

As argued was argued by Laville, there is not always a clear cut between the third sector, the market and state organisations (1999, p.118). First, the political and social meaning of the third sector can be analysed with respect to the changing relationship between state and citizens. For instance, the role of NGOs can be either alternative or outstanding to that of the state. Anyhow, it is desirable that NGOs play a role of auxiliary to public sector programs instead of being autonomous players in certain policy fields like, for instance, social policy and culture.

NGOs can differ in many respects. The main determinants are the length of time they have been existing, their adoption of a sector or thematic focus, whether they were formed in response to community demands or whether they depend entirely on external funding. A useful distinction is that between voluntary organisations meant as service providers and those acting as advocacy groups (Evers and Laville, 2004, p.12).

In the recent past, non-profit organisations have increasingly acquired a social function with respect to political, economic and social issues in many countries all over the world. Those providing services more often play a crucial role in tackling key concerns in modern societies, such as environmental pollution, climate change, increased migration flows, demographic changes, populist ideologies, and the rise of xenophobia and racism, which has led them to increasingly perform the role of social enterprises. They are thought to provide solutions to the inequalities raised by the impact of neoliberal globalization. Notably, the rediscovery of civil society has often coincided with a revival of the role of third sector organisations as intermediate actors, which operate to provide social, cultural and educational services (Anheier, 2004, p.3).

Crucial assets for the survival of voluntary organisations are expertise, networking skills and financial resources. On the other hand, among the main constraints limiting their dynamism there is an increasingly competitive environment for which they are often obliged to adopt a number of practices belonging to the market sphere in order to emerge. Moreover, the difficulties faced by these organisations in establishing European transnational networks include the search for like-minded actors in other countries, and the search for matching funding for projects co-financed by the EU (European Commission, 1997, p.10). In many cases, there is a conflict between short-term financial support from the EU and long-term needs of the organisations, besides complex administrative procedures related to the access to EU funds. To a certain extent, many non-profit organisations have also reoriented their activities towards fields of action for which EU funds are more easily accessible, but the power of such funds in effectively shaping their priorities seems arguable. Notwithstanding, NGOs are key agents in fostering transnational cooperation and learning, mainly through the exchange of information, know-how, experience and best practices. The next chapter will look at the Europeanisation of civil society sector, especially with regard to the role played by EU funds in boosting or jeopardising the development of transnational cooperative networks.

Further, political challenges for the third sector concern issues of politics and governance. Indeed, the activities of non-profits are articulated within legal frameworks, forms of governance and networks of interaction. They try to influence both national and

European governments. Therefore, it is crucial for them to improve their lobbying<sup>17</sup> capacities at both levels in order to communicate their own concerns effectively. On the contrary, the main sources of government's influence on NGOs' operational environment include the nature and quality of governance, collaboration with NGOs, public consultation and official support.<sup>18</sup> In his study on Central and Eastern Europe, Rek provided a valuable insight into the bottom-up involvement of civil society in order to investigate to what extent civil actors achieved equal representation and participation in Brussels (2010). His main point of criticism concerned the lack of a large empirical literature studying the impact of the EU on interest intermediation and the participation of smaller non-state actors in new forms of governance.

Today, it seems that there is not a large public support to NGOs' activity and they failed to establish a stable communication with formal authorities in many European countries. Notably, the diversity of national civil societies is a type of endogenous variable that largely affects the nature of this relationship. Generally, in Europe, civil society actors are not an integrated part of the political system, yet they are involved in many different processes as well. For instance, NGOs may be active in policy fields where the EU does not play a major role. This is the case of many organisations providing support to social issues such as the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, the integration of foreigners and immigration. As regards its relation with the project of European integration, the EU has strongly promoted the development and consolidation of civil society associations through its financial programmes, especially in the case of CEE countries. By contrast, Borragán and Smismans pointed out how a country's institutional legacies deeply affect the development of the third sector and its relevance on the European agenda (2010). In the discourse of the European Union institutions, civil society and third sector have recently become the protagonists of a new

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<sup>17</sup> Literally, it indicates the open area inside the entrance of a public building. In political science, it describes a group defending certain interests while the "lobbying" stands for the techniques used by the actors to be represented at specific institutional levels. The NGOs and networks of NGOs are among the most widespread types of lobby. The main objectives of lobbying activities are to influence the policy-making, to have access to information about policies and funding opportunities and to build stable relationships with other organisations.

<sup>18</sup> Possible indicators of the nature and quality of governance are, for instance, pluralism of involved interests and accountability of the government's decisions; public consultations represent the main instrument to measure the policy impact of non-governmental organisations, while official support takes the form of government funding directed to these organisations in order to finance their activities.

era of political, economic and social challenges, which partly result from a growing interdependence between countries at both the regional and the global level.

## 2.4 The EU political discourse and policies for civil society

### 2.4.1 The late recognition of civil society in the EU political discourse

The current debate about the role of civil society in Europe reveals some ambiguities about the relevance of voluntary associations, NGOs or NPOs in the European polity. Although, the EU has always been relatively active in promoting initiatives aimed at stimulating participatory citizenship through the empowerment of civil society organisations. In addition, the European Commission has always recommended the enforcement of civil society sector as one of the requirements to be fulfilled to enter the Union as established in the summit of the European Council held in Copenhagen in 1993.

In general, in the political discourse of EU institutions, CSOs represent a key partner as “not only they provide the seed bed or gene pool from which future social and other policies may eventually grow but also the political, social and intellectual climate in which change comes to be seen as desirable on a wider scale (European Commission, 1997, p.5).” Notably, the Union first considers civil society a pivotal forum for the exchange of opinions about several human concerns as well as a crucial means of information flows between state and citizens, allowing them to monitor how governmental authorities operate (European Commission, 1997, p.6). The EU has regarded civil society also as a channel for feedback, criticism and protest (European Commission, 1997, p.5). As reminded in Article 11 of the renewed Lisbon Treaty, the Union envisages participatory democracy as a democratic principle at the basis of the European project, where CSOs represent an avenue for their members and volunteers to express a sense of citizenship (Title II, Art. 11 TEU). Likely, the EESC defines civil society organisations as “all organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens” (1999, p.36).

As pointed out by Smismans, until 1998, the discourse on civil society remained limited to the Directorate General V and XIII <sup>19</sup> of the European Commission. Only in the 1990s, the discourse of EU institutions about the role of NGOs acquired a normative character (Smismans, 2003, p.484). Particularly, they have defined civil society as that sector of social economy made of cooperatives, mutual societies and voluntary organisations that give a raising contribution to the European project (Lahusen, 2006). As regards NGOs and other voluntary organisations, already in the 1970s, Jacques Delors put the third sector on the EU agenda and highlighted its huge social and civic potential. His original idea was that of a genuine third sector starting from the local level rather than the supranational one. He focused his attention on the importance of subsidiarity that means on what can be done at levels that are closer to citizens (Delors, 2004). What is more, he was the first to address the slow progress achieved by the Europeanisation of the third sector (Delors et Gaudin, 1979). After the Maastricht Treaty, a renewed interest for societal actors has emerged and the relationship with the EU has been articulated mainly through a strong institutionalisation of social dialogue<sup>20</sup> (Smismans, 2003, p.484). On the other hand, the dialogue of the Union with associations dealing with social issues such as culture, gender, education, discrimination, racism and cultural diversity has been underestimated or neglected by European intervention.

The functional role of civil society, as timidly emphasised by EU institutions, is that of enforcing output and input legitimacy, the former standing for the public assessment of the relevance and quality of supranational institutions' performance, and the latter defined as the participation in EU decision-making process. Unfortunately, the EU lacks democratic input legitimacy since the responsiveness to EU citizen concerns as a result of their participation in EU policy processes remains low. On the other hand, the political strategy used by EU institutions, mainly the Commission, to further legitimate the European decision-making includes discourses on openness to civil society. Therefore, the EU has developed its own culture of consultation<sup>21</sup> and dialogue regulating

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<sup>19</sup> The Directorate General V of the European Commission is responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and its main goal is the development of an innovative and sustainable European social model. The Directorate General XIII is specialised in the field of communication networks, content and technology and it manages the Digital Agenda of the European Union.

<sup>20</sup> Social Dialogue was introduced in the 1980s by the European Commission as an alternative and more complex form of corporatism, where a limited number of interest groups has privileged access to the decision-making process. Its introduction was accompanied by the creation of the Platform of European Social NGOs.

<sup>21</sup> The EU culture of consultation makes use of instruments such as Green and White Papers, Communications, advisory committees, ad hoc consultations, the Dialogue with Citizens forum and internet consultations through Your Voice in Europe.

the interactions with voluntary sector organisations, mostly consisting in informal consultations between civil society actors and the DGs of the European Commission. The consolidation of civil dialogue<sup>22</sup> started with the first European Social Policy Forum in 1996, gathering one thousand participants, mostly representing NGOs. The range of parties involved may include representatives of regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, individual citizens, academics and interest parties in third countries (European Commission, 2002, p.4). In the consultation process, a key role is assigned to the EESC and the Committee of the Regions.<sup>23</sup> The White Paper on European Governance, published in 2001 and aimed at reinforcing the EU culture of consultation and dialogue. It initiated the debate on issues of civil society and governance at the EU level, which involves EU institutions, Member States, regional and local authorities, and civil society actors. Its main recommendation is addressed to national governments so that they foresee adequate mechanisms for broad consultation with civil society when discussing EU decisions and implementing European policies. In this regard, consultation has been envisaged as complementary to political decision-making since it first aims at giving interested parties a voice, without replacing it (European Commission, 2001, p.16). Notably, the Commission recalled the key principles informing consultation and democratic governance, namely participation,<sup>24</sup> openness, accountability, effectiveness and coherence, which apply at all levels of government (2002, p.14). The reform of European governance had the secondary goal of allowing the EU to reach also global governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. However, its main objective remained that of encouraging a wider public debate on EU policies.

The concepts of civil society and third sector, as well as their meaning in the EU political discourse, are fundamental if we want to understand the political and social

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<sup>22</sup> Civil dialogue, figured out as the first ideal platform to change policy orientations and society. The “Grabowska report” on civil dialogue issued in 2008 was drafted by a socialist MEP from Poland and it called for the establishment of specific rules and structures at the EU, national or local level for civil dialogue between EU institutions and civil society under the Lisbon Treaty. It welcomed the idea of a citizens’ initiative through which a legislative proposal can be submitted to the Commission after one million signatures have been obtained (see art. 11.4 TEU and art. 24 TFEU).

<sup>23</sup> The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body of the European Union. It was established in 1957 by the Rome Treaties in order to involve economic and social interest groups in the creation of the European common market. It plays an advisory role since it conveys the opinions of these groups to the EU institutions responsible for the decision-making. In many policy areas, the Council or the Commission must consult the EESC before taking any decision. The Committee of the Regions is another advisory body, but it represents the interests and needs of regional and local authorities. On matters concerning regional and local government, it must be consulted by the Commission, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.

<sup>24</sup> Participation concerns the whole policy process from formulation to implementation of the policy.



changes brought about by European integration on the selected Polish NGOs. At the same time, this case study is particularly illustrative for the dynamic development of grassroots associations and initiatives as the main avenues for critical publics. Moreover, this research aims to introduce a sociologically informed analysis of the Europeanisation of Poland's third sector based on social institutionalist theories and interaction between individuals, which is rarely considered by experts. As a result, a research on civil society accordingly structured constitutes an innovative point of junction between political science and political sociology.

#### 2.4.2 Whither Europeanisation of civil society?

The major contribution of Grabbe was to recognise that European integration affects not only politics and economics but also society (2001). The literature on the third sector has tended to be distinct from the literature on European integration and few studies on Europeanisation and civil society are available. The EU is unique because it is the result of the dynamic interaction between political and societal actors at different institutional levels within an elaborate system of multilevel governance. The term Europeanisation captures a complex operation of political, economic, societal and cultural transformation and refers to long-term historical changes. Broadly speaking, the levels of involvement of civil society can be summarised in representation, participation and Europeanisation. Considering that the impact of EU integration on the third sector has not been well developed so far, a higher attention to its social dimension will allow to better understand the role of domestic actors that are not always involved in the European decision-making process, but who are nevertheless affected by EU norms, principles and values. The definition of Europeanisation as combination of both downloading and uploading perspectives well suits this kind of analytical approach.

With reference to the conceptualisation of NGOs as service providers, the sector is increasingly taking the form of a "social economy" made of "service markets" providing services in several fields that are not under the direct responsibility of EU regulation (Lahusen, 2006, p.121). Another effect of Europeanisation on civil society is, for instance, a shift in the policy implementation process, which very often turns to be a responsibility of the local public administration or societal actors, who may not be directly involved in the decision-making procedure (Saurugger and Radaelli, 2008). In addition, transparency standards inspired to the EU model of good governance are another example

of vertical influence, because CSOs are accountable to their members and the society in terms of how money is spent. The Europeanisation of civil society is first conceivable as the adaptation to EU regulation, but the concept also stands for multiple processes of interaction taking place between the EU and the third sector of Member States. In the case of Central and Eastern European countries, there is a general consensus on the fact that initially Europeanisation was mostly policy-driven. Indeed, a solid development of democracy and civil society was one of the prerequisites for candidate countries to enter major Western institutions, such as the EU, NATO, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (later institutionalised under the name of OSCE) and the Council of Europe.

An important number of researches focusing on the role played by civil society in CEE during EU accession highlighted how, for those countries, Europeanisation stood as synonym for a “return to Europe”. One of the main questions is whether some spontaneous changes have been undertaken since then or EU-driven transformations played the major role. Anyhow, Salgado argued that a direct pressure from European institutions on CSOs is not conceivable, as different types of incentives replace it (2014, p.8). In studying the impact of the supranational level, scholars have usually given priority to goal attainment in terms of compliance with EU rules and requirements. Nonetheless, the role of European law on civil society, Salgado argues, is quite weak and the only sources of change - however with limited impact - are funding and access opportunities (2014). In particular, the multilevel nature of EU polity further expands the political channels for civil society. On the other hand, it cannot go unnoticed that engagement and confidence in the EU appears to be weak in many civil societies. The main dimensions of the impact of European Union decisions on civil society are its political-institutional infrastructure, capacity building and horizontal linkages.<sup>25</sup> For instance, within the framework of informal integration processes, non-state actors can be active in debates about several EU issues in the form of transnational cooperative networks and platforms at the European level, allowing the mutual transmission of knowledge and values.

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<sup>25</sup> The institutional infrastructure refers to the development of institutions, systems and resources that support civil society. Here the focus is on tangible elements rather than a relationship and cultural norms. It includes the legal and fiscal frameworks for NGOs, the improvement of local philanthropy and the creation of umbrella organisations with representative and advocacy functions. Capacity building stands for building the capacity of civil society through financial aid (EU funding is a crucial support), technical assistance and training. It allows civil society to engage in decision-making and implementation processes. Horizontal linkages are a synonym for bonds of trust, cooperation and interdependence among individuals and groups within civil society to advance shared purposes and common needs, while building relational and cultural norms.

Anyway, only some civil society actors interact more closely with EU institutions and are able to build effective lobbies and networks in Brussels as, for example, environmental NGOs. On the other hand, Sandholtz affirmed that Europeanisation processes benefit subnational actors that gain in additional resources to counterbalance their asymmetric relationship with national governments as well as the lack of proper financial support (1996).

Interestingly, Kohler-Koch identified in the countries' highly differentiated national political cultures the main obstacle the equal representation of societal interests at the EU level. However, while opening the way to further research in the literature on bottom-up Europeanisation, she failed to provide concrete solutions to the issue (2008).

## 2.5 Cultural diversity for dialogue in a “united in diversity” Europe

The former UN Secretary General once declared, “Tolerance, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever in a world where peoples are becoming more and more closely interconnected” (Kofi Annan, 2000).

In the 2000s, what has caught the attention of many sociologists is the impact of greater mobility and dynamic processes of globalisation, which have resulted in increased contacts between cultures, religions and ethnic groups. At the same time, cultural diversity has become the norm in many European countries and beyond. As a result, discourses about the peaceful coexistence of people with different cultures, identities and histories seem to be particularly urgent in the present days, since concepts of otherness and difference have re-emerged together with hatred and xenophobia. In this context, tolerance, which is both an attitude and a state of mind, acquires various conceptual meanings: the attitude of being positively indifferent to difference, the recognition of the rights of others and openness and curiosity towards the other (Walzer, 1997). However, in any society, there is always some degree of diversity that people are not fully able to accept.

Primarily, to define the concept of “culture” it is useful to look at the everyday life and the way it is categorised by people. Its elements of distinction encompass history, social behaviour, religious practice, body language, dialect, eating habits, dress style, traditional festivities, and so forth. It is possible to look at its meaning by adopting the broad definition suggested by Williams who defined culture as “the whole way of life

embedding all spiritual and material activities of people” (1982, p.4). On the other hand, its conceptualisation as a component of social identity is strictly connected with discourses on civilisation, social classifications and hierarchies. What is more, culture is strictly linked to nationality and it might become a synonym for national stereotype. The present research highlights how reflections on the notion of “culture” are strictly intertwined with reflections on the interaction between cultures. Nowadays, a major question is whether multiculturalism<sup>26</sup> represents a dead concept, given the dramatic increase in the speeches against it, in the wave of Great Britain and France. Vertovec and Wessendorf have called its retreat a real “backlash” or boomerang effect (2010). For many European governments, multiculturalism has become an uncomfortable concept and, for some, it has even failed, although such a statement seems to be questionable and lacking a concrete basis of evidence.<sup>27</sup> Most extreme factions argue that it would underestimate problems linked to immigration and ethnic diversity.

As a result, the current phase is one in which the term “multiculturalism” seems to have been abandoned in favor of the use of “cultural diversity”, “cultural pluralism” and “intercultural dialogue”, in order to avoid the misunderstandings and illusions it brings with it. The concept of “diversity” encompasses measures to lower discrimination, to guarantee equality of opportunity in all domains of social life. The criticisms to multiculturalism contended that, on the contrary, it ignores questions of economic and political inequality, i.e. unemployment, and social and political marginalization, besides reinforcing the perception of minorities as external “other”.

Today, many countries are experiencing an immigration crisis and even Poland is likely to be one of them in the near future. Many people look at immigration as a synonym for overpopulation, security threats and a factor of failed integration. In this case, NGOs often provide an alternative means of support and representation against the generally observed neutrality of the state in tackling these issues. An increased attention to the study of culture and identity in International Relations has led to the emergence of the concept of “societal security” and discursive constructions on the concept of “securitization”,<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Multiculturalism designates the celebration of ethnocultural diversity in terms of people’s customs, traditions, cuisine, music, existing in a multi-ethnic society. It considers these as authentic cultural practices that members of ethnic groups should preserve.

<sup>27</sup> Discourses of multiculturalism’s death are largely exaggerated: multiculturalism takes different forms and not all of them are subject to a backlash. Only in relation to immigrants a certain form of retreat is quite evident.

<sup>28</sup> Securitization discourses, usually associated with the Copenhagen school of security studies, belong to a functional approach arguing that security should be seen as a speech act where the central issue is not if threats are real or not, but the ways in which a certain issue (from migration to environmental

especially in foreign policy. We could guess how social attitudes toward increasing waves of immigration will change together with public awareness of the importance of intercultural dialogue in Poland.

As regards images and perceptions of the “other”, stereotypes may degenerate to prejudices and express a certain socially constructed perception of the other as morally deviated, racially, culturally or ethnically inferior, corrupted or tending to criminal acts (Lippmann, 2007). Very often, they can inform ideologies and structure political life (Galent, Goddeeris and Niedzwiedzki, 2009, p.153). This complex picture of human relations reveals the significance of identity discourses.<sup>29</sup> Notably, cultural identity<sup>30</sup> is what distinguishes cultures and historical backgrounds, and the belonging to different social and ethnic groups. For its part, the EU exists as both a geopolitical entity and an identity project.<sup>31</sup> The Europeanness of a country or people is complex to define: it may be centred on specific moral values, genetic features, living standards, as well as the image of Western Europe as model of modernity, prosperity and democratic rule. Despite this, the concept of “European identity” remains rather abstract for many European citizens (Della Porta & Caiani, 2006).

Given these premises, the need of a Habermasian “dialogue of cultures” is one of the main implications. By contrast, the concept of intercultural dialogue leaves a large room for interpretation. There is not a universally accepted definition of intercultural dialogue, but its practices generally aim at going beyond the realm of tolerance to establish a deeper interaction and a mutual empathy between people. In general, the promotion of intercultural dialogue goes together with the development of intercultural competences.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, education plays a pivotal role in promoting an “intercultural learning” that may allow to cope with potential changes and challenges of today’s world. Intercultural contacts have become easier to establish thanks to a wide range of

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degradation) can be socially and subjectively constructed as a threat. The notion of “securitization” is increasingly associated to framed attitudes and discourses about immigrants.

<sup>29</sup> Identity *per se* corresponds to a social construction informing the social life of a group and every form of social contact is a crucial element in its construction.

<sup>30</sup> The basis of such an identity are commonly shared cultural features, among which historical consciousness and language occupy an important place.

<sup>31</sup> “Europe” tends to be a cultural and historical concept rather than geographical and the current debate is more focused on identity issues rather than the scope of a wider European integration.

<sup>32</sup> Given deepening processes of globalization and worldwide contacts between individuals and organizations, what they increasingly need is the ability to communicate in a successful way. Intercultural competence is the ability for successful communication with people of other cultures and requires emotional competence and intercultural sensitivity.

technological innovations, more permeable borders between nations and increased cultural exchanges, especially among students and workers. Many people perceive cultural diversity and the presence of foreigners as a threat to cultural autonomy or a means to destroy the pure elements attached to a culture.

Intercultural dialogue allows a sharing along both cultural and ethnical dividing lines.

It is possible to initiate and promote such a dialogue through a number of challenging initiatives, comprising cultural, educational and artistic events like seminars, trainings, workshops, multicultural festivals, competitions and international cultural exchanges. Hence, the importance of civil society participation in cultural cooperation is evident (Dogot, Gyula, & Gimeno Ugalde, 2008, p.45).

### 2.5.1 The intercultural dimension in the European Union official documents

“Le dialogue entre les diversités du continent Européen est le fondement de la réalisation de l’Europe et de l’idée Européenne de l’homme encore inachevée” (Denis De Rougemont, 1984).

With regard to the project of European regional integration, the EU professed to promote “constructive social, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, education, support for cultural and religious expressions that respect national and European values, rights and laws” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p.23). Together with other regional and international organisations, the Union has been rather active in the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, which is perceived as a crucial instrument for the success of integration strategies. One goal of the Culture Programme published by the European Parliament for the period 2007-2013 was to enhance intercultural dialogue, which refers to other principles and priorities of the EU, namely social cohesion, solidarity and social justice (European Parliament, 2001, p.144). Particularly, the action of the EU within the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYIC)<sup>33</sup> was associated to the promotion of an idea of European

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<sup>33</sup> The EYIC was the outcome of the decisions no. 1983/2006/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

citizenship as one open to the world and based on European common values. Its strategy aimed at giving a European dimension to best practices related to this field, especially among young people and children, with the prevention and eradication of xenophobic attitudes and intolerance toward otherness as their main goal. According to the Treaty of the European Union, “the EU should respect its rich cultural and religious diversity, and ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced” (Art.3 TEU). Intercultural dialogue can be also referred to as cross-cultural communication, which is used by the EU as a soft power instrument to face the contemporary challenges resulting from cultural diversity and the calls for bridging cultures through dialogue. Notwithstanding, as regards best practices linked to intercultural dialogue, there is a lack of standard EU indicators for its implementation and monitoring. Moreover, the concept of interculturalism is often misleadingly associated and confused with broader issues of cultural diversity and cross-border cooperation. Similarly, there is no international, European or national law that regulates intercultural dialogue as a distinct legal category. However, the proper context in which such dialogue can effectively take place is a context of respect for human rights, equality of opportunity and participation, and freedom of expression where different cultures are able to interact. Indeed, the success of intercultural dialogue is strictly linked to the fulfilment of basic human civic, social and cultural rights as those listed in the European Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, including non-discrimination, religious and linguistic rights, and political participation (art. 22).

Within official EU legal documents, intercultural dialogue is mentioned in connection with the dimensions of intercultural education, citizenship education and human rights education. From a more detailed point of view, in 2001 the EU Council of Education exhibited a strong commitment in the promotion of active citizenship and social cohesion. Notably, it emphasized “the development of society, in particular by fostering democracy, reducing the disparities among individuals and groups and promoting cultural diversity” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p.7). Moreover, with reference to intercultural competence, it recommended that “all citizens should learn skills required in an increasingly international and multicultural society”. Interestingly, according to the EU, the concept of identity is part of a process involving the development of “interpersonal, intercultural and social competencies, civic competencies, and cultural awareness” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p.12). Indeed, culture became one of the defining elements of European identity since it is what is supposed to bind Europeans together.

The presence of the concept of intercultural dialogue in the European Union policy on culture seems to have remarkably increased. For instance, the acquisition of a so-called “intercultural competence” in educational settings at all levels became crucial and it was also included among the objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission (European Commission, 2007). At the same time, the EU stressed the need for intercultural dialogue given that “the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue” (European Commission, 2009, p.2).

Interestingly, some Europe-wide networks of organisations engaged in the culture field played a crucial role in opening a debate on the need to develop a common framework of reference for practices of cross-cultural dialogue. In particular, the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue<sup>34</sup> supported this claim. It represents a bridge between organisations from the culture field active at the grassroots level and those engaged at the EU level, and it was recognized by the European Commission as a structured dialogue<sup>35</sup> platform.

Given these premises, the aim of this research is to explore the response of Poland’s civil society and third sector to European norms and values as well as their impact on NGOs’ discourses on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Yet, the evaluation of non-profits contribution in this field perhaps needs a longer time perspective.

## 2.6 The EU funding opportunities and other incentives for civil society consolidation

An additional effect of Europeanisation on voluntary organisations such as NGOs derives from the access to EU public funds, which serve to implement programs and

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<sup>34</sup> The Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, replaced by the Platform for Intercultural Europe, was designed to function as an interface between civil society and the European Commission and to strengthen the structured dialogue between EU institutions and the culture sector within the policy debate at the European level.

<sup>35</sup> Structured Dialogue was created by the European agenda for culture in a globalising world” of December 2007 and it allows NGOs to play an advisory role while benefitting from cooperation with EU institutions. In order to establish a structured dialogue meant as the participation of civil society in EU policy processes the Platform for Intercultural Europe makes use of the EU Integration Forum.



policies formulated at the EU level. With regard to this, funding for such organisations is usually provided in exchange of their expertise in order to give them political legitimacy or get specific policy information (Jacquot, 2013, p.8). However, it seems that the EU funding programs are too much bureaucratised and therefore not accessible for many NGOs. A high degree of expertise and good contacts with specific people who know the process better sometimes help better organised organisations in obtaining EU funds, which, however, tends to create a certain hierarchy within the third sector. In this regard, Trezz argued that for smaller NGOs it usually appears to be more difficult also to gain access into all levels of EU governance system (Trezz, 2007). Moreover, a crucial factor is the cultural resonance of EU-donor's funding programmes in the receiving society. In brief, the offer of incentives from the EU should not be conceived only as an instrumental strategy giving to CSOs a European character, given that the process is not always sustainable for them.

On the other hand, non-material resources accessible to these actors through EU funds are equally important. An illustrative example is the use of the European public sphere as the arena to raise the voice of societal interests and improve CSOs' political salience. At the same time, the EU can use the promotion of horizontal contacts between NGOs to boost Europeanisation.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, since many EU funding programmes require the formation of transnational networks of cooperation, they facilitate the formation of international partnerships with organisations from other countries, hence allowing cross-national exchange. From a political perspective, some NGOs, particularly those related to environmental and social issues, occasionally function as a watchdog for the European Commission, which conceives them as an intermediary to ensure the correct application of EU policies at the national, regional and local level. Mainstream studies on Europeanisation have given too much priority to those organisations that are active at the European level. Even locally based NGOs may be interested in European Union dynamics and they may be important change agents providing the incentives for larger changes (Salgado, 2014). In this context, by borrowing the argument adopted by Galent, Goddeeris and Niedzwiedzki, I claim for the necessity of a stronger focus on micro dynamics in the social dimension of the present research (2009).

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<sup>36</sup> Horizontal contacts, however, may occur also independently from the existence of the European Union, but the latter can provide the arena for communication or competition between organisations as well as Member States.

Salgado rightly acknowledged the weak social dimension of European integration due to the imperfect representation of societal interests at the European level (2014). Her study is relevant for the present research because it acknowledged how the Europeanisation has not investigated enough the actions and reactions of smaller non-profit actors. In line with the criticism addressed by Salgado, an empirical study conducted by Lundberg, Brundin and Bozzini pointed out how the main obstacle to an effective participation of CSOs in European networks seems to be the extremely bureaucratic nature of EU funding (Lundberg, Brundin, Bozzini, 2011). Similar criticisms found a resonance in a study by Pleines (2006, p.62). On the other hand, Lundberg, Brundin and Bozzini acknowledged the generally limited interaction between civil society and EU political structures, within the political context of a European multilevel system of governance (2011).<sup>37</sup> Besides this, his main contribution is the acknowledgement of the reference to Europe as the master frame used to activate local civic actors at the national and European level (Pleines, 2006, p.57).<sup>38</sup> The limit of this political strategy, however, resides in the need of compromise with integration demands, which represent the risk for NGOs to be used rather as tools of EU policy implementation.<sup>39</sup> The general assumption is that NGOs perform different reactions to EU funding and the related opportunities it brings with it.

## 2.7 The case of Poland: civil society and the EU conditionality rule

The peaceful democratic transformations occurred in Central and Eastern Europe relied on a dynamic civil society emanating a strong impulse for democracy and facilitating the reform process during the 1980s and 1990s. After 1989, the principle of

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<sup>37</sup> The notion of “multilevel governance” refers to a new perspective for the analysis of EU polity emerged in the early 1990s with the theories of Hooghe and Marks. It envisages the processes of European integration as more complex and diversified than the mere transfer of sovereignty from the Member States to the EU supranational level. The decisional function is dispersed between distinct levels of government and the action of the national level depends on the resources of the others for policy formulation and implementation. This picture of interconnected arenas links the local, the regional, the national and the supranational and leads to modes of decision-making based on bargaining and deliberation (for decision-making as collective process, see Kingdon, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> The European Union is used by many NGOs as equivalent for frames of human rights and European liberal values to legitimise their activities and missions at the local, national and European levels.

<sup>39</sup> At the supranational level there is only room for occasional consultations and NGOs are welcomed mostly when they behave as supporters of European integration. The approach of the Commission seems to promote openness and pluralism on the one hand, and provide limited flexibility on the other.

subsidiarity,<sup>40</sup> as it was set out by the EU in the Maastricht Treaty, played a crucial role together with the local delivery of services and it was mentioned in the Polish Constitution of 1997. In 2005, the creation of the Civic Initiatives Fund was the response to the government's long-term objective of further empowering the potential of the NGO sector and the Polish model of social economy. Many CSOs' activities depend on foreign financial support. Civil society, also called "alternative society" or "parallel polis", embedded modernity and democracy, which became the tools to overcome forms of "national renaissance" after communism (Leś et al., 2004, p.19). In the transition period, civil society stood for a "collective action frame" taking the form of organised civic movements in opposition to the communist regime. At the same time, the civil society sector underwent a significant functional and normative revolution.

Grabbe identified the uniqueness of the Europeanisation process in CEE in its rapid pace of adjustment, the candidates' relative openness to EU influence and the asymmetrical relationship in favour of the EU (2002). He also observed the power of EU conditionality in shaping behaviours and practices through benchmarking, models and technical assistance (Grabbe, 2002, p.9). Another type of top-down approach in studying Europeanisation with respect to civil society looks at how European civil society practices activate civil actors at the local level, which is the perspective mostly adopted by sociological analyses of Europeanisation and European integration. For instance, the EU represented a legitimacy instrument for the increased involvement of civil society in domestic political decision-making. Rek pointed out that, in general, the EU impact on civil society's interactions with the national level has been more significant as it led to increased political weight of organised groups in participation processes (2010, p.71).

One assumption to be tested is whether, in the case of Poland, Europeanisation turned to be a process that both affects and is affected by non-governmental actors. A secondary goal of this research is to identify the different impacts that European norms and values produce on the non-governmental sector at the local level. Before the EU accession, non-state actors played a key role in making the country adapt to EU minimum requirements for civil society development as established by the *acquis*. Moreover, the EU political strategy was implemented through the Civil Society Dialogue initiative, designed as a political and cultural dialogue between the European institutions and candidate states (European Commission, 2005, p.2).

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<sup>40</sup> In the EU, the subsidiarity principle ensures that powers are exercised as close to the citizens as possible.

On the other hand, a successful uploading is likely to have an impact on the effectiveness of downloading in terms of domestic change (Howell, 2004, p.5). Even subnational actors may be involved in a sort of micro uploading. Nonetheless, a largely shared perception is that the participation of civil society organisations in EU policy debates has generally been limited (Pleines, 2006; Salgado, 2014). The obstacles to an effective activation of grassroots organisations are mainly located at the national level due to a lack of resources and knowledge of policy processes related to the European level. Gąsior-Niemec and Gliński argued, instead, that the main determinants of a weak involvement of CSOs may be a significant material differentiation within the third sector, partly resulting from different levels of normative and institutional pressure exercised by EU funds (2007, p.32). Nonetheless, some authors argue that most post-socialist countries present a high degree of dependence on the communist legacy in terms of political, economic and social order (Borragán, 2004, p.249).

In order to capture local Polish peculiarities, Europeanisation should not be conceived as homogenisation but as a concept reflecting both the unity and diversity of European society (Borragán and Smismans, 2010). As a result, I argue that European civil society research benefits from studies of pluralism, cultural diversity and multilevel governance

As argued by Anheier, the evolution of civil society often tells the whole history of a country, its national legacies and constraints (1999, p.17). In Poland, it has been a crucial actor of systemic change, accompanying the structural transformations underwent during the shift from communist dictatorships to democracy. Under the socialist rule, the already existing forms of civic engagement were generally associated with the activities of the church, social movements and the aristocracy, but they were organised in underground existence. The absence of an open and inclusive civil society ensuring freedoms of association and expression found reflection in the elitist character of every societal initiative, which increased the gap between elite and masses (Szabó, 2004, p.79). Partly for this reason, one important legacy from that period is a strong public distrust on the state and formal institutions (Fritz, 2004, p.16).

Some authors claimed that Poland had an atomised and imperfect civil society under the socialist rule, mostly because an independent non-profit sector did not exist yet (Kubik, 2000, p.189). Since 1990, due to a more favourable political and social environment, Poland assisted to a veritable “association boom” of legalised civic groups, followed by a homogeneous increase in the number of almost any type of CSOs. Between

1989 and 1999, the numbers of membership grew 14 times in Poland (Mansfeldová, Nałęcz, Priller & Zimmer, 2013, p.104). Early sources of external funding for civil society were the United Nations Development Programme, the US Agency for International Development, the PHARE Programme and EU accession funds (Czajkowska, 2011, p.18).

Particularly, there was a clear shift towards locally-oriented civic engagement. Already existing forms of non-profit activities mostly had the form of associations or foundations,<sup>41</sup> but several legal and financial constraints to their fully-fledged development remained, even after the Act on Foundations of 1984 entered into force. After 1989, Polish CSOs tended to follow the Western path of bottom-up organisations emerged from the citizens' initiative. Yet, they tended to maintain a horizontal character, as they were strongly dependent on Western technical and financial support. At the national level, the Law on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering of 2003<sup>42</sup> set out the rules for cooperation between the non-governmental sector and public administration. It represented the first form of legal recognition comparable to a "Constitution" of the Polish third sector. A common tendency of NGOs in Poland is that of seeking protection, understanding and cooperative attitudes from the political sphere and public administration (Gašior-Niemec and Gliński, 2007, p.251). However, even in Poland, the tendency of the political elite is to recognise the voluntary sector only with merit to its contribution to economy rather than an equal partner to be consulted for the provision of crucial services (Salamon and Anheier, 1999, p.333).

In addition, the collapse of communism brought about more favourable conditions for the involvement of many CSOs in transnational civic networks. From 1989 to the early 2000s, the growth of the sector was accompanied by the development of a number of national umbrella organisations<sup>43</sup> to be better heard at the EU level and to use resources

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<sup>41</sup> Associations are voluntary, self-governing, non-profit, permanent unions of individuals aimed at fostering active participation in public life, actualizing individual interests and expressing different opinions (Polish Law on Associations, 1990). Their main activities go from social services, sport and recreation, to education, professional and labor union services, health care, art and culture. No legal definition exists for foundations, but their main function is to perform economically or socially useful activities.

<sup>42</sup> The Law on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering particularly requires that local government units cooperate with NGOs on a regular basis and recommends different practices, especially annual programmes of cooperation and agreements on financial support to NGOs.

<sup>43</sup> The emergence of umbrella organisations at the EU level is an outcome of Europeanisation, which has led interest groups to reorganise their own lobby strategies towards a multilevel organisational structure.

more efficiently, such as the Forum of Non-Governmental Organisations' Initiatives<sup>44</sup> and the Union of Social Service Non-Profit Organisations. In Poland the main categories used to define the nonprofits are those of “nongovernmental organizations” (*organizacje pozarządowe*), “non-profit sector” (*sektor non-profit*), and “social organizations” (*organizacje społeczne*) (Leś, Nałęcz & Wygnański, 2000, p.2). Historically, the non-profit sector has grown significantly in the last decades, but most Polish NGOs are less than ten years old since 91% of the organisations registered in 2004 were founded after 1989 (Czajkowska, 2011, p.20). As regards NGOs, the sector has shown a tendency toward increased professionalization, in line with the general tendency in Western Europe, due to a higher need of expertise in comparison with the past (Maloney, 2008, p.235). This trend proved to be crucial for their growth and recognition.

Notwithstanding, taking a negative perspective, Rek argued that the country has not achieved a fully-fledged civic culture even after democratisation (2010). Particularly, Howard argued that Poland's civil society is relatively weak when compared to the idealistic expectations of late 1980s and to its Western and Northern counterparts - an issue raised also by international donors (2002, p.157). The societal picture is that of a “democracy without citizens” (Ekiert and Foa, 2011, p.1). This is probably due to many factors, among which the country's recent statehood played a key role (Liebich, 2008, p.283). The result is a broad decline of civil society after post-communism as well as a quite complex picture of the third sector, which appears to be deeply diversified but rather active. In the past twenty years, the scope of the activities carried out by NGOs has widened and many of them became actively engaged in the fields of culture, research and education (Cultures of the World Foundation, Open Culture Foundation, the Polish-American Foundation “A Bond between Cultures”, the Judaica Foundation - Center for Jewish Culture, and many others).

The research on the nonprofit sector in Poland has been mainly conducted by public institutions and third sector organisations.<sup>45</sup> As regards the infrastructure of the country's third sector, almost half of NGOs are small and have none or very low income,

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<sup>44</sup> The national Forum of Non-Governmental Organisations' Initiatives is a periodic event launched in 1996 that takes place every three years in Warsaw and is attended by representatives of non-governmental organisations, local governments, public administration and business sector. In 1996, the main novelty was the introduction of the Charter of Principles of NGO Activities, while in 2003 the National Federation of Polish Non-Governmental Organizations was created. The federation brings together more than 100 organisations from all over the country.

<sup>45</sup> Many of these research institutes are think tanks. They include the KLON/JAWOR Association, the Institute of Public Affairs and the Institute of Political Studies the Polish Academy of Sciences.

mainly coming from government programmes, foreign donors, Polish and foreign organisations and public campaigns. The major challenges faced by Polish NGOs appeared to be the EU pre-accession conditionality, maintaining contacts and uncertain and highly competitive public funding (Czajkowska, 2011). Moreover, among the main challenges faced by the third sector, there is its relationship with the state (Leś et al., 2000, p.21).<sup>46</sup> One of the main obstacles to a full involvement of civil society is represented by the risk of bringing on the table sensitive and controversial issues. Nowadays, a common tendency in Poland seems to be the attachment to old-fashioned political and social traditions as well as conservative modes of behaviour and views on society, which, for instance, undermine major breakthroughs in citizens' attitudes toward cultural pluralism, and the social integration of immigrants and minorities (Mach, 2007). During the years, NGOs have not embraced every social issue. Indeed, the inclusion and promotion of cultural and religious diversity and multiculturalism has not been a priority of the Polish agenda during and after democratic transition. In brief, Poland appears to have a relatively pluralist civil society and a quite young third sector, which may result in sectorial fragmentation and unstable relationships with the state and local administration, besides an unbalanced representation of societal interests. The main democratic transformations and the adoption of norms and practices underlying the development of a liberal democratic society were driven by the accession into the EU and the EU policy of conditionality.

## 2.8 Europeanisation of Polish civil society

The major challenge in theorising Europeanisation is to combine explanations of domestic change with empirical tests. As a result, empirical research on the phenomenon appears to be crucial, as a stable knowledge of its outcomes in certain policy fields is still limited. Researches on the Europeanisation of civil society in Poland have been equally

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<sup>46</sup> It is possible to distinguish different phases of the state approach towards the third sector. The period 1997-2001 was marked by a policy of missed opportunities, i.e. in terms of the inclusion of NGOs in social reforms, and a salient issue was the conflict between third sector representatives and local government about social command. The period 2001-2005 saw the building of a model of inter-sectoral cooperation and the agreement on the Act on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteer Work. The phase between 2005 and 2007 oscillated between cooperation and control (for a detailed analysis, see Rek, 2010).

limited and further studies on the topic could help to assess a variety of important changes experienced by subnational actors, especially NGOs.

In Poland, civil society has been among the main triggers for change in the direction of democratisation and European integration. Simultaneously, according to the findings of Czajkowska, Brzezinska and Sadecka, the accession of Poland into the European Union brought about considerable changes in policy and financing of the third sector (2011, p.36). Liebert and Trenz provided a new perspective on the shift in political responsibility of the non-profit sector towards more sensitive social issues for which they became a sort of “watchdog” for the European Commission (2011, p.8). However, their research lacked a deeper study of the material factors shaping the NGO sector’s participation in the national policy-making. In general, it is desirable that the central government does not have a monopoly on service provision but rather acts in close partnership with local authorities and NGOs.

In order to capture the way in which subnational actors make use of EU resources and constraints while transforming the European polity, this section will adopt an approach looking at their possible “usages” of the European integration process by NGOs. These domestic actors are not passive recipients of the EU influence, but they can develop forms of agency linked to a wide set of social practices reflecting their engagement in Europeanisation dynamics. At the same time, this perspective allows to observe both how the EU makes use of the local level and the way in which local actors use the EU financial (EU funding), cognitive (ideas and values), normative (recommendations, directives, guidelines, etc.) and political resources (access to EU system of multilevel governance). The normative - and also cognitive - influence was particularly strong on Poland’s civil society, given the strict conditions to be met in order to enter the European Union (Grabbe, 1999). In this regard, Poland experienced a long learning process during which several training programmes allowed national officials to become acquainted with the EU institutional structure, its legislation – especially directives,<sup>47</sup> and fund management procedures. Grabbe underlined that the process of Europeanisation there has been wider and deeper in scope because Copenhagen criteria set a wider group of conditions for EU

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<sup>47</sup> The directive is a binding legislative instrument issued by the European Union and “directed” to Member States. It can serve to set minimum EU standards at the national level and, once approved as EU law and implemented by EU members, it has legal force and must be observed in all its prescriptions. However, national authorities have a large margin of manoeuvre as regards the implementing measures. Generally, if a Member State fails to adopt the EU legislation or does not implement it at the national level, the European Commission may initiate a legal action at the European Court of Justice.



membership (2002, p.5). Nonetheless, while recognizing the uniqueness of its asymmetric relationship with the Union, his study failed to focus on the impact of EU influence on the cognitive and normative system of Poland's civil society. On the other hand, Liebert and Trenz investigated how the EU affected the role of civil society in new Member States with regard to the development of a public sphere in the case of new Member States. They claim that, because of deepening European integration, new forms of EU governance concerning civil society consultation and participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies have emerged (Liebert and Trenz, 2008, p.3). Moreover, many scholars agreed that an immediate effect of European integration has been the institutional strengthening of third sector actors in the sense of expanded incentives to engage in transnational and supranational forms of cooperation and dialogue as well as the enhanced access to EU public funds. Several authors have claimed that different national historical legacies resulted in diversified outcomes in terms of Europeanisation. Börzel and Risse included domestic incentives, the nature of statehood and the regime type among the factors explaining the impact of EU policies and institutions on Member States (2014, p.12). Similarly, as regards output legitimacy, constructivists focus on the consistency between EU policies, on the one hand, and values and identities framing domestic beliefs at the national level on the other (Schmidt, 2013, p.5).

The impact of EU conditionality, which was mainly associated with democratisation processes and free market economy, has been significant in three respects: the (national and subnational) polity,<sup>48</sup> the economy and the society. Through the PHARE programme,<sup>49</sup> for instance, the EU helped to strengthen civil society and informal relations between CSOs and transnational civic networks in Poland and other CEE countries. The adjustment of third sector organisations to EU standards was the result of a combination of endogenous and exogenous factors interacting with each other, the former including the resources of civic actors, the political and financial support of the state and the quality of institutional infrastructure. In the case where EU policy of

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<sup>48</sup> National and subnational polities include representative and governmental institutions, relations between levels of government, the judicial system, political parties, pressure groups and public administration.

<sup>49</sup> The PHARE programme (*Poland and Hungary: Action for the Restructuring of the Economy*), launched in 1989, is one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the EU to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union. In its support to institutional development it involved also the civil society sector and made use of special instruments, such as the PHARE Democracy Programme, Lien Programme, the PHARE access Programme and PHARE Partnership Programme.

conditionality has been applied, benchmarking and monitoring proved to be crucial in the provision of best practices that applicants should follow, even though national traditions, policy paradigms and different perceptions of what a good standard is played a role. In Poland, the willingness to follow the EU models was jeopardised by the weakness of post-communist statehood and civil society (Grabbe, 2002, p.29). Although the external pressure from the EU is a crucial variable, it must be noted that in many policy areas, including social policy, culture and education, the decision-making at the national level remained a domestic prerogative (Vachudova, 2005, p. 229). What is more, in several policy areas, national governments are left with vague EU requirements. With regard to this, the study by Sedelmeier on the processes of Europeanisation in new Member States provided to look at the EU influence on domestic political and social structures (2011). However, his work did not address issues of Europeanisation of civil society including the relationship between society and the state and the participation of civil actors in the policy-making.

After Poland's accession, the EU active leverage has been replaced, although not fully, by dispersed Europeanisation dynamics. The EU influence on Poland's civil society with regard to liberal democratic values has been particularly relevant. According to constructivist theories, the process of Europeanisation and its impact on the third sector may be explained by looking at the EU as a model with reference to prosperity, stability, democracy and civic culture (Risse, Cowles and Caporaso, 2001, p.9). Indeed, according to sociological institutionalism, the EU appears as a "community representative" based on a liberal collective identity informed by the rule of law, social pluralism, democratic political participation and representation, and free market economy (Schimmelfennig, 2001, p.59). Collective ideas, in turn, shape identity and interests of actors, who, in consonance with the *homo sociologicus* model, act on the basis of those internalized values and social norms. Nonetheless, the study of adaptation to the EU norms and values shaping the activities of civil society seems particularly complex. The main question acting as discriminant to detect real outcomes of EU influence is to ask whether a certain change would have taken place without Europeanisation that means conducting a counterfactual analysis.

The membership in the European Union gave Poland the right of equal access to EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, which represent another important source of normative and institutional pressure (Gliński, 2006, p.37). For instance, the 2004-2006 competition for public grants dispensed by the EU have played a major role in providing

NPOs with an increased number of opportunities and incentives (Gašior-Niemec and Gliński, 2007, p.249).<sup>50</sup> One of the main outcomes of the availability of EU funding was an increased pressure on Polish civil society to acquire new skills and know-how as well as to improve institutional capabilities. As a result, in many cases, new EU funding opportunities have only enhanced the cognitive and institutional challenges existing at the local level.

The Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013 granted to Poland were mainly concentrated on the objectives of the European Employment strategies, thus neglecting other areas of social intervention. For instance, the money coming from the EU is particularly important for cultural national programmes because they tend to be poorly financed by the state. In this context, the rules for the use of the money from European Social Fund<sup>51</sup> have been partly responsible for a certain polarization of the civil society sector (Rymsza, 2008, p.61).

On the other hand, the perspective adopted by Sudbery claimed that Europeanisation is more a cyclical phenomenon of complex mutual interactions and a bottom-up approach is particularly appropriate for studying the case of Polish civil society and third sector (2008, p.3). In her study on Polish women's rights NGOs, she put the focus on the nature of the EU as not only a source of policies and regulation but also as an idea that is used as a master frame for action by a large set of subnational actors (Sudbery, 2008). Her study is relevant because it assumes that subnational actors may also succeed in achieving their goals at the European level rather than within the national dimension,<sup>52</sup> either for lack of trust in national institutions or for particularly strong cooperative networks with other European organisations. A parallel exists between the two studies as, to the same extent of gender issues, intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity *per se* have not proved to be particularly sensitive issues in Polish society.

In conclusion, Polish voluntary organisations, including NGOs, had only a limited influence on the European arena when it comes to representation of their interests and

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<sup>50</sup> The club theory argues that, within the horizontal processes of European integration, namely the EU enlargement, Member States need to find an effective solution to the problem of cooperation that maximizes collective welfare. What is crucial is the distribution of the costs and benefits of enlargement both to old and new members.

<sup>51</sup> The European Social Fund (ESF) is the main financial instrument of the EU for the promotion of employment and social inclusion, promulgating a strategy of investment in the human capital of European citizens.

<sup>52</sup> In line with the neofunctional theory of "political spillover", the European venue may represent a valuable alternative to domestic veto players and a place where to promote universal democratic values with a higher level of audience. It is a point of access for policies potentially more favourable to local demands rather than national ones.

development of transnational networks (Borragán, 2004, p.250). The impact of EU norms and democratic values tended to be wider and deeper in scope.

### 2.8.1 The EU influence on Poland's third sector with regard to cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue

In recent decades, cultural diversification has gained momentum. Europe has attracted migrants in search of a better life and asylum-seekers from across the world. [...] As we live in increasingly multicultural societies, we need therefore to promote intercultural dialogue and intercultural competences (European Commission, 2007, pp. 8-13).

In the case of Polish society, discourses on the maintenance of national sovereignty and status quo have re-emerged with force and the revival of ethnic-based identities represents an important source of potential resistance to Europeanisation in the field of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Among the long-lasting legacies of the communist period, Szabó observed a certain reluctance toward cultural pluralism and tolerance accompanied by the fear of an external cultural dominance (2004, p.86). In this context, it is worth to point out how civil society is able to enshrine the social energy necessary to face political, economic, social or cultural crises. In the last decades, an increasing permeation of European values and models occurred in Poland, but recently Europe has turned to be a controversial topic, especially in terms of the social and cultural values it exports. For many, the EU is associated to the openness of national frontiers, which represents a threat to national culture and cultural identity. It seems feasible to suggest that, as many observers put it into light, Poland as a historically multicultural country has a hardly stable tradition of acceptance for cultural pluralism, even though the Poles distinguish themselves for a relatively strong social identity (Mach, 2007). As a result, issues of interculturalism<sup>53</sup> and intercultural dialogue have not been a subject of public debate in Poland, even after the collapse of communism.

Today, the official statistics say that the number of foreigners is doomed to increase in the country and this would be one reason to enhance practices of intercultural

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<sup>53</sup> Interculturalism is used as synonym for intercultural dialogue as it promotes dialogue and interactions between different cultures. Precisely, the concept has emerged as a response to the criticisms addressed to policies of multiculturalism that failed to achieve social inclusion.

dialogue among citizens. After an era of nationalism, war and Soviet communism, Polish society needs to perceive diversity as an immense opportunity of enrichment and confrontation, and the coexistence of different cultures as a chance to overcome ethnic conflicts, social misunderstandings, racist and xenophobic attitudes, mental closure, cultural prejudice and stereotypes. Since 1993, intercultural dialogue played also a crucial role in the establishment of good relations between the members of the Carpathian Euroregion<sup>54</sup> including Poland (Dogot, Gyula & Gimeno Ugalde, 2008). In 2011, the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU has adopted significant measures concerning the diversity of cultural expressions, such as the EU Youth Conference in Warsaw and the “Go East, Erasmus!” Conference of Ministries of science and higher education in Białystok.

Given that the rationale of the non-profit sector is its capacity to advance pluralism and accommodate diversity, NGOs turned to perform an essential function in the promotion of contacts and exchanges between cultures. In 2008, Poland actively took part in the European Heritage Days, designed to foster the promotion of an idea of Europe as a space of cultural and human diversity, with the exhibition “The Commonwealth of diverse cultures: Poland’s heritage”. In Poland’s National Strategy for the EYID, a particular attention has been put on the relevance of dialogue between cultures in daily life. Moreover, Poland’s action plan envisaged the creation of a Council of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue composed by the major Polish NGOs dealing with intercultural dialogue activities, ethnic and national minority organisations, academic communities and governmental organisations.<sup>55</sup> Since 2008, NGOs have been actively involved in the implementation of the National Project “EYID in Poland” through conferences, seminars, research studies on multiculturalism, training courses and festivals dedicated to culture. According to the promotion of good practices, an electronic survey on projects dealing with intercultural dialogue has been created in the web portal “Polish regions in the European cultural space”. Even as regards monitoring actions, it has been decided that, according to the requirements set by the EU, the National Centre for Culture

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<sup>54</sup> The Carpathian Euroregion, established in 1993, includes the bordering areas of Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. The aim of this international association is to support cooperation among these countries in the field of culture, science, education and economy.

<sup>55</sup> National cultural institutions operating in the field of intercultural dialogue are the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the International Cultural Centre, the Fryderyk Chopin National Institute and the National Centre for Culture.

was responsible for monitoring the activities of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in Poland.

In conclusion, the country has experienced a relative openness since cultural changes went together with a relative acceptance of ethnic otherness and cultural diversity, even though it is difficult to measure discrimination against other cultures or the scope of dialogue between different peoples. In Poland, certain stereotypes and distorted images of the “other” may be the result of a common attitude in seeing the world in an old manner that present close connections with the communist way of thinking (Mach, 2007, p.60). All this has led to ambiguous legacies of the EU accession on the national debates and practices linked to intercultural dialogue. Nonetheless, Poland has tried to be at the forefront with innovative practices promoting contacts between members of different cultures, mainly through the active engagement of many NGOs in the field.

The next chapter will focus on the broad research design employed in this study and the type of methodology used to answer the main research hypotheses concerning the Europeanisation of Polish NGOs promoting intercultural dialogue.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This chapter illustrates the research methodology used in this study. It explains the procedure followed for the selection of the research sample, the setting of questionnaire, the selection of participants to the research and the codes used during the process of data analysis. It also presents a discussion on the validity and limitations of the study.

This empirical study stems from curiosity towards the complex phenomenon of Europeanisation taking place at the EU level and having a specific impact at the subnational level in Member States. The purpose of this research is to investigate the scope of the influence of the European Union on a group of Polish NGOs that are actively engaged in fostering both cultural diversity in all its implications and intercultural dialogue. The research focuses in particular on organisations that have had access to European Union funds in the form of public grants to finance their projects. More in detail, it explores different dimensions of EU influence with regard to these NGOs, namely their adoption of EU-related norms and values, their representation and participation at the EU level, their involvement in forms of transnational cooperation and the impact of European integration on their relationship with the Polish government.

The main goal has been to understand whether and how the outcomes of Europeanisation of NGOs may be influenced by such variables as political culture, the level of public awareness, institutional legacies, a material differentiation among NGOs and different European values adopted in the mission implemented by each organisation. The potential limits of such a case study consist in the difficulty to carry out a research in the field of Europeanisation where not many other empirical studies exist.

In approaching the topic of Europeanisation of Polish NGOs and in relation with the main conceptual issues explored in the previous chapter, three distinct but connected qualitative research techniques have been applied. First, a thematic content analysis of the main official documents issued by EU institutions on the topic of respect for and

promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue has been carried out. The same type of analytic instrument has been used for the analysis of the content of NGOs' websites and publications. Second, a pre-interview online survey has been conducted in order to reach the appropriate pool of respondents according to some distinctive elements that served to divide them into categories. Finally, a semi-structured interview has been conducted with each respondent of the chosen NGO. In this final stage, the research has addressed the leaders of four NGOs settled in Poland that are actively engaged in voluntary activities preserving and promoting cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and contacts between cultures, although in different ways. The interview schedule has been slightly modified in light of emerging findings, which needed to be further explored during the interview. For instance, new perspectives on the complexity of the access to EU funds and the tendency to import good practices from other countries were introduced by some respondents.

Therefore, a qualitative method has been preferred to a quantitative one, as it appears more appropriate for analysing the complexity of the phenomenon of Europeanisation in terms of outcomes and intervening variables. It allows for an in-depth description of actors' behaviours, attitudes and personal perspectives, instead of making generalisations based on numbers.

The assumptions of constructivist institutionalism have been adopted by this research, which conceives the impact of the EU-led processes in terms of socialisation and social learning through the consistency between the EU policies and the values, norms and practices related to NGOs. It focuses on the internalisation of European values and principles by the organisations and their leaders that means the usages of the Europe frame as a cognitive and normative model of reference. The principles and values an organisation adopts are reflected in the way it designs its mission, which generally tells what the organisation is about, what are the main ideals and values it promotes and how it operates to achieve them. Answering these broader questions and addressing these concerns requires the inclusion of a qualitative study.

A thematic content analysis of the mission statement, project reports and publications of each NGO has been carried out, focusing on the main ideas, messages and values communicated therein. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate discussion surrounding the main research questions, especially to investigate possible expressions of socialisation and social learning processes as well as cross-loading dynamics they enabled the interviewer to obtain additional information on issues that



might not have been envisaged in advance. In particular, this type of interview appeared to be the most suitable research instrument as it follows an interview schedule but at the same time welcomes a certain flexibility in terms of responses and feedbacks.

The combination of these research strategies provided the methodological basis to develop hypotheses linked to the existing theories on the Europeanisation of the third sector, with particular attention on NGOs, and design a research strategy to test the main methodological assumptions. Even though both qualitative and quantitative research methods may aim to capture the individual's point of view, qualitative tools are expected to carry out the task from a closer perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.16).

The final aim is to test whether the theories on Europeanisation of civil society and the third sector can be applied to the case studies. Indeed, what the research attempted to demonstrate is that Europeanisation processes do not lead to predetermined results, but to relatively uncertain outcomes both in relation to top-down and bottom-up dynamics of influence, given the distinct cultural, institutional and financial contexts in which the NGOs operate. In order to answer the main questions, a case-oriented method has been used to provide a different way to explain social phenomena associated with the process of European integration.

The following section briefly presents and discusses the research hypotheses that the research will try to answer.

### 3.2 Research hypotheses

Building on the main theoretical assumptions on mechanisms of Europeanisation maintained by the study, some research hypotheses have been formulated. In line with the theoretical concepts of downloading, uploading and cross-loading, the phenomenon of Europeanisation tends to both affect and to be affected by the chosen non-governmental organisations. On the other hand, the Polish non-governmental organisations are likely to react in different ways to developments at the EU level, especially in terms of internalisation of the idea of a European cognitive and normative framework.

The first hypothesis argues that the European Union exerts a cognitive influence on Polish NGOs operating in the field of intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity, developing through a process of socialisation involving the organisations and their leaders. According to such a process, the mission and action of the non-governmental

organisations are likely to be inspired to such European values and principles as respect for cultural diversity, tolerance, solidarity, democracy, respect for human rights, social cohesion and promotion of intercultural competence, which are closely intertwined with the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Nonetheless, NGOs are supposed to represent and articulate in different ways those democratic principles and values underlying the European integration project.

The second hypothesis claims that the fact that the field of culture and, as a result, intercultural dialogue as a principle are not a policy area under the jurisdiction of the EU, European normative standards related to this subject are likely to be absent. As a result, a process of Europeanisation informed by the adoption of the EU as a normative framework of reference does not occur. Accordingly, the EU is not responsible for the promulgation of binding legal acts in the field of intercultural dialogue, except for the EU law on non-discrimination. On the other hand, the related principles of respect for human rights and social integration endorsed by the European integration project tend to be treated as a *conditio sine qua non* by NGOs in order to establish a constructive dialogue between cultures.

Furthermore, it is expected that the participation and representation of the NGOs at the EU level do not take place or they are rather limited to bigger and more professionalised organisations maintaining Brussels-based networks. Furthermore, smaller and more isolated organisations are likely to be marginalised in terms of representation and participation in the EU policy-making.

According to the fourth hypothesis, the EU funding policy tends to facilitate the participation of the Polish NGOs in transnational cooperation programmes in the area of intercultural dialogue. The European Union, indeed, makes available to non-profit organisations a wide set of opportunities, such as international conferences, workshops and projects, and European exchange programmes, which are financed by EU public funds. However, this argument is counteracted by theoretical discourses on a sort of “oligarchisation” of the third sector in Poland, which is the result of a high material differentiation among non-governmental organisations. Therefore, poorer organisations without a financial sustainability tend to be excluded from mechanisms of transnational cooperation. A related assumption is that the establishment of transnational cooperative networks allows the transfer of EU values and good practices of intercultural dialogue between Polish NGOs and voluntary organisations or institutions in other European countries. In this regard, the research presupposes that most of the organisations in the

sample experience a process of social learning with regard to good practices imported from abroad.

The last hypothesis claims that such EU principles of good governance as accountability and participation tend to inspire the relationship existing between the Polish government at the national and local level and the selected NGOs. According to what maintained in Chapter Two, the process of European integration is supposed to contribute to the emergence of forms of EU governance concerning civil society consultation and participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

The next sections provide an overview of the sample of respondents as well as the setting in which the research was carried out, the methods used for collecting relevant data, the process of analysis applied to gathered information and the potential weaknesses associated with the research strategies.

### 3.3 Setting and participants

The setting and the pool of participants for the interviews were chosen according to the time and resources available for conducting the research. Although the entire population of interest composed by NGOs is not remarkably large, it was not feasible to study all the subjects of the chosen topic mostly because of a lack of extensive resources and relatively low expectations with regard to responses. A purposive sampling technique pertained to an already existing theoretical framework has been chosen, according to which the sample has been intentionally selected given the knowledge on the population of interest and the purpose of the study. As non-probability sample of four case studies has been selected and the leaders of each NGO were chosen to play the role of key informants. Contrary to the purpose of the study, a probability sampling would admit that every unit in the population of interest has a chance of being selected in the sample that can be accurately determined. For this reason, it was excluded *a priori*. On the other hand, the non-probability sampling does not allow the estimation of sampling errors because of the non-random character of the case selection. Similarly, a snowball sample was not applicable as the potential respondents were not particularly difficult to locate, thus rendering this technique unnecessary. Another advantage of the purposive sampling, instead, is that it seems more likely to increase the scope of data exposed. The selected NGOs share some common elements in terms of field of civic engagement, missions and

fundraising strategies that any other sampling technique would not be able to capture. On the other hand, a general weakness of such a technique is that it is difficult to develop generalisations based on specific case studies.

The defined research population from which the sample has been selected is represented by all those entities that have the legal personality of either associations or foundations, that are active in the field of advocacy of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and are recipients of EU funds. The sample is small but each case was studied intensively. Furthermore, this sampling strategy reflects the need to represent a wide range of experiences rather than to provide predefined results that are replicable in the whole population.

The leaders of the following Polish NGOs participated in the research: the Borderland Foundation (*Fundacja Pogranicze*) in Sejny, the *Interkulturalni* Association in Krakow, the Other Space Foundation (*Fundacja Inna Przestrzeń*) in Warsaw and the Homo Faber Association (*Stowarzyszenie Homo Faber*) in Lublin. The total number of respondents is seven and the interview took place exclusively in the English language. The contact persons were individuated on the official website of each NGO in the section dedicated to the organisation's members. The representatives of the NGOs who took part in the interviews were both men and women between the age of thirty and sixty who, at the time of the research, lived and worked in Poland as the founders or main representatives of their organisation. The number of interviewed men is five and that of women is two. In general, the leaders I have interviewed gather volunteers and members, invest their own time and resources, are often well-connected and use both formal and informal contacts to convey their cause. These are common elements to all case studies in the sample. In general, smaller organisations had from one to two persons as leaders and managers of the projects. In the case of larger organisations, the number varied between three and five. The broad structure of the NGOs was often composed by people from one's own network, as confirmed by other qualitative studies on the NGO sector (Glisnki, 2006).

As far as the setting of the interviews is concerned, the study was carried out in different cities throughout Poland, which presented some specific characteristics in terms of ethnic and cultural pluralism, immigrant population and historical legacies. The access to the field of the interviews was obtained through emails addressed to each organisation, which asked the board of representatives to participate in future interviews. In order to establish a relationship of mutual trust, I presented myself as a representative of academia

studying the process of Europeanisation and its impact on the NGO sector in Poland through a research on the field. Nonetheless, target organisations and people occasionally revealed to be highly difficult to reach in this way. Once an organisation had confirmed its interest, an agreement was made on the time and place of the interview, on the general topic under investigation, the use of a tape recorder and the eventual publication of confidential information after the collection of the responses.

The locations were distributed all over Poland in the cities of Krakow, Warsaw, Sejny and Lublin. Among them, Krakow, Warsaw and Lublin represent three main immigration centers and the destination of a high number of foreigners to study, work and live. The participants to the interview chose the specific context, which corresponded to the headquarters of their workplace. These locations represented the place where the subject of research manifested itself more strongly. It was possible to observe directly the main setting of the NGOs' activities and to speak with more organisations' representatives on the same day. Furthermore, this allowed the respondents to feel comfortable and relaxed while being interviewed because the surrounding environment was largely familiar to them. I chose a location where I could learn most about my topic, despite the fact that those settings were not likely to teach everything about Europeanisation, which is a relatively abstract topic. Although in some cases the setting was not easily accessible due to the long distance between Krakow and the city of destination.

The interview with the leaders of *Interkulturalni* Association, namely the President Jakub Kościółek and the Vice-President and Advocacy Projects Coordinator Adam Bulandra, was conducted individually on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015 at the association's offices in Krakow and each interview lasted about two hours. Even though the total number of leaders is three, one of them, Iga Machalewska, did not participate in the interview and so was not included in the study. As concerns the setting, the city of Krakow is the cultural capital of Poland and its development was marked by a flourishing multi-ethnic and multicultural past. Besides being an important cultural and economic center, the city now faces a continuous increase in the number of foreigners, especially Ukrainians, besides being home to many ethnic minorities including Armenians, Jews and Slovaks.

The interview with the four representatives of Borderland Foundation took place on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations" Centre (*Ośrodek "Pogranicze - sztuka, kultura, narodów"*) in Sejny and the foundation's office at the International Centre of Dialogue (*Międzynarodowe Centrum Dialogu*) in the nearby

village of Krasnogruda. All the interviews took approximately six hours. The leaders who participated to the research were Krzysztof Czyżewski and Wojciech Szroeder from the Management Board, the Head Accountant Agata Milewska and Ksenija Konopek. Sejny is a small town in North-Eastern Poland close to the border with Lithuania and Belarus. After the First World War, it was a disputed area between Poland and Lithuania, which, later, came under the control of the Germans, the Soviets and the Lithuanians. Today, Sejny has become a notable centre of cultural life for the Lithuanian minority living in Poland and is inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians and Russian Old Believers. In the past, the city has hosted Belarusians, Jews, Germans, Tatars and Gypsies. Through the words of Krzysztof Czyżewski, the setting can be described as follows: “Sejny is a location of painful borderlands full of broken bridges, traumatic memories, inveterate conflicts and different national mythologies that were painful to our neighbours” (2014, p. 28).

From the Homo Faber Association, one leader, Piotr Skrzypczak, participated to the interview on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at the main office of the organisation in Lublin. The multicultural heritage of Lublin is of great significance for understanding its historical development and the relationship established between its citizens and other communities living in the city. As it is for Krakow, Warsaw and Sejny, its multicultural past represents a great value. The town was and still is attractive for many foreigners, including Russians, Jews, Germans, Italians, French and Hungarians. In particular, Lublin is the expression of an authentic cultural and religious pluralism, even though today the Evangelical, Orthodox and Jewish communities remain rather small. Moreover, it includes a strong student community and a vibrant cultural and social life.

The main representatives of the Other Space Foundation based in Warsaw did not take part in the interview and the research was conducted only through a thematic analysis of the organisation’s website and online publications. Warsaw, the capital of Poland, is a city where many different cultures meet and coexist. The level of integration of immigrants in the society is considered to be high and an increasingly high number of foreigners coming from Africa, Asia and the Middle East choose the capital to start a new life.

Participation was solicited mainly through the use of emails and follow-ups. Since the beginning of the research, I tried to find a balance between maintaining a professionally detached approach and showing a genuine involvement in the ideals defended by these organisations. In particular, I realised how important it was for most

of them to talk directly with people and share their own concerns. I also appreciated the passionate engagement of some respondents, which enabled me to find good interlocutors.

### 3.4 Data collection methods

The data collection methods employed by the research are short preliminary surveys, semi-structured interviews and an in-depth content analysis concerning different sources of qualitative data. These qualitative research methods offer excellent means to provide a deep insight into non-numerical data and it focuses on the qualities of subjects as well as processes and meanings that are not scientifically measured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.14). As it is for this study, qualitative methods can provide rich and detailed data leading to focused descriptions of a given phenomenon in the social world. The research has employed both primary sources of data, that means self-created data deriving from questionnaires and interviews, and secondary sources, that is already available data extracted through a content analysis from NGO reports and statutes, newspapers, magazines and books. The reason for combining these instruments is that the research addresses questions concerning the origins and causes of specific social and political phenomena, namely whether the process of Europeanisation is taking place with regard to NGOs in Poland as well as why and how it is occurring.

Except from naturally occurring materials like written texts, the main instruments to be used have been self-report methods, which ask the person for information directly. They appeared as the most viable option to ask the respondents about information regarding their life experience and issues related to their professional fields. Of paramount importance is the fact that these instruments are frequently used in social sciences and anytime the aim is to analyse issues concerning human relations, individuals' feelings and perceptions, systems of values, beliefs, and identities. They give access to phenomenological data as any other instrument would allow to do. Self-report methods explore areas of social reality that statistics cannot measure.

First, a content analysis was applied to textual materials representing the specimens of the research topic. In particular, a thematic content analysis was applied to the official documents issued by EU institutions on the subject of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in order to investigate the political discourse of the European Union

on these issues. The main key concepts that emerged included the notions of multiculturalism, diversity, ethnicity, racism, xenophobia, tolerance and intolerance, which are directly related to the category of human rights protection. These documents include the EU Treaties, communications from the European Commission, conclusions of council meetings issued by the Council of the EU and EU publications. A thematic content analysis was conducted also with regard to the statute reporting each organisation's mission, its projects and partnerships contained in the website's archive. Moreover, the interviewees eventually provided additional documents concerning past projects realised by the organisations either in Polish or in English, copies of magazines or summaries of the projects for which they were granted EU public funds. The chosen method is strongly connected to the assumptions of the constructivist approach, which can be used to study the discursive influence of EU documents on the system of values, norms and practices of the respondents. It was decided not to make use of any sophisticated text analytical method given the supplementary character of qualitative content analysis in this research. Consequently, this phase envisaged the use of an informal approach.

Second, research on the website of different NGOs served to pre-select the type of organisation useful for the research in order to understand which among them were really engaged in the field of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and from which perspective. An emailed questionnaire addressed to all potential participants followed and it was succeeded by interviews with those NGO leaders who responded to further probe their responses. The questionnaire was composed of a series of short open-ended questions structured in the same way for all respondents and it was useful to familiarize with the participants. In this context, surveys are particularly good for collecting data on relatively simple topics, require little time and are a useful means of investigation before interviews take place.

For the collection of empirical data, a qualitative analysis has been applied through the use of qualitative interviews. They provided a direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis and were conducted between June and July 2015 in Poland. This qualitative research method was particularly appropriate for gaining insider information on individuals' experiences and feelings connected to issues of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as well as their relation with the EU dimension. Another advantage of this instrument is that it narrows the distance in space and time since it allows to study directly past events or experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.351). On the contrary, with the use of quantitative techniques some areas of reality



would have remained inaccessible. The interview instrument provided the basis for gathering spontaneous personal perceptions, attitudes and behaviours besides gathering background information crucial for the next steps of the research.

The semi-structured interviews conducted with the representatives of the four Polish NGOs were based on an interview schedule listing the major questions to be asked and some possible points to follow up with. Indeed, the goal was not to treat every situation or response in a like manner. The interviews consisted of about twenty-five questions divided according to the topic. The interview guide contained a briefing part opening the discussion with general guidelines about the proposed arguments to be explored and a debriefing part summarising the interview. The main points connected to these issues were then turned into questions. Finally, these data were interpreted to draw up information about the different reactions of domestic NGOs to EU-related developments. The kinds of questions that were included in the interview tackled several issues recalling in a direct or indirect way the main research questions. Initially the interview guide tried to “break the ice” with general queries and it gradually moved to more specific questions. They ranged from exploring the origins of each organisation, the evolution of their mission, their understanding of the concepts of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, their attitude towards the project of European integration and the main values adopted in carrying out their projects, to their participation in the local, national and European decision-making, their involvement in transnational cooperative networks and their relation with the public administration. The language excluded the use of particularly technical or ambivalent terms in order to put the basis for a mutual understanding allowing the respondents to share specific meanings and referents.

The measuring instruments presented in this section aimed to gather data to address the following research objectives:

- To investigate whether the EU exerted any form of direct or indirect influence on the sample of Polish NGOs;
- to find out what are the outcomes of the process of Europeanisation with regard to the sample of Polish NGOs promoting intercultural dialogue in five specific dimensions;
- to identify the different role played
- by the access to EU funds as the independent variable in each case study;

- to explore Europeanisation dynamics in a policy field, i.e. protection of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, that does not fall under the direct competence of the EU;
- to introduce new perspectives on the changes experienced by subnational actors as a result of the European integration project and open the way to further research on the potential limits of Europeanisation as regards the non-governmental sector.

Notably, the use of qualitative interview responded better to the need of testing a preliminary understanding of the topic of Europeanisation, while developing new ideas and hypotheses, uncovering new topics of interest, but especially it provided a deep insight into the respondents' understanding of the multidimensional concepts of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews was most appropriate for early stages of research since it allowed the inclusion of questions about the validation of the respondents' interpretations of concepts and phenomena (Yauch and Steudel, 2003). The interviewer is able to ask follow-up questions in order to clarify the meaning of responses and queries that probe for more detailed and contextual data that the respondent does not mention in a spontaneous way. Equally, it enables to modify the order of questions: the interviewer has a chance to move the conversation in any direction of interest that may arise while trying to avoid any type of personal bias. This would not have been possible through structured interviews, which are associated to a limited set of response categories. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provided data that would have been impossible to collect in the case of direct observation due to their changing nature and unavailability of time. Some authors recommended the use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative research approaches to address further changes in the field of Europeanisation studies (Graziano & Vink, 2006, p.25).

On the other hand, among its limitations, there are potential validity problems such as, for instance, some crucial information may remain concealed or the responses may be different than expected. The respondent may omit relevant information either to please the interviewer or not to reveal more confidential data than required. What is more, usually the information is rather personal as well as detailed and does not necessarily correspond neither to reality nor to all other applicable cases. Similarly, the participants for the interview may not use the technical words or concepts that the interviewer expects,

as it happened in the present case. Similarly, the use of open-ended questions presents the difficulty of distinguishing the personal bias or the validity and exaggeration of the responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.125). This approach also produced a huge amount of variable data whose analysis proved to be time consuming. Informal or unstructured conversational interviews are more suitable for the approach of participatory observation, which was not used in this case. Likely, focus group interviews also appeared as inappropriate as they do not provide the necessary conditions for the specific experience of each respondent to emerge, and it would present an obstacle to a free discussion by means of conformity pressures.

The answers were recorded through the use of a tape recorder, given that audio recordings usually provide the richest data to study face-to-face social interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.359). Then, they have been immediately transcribed onto a paper in order to not lose the freshness of information provided as well as the feelings and memoirs connected to the discussion. The interviews were tape recorded for three main reasons. First, paper notes are likely to be inaccurate and time consuming, especially in the cases in which respondents have a limited amount of time at their disposal. They were used only as a supporting instrument to help conduct the interview. Second, the use of tape recorder allows a more spontaneous recording of information without influencing the interaction with the interviewee or risking overlooking some crucial data. Third, the audio recorder allows to record crucial elements of the discourse, such as pauses, overlaps, and inbreaths. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and their content thoroughly analysed. Finally, with regard to ethical considerations, the principles of informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm were implemented with regard to the research participants.

The following section describes the procedure that was used to analyse and interpret the whole corpus of collected data in a meaningful way.

### 3.5 Qualitative data processing and analysis

The procedure of data processing and analysis made use of two different but complementary methods. A content analysis was conducted with regard to the interview transcripts, while a thematic content analysis focused on the recurrent themes in the

NGOs' official websites and EU legal documents, including publications and project reports, which were likely to reflect experientially on the topic of the study.

A first stage corresponded to the verbatim transcription of all semi-structured interviews conducted with the leaders of the Polish NGOs in order to be coded and interpreted. Before examining their content, an "open coding" was realised by writing notes in the margins of the transcripts in order to capture preliminary codes of analysis suggesting major themes or concepts. This phase proceeded with a content analysis of the interview transcripts, which was realised by hand without using any type of computer software. The content analysis served to individuate major themes and categories, the former corresponding to the concepts linked to Europeanisation and intercultural dialogue and the latter corresponding to the five dimensions of Europeanisation chosen to narrow the focus of the study.

The next step was to carry out a thorough examination of preliminary codes in order to find relationships and formulate the final coding framework. The use of a pre-established coding scheme was excluded, since it is usually common in structured interviewing, but it was developed as the process of data analysis proceeded. This allowed to establish which were the core themes through the analysis of respondents' comments, field notes and analytic memos. The analysis proceeded by defining a set of categories and then counting the number of instances that fell into each category. Examples of preliminary codes were "promotion of cultural diversity", "multicultural heritage", "common European identity", "integration of foreigners", "open and diversified society", "international exchange", "political atmosphere", "lack of public awareness", "open consultations", "EU bureaucracy" and so forth. In the second phase, a review was carried out in order to identify recurrent ideas, patterns, themes and connections between them. The final coding framework made use of the following categories:

- the idea of the EU as cognitive framework
- the idea of the EU as normative framework
- participation and representation at the EU level
- transnational cooperation
- relationship with the government

The interim themes of cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, non-discrimination, immigration, intercultural education, cultural transfer and competition for

EU funds, information about and participation in EU policy processes, and public consultation with the government represented the main codes employed in the analysis. In particular, the framing and interpretation of talks included also the non-verbal features of the face-to-face interaction as well as the latent information provided by the interview. Then, a further stage consisted in looking for overlapping or similar categories and their repetitions in the rest of the sample together with the themes associated with them.

The choice of thematic content analysis is justified by the need to capture the thematic content of written texts through the identification of common themes. It allowed to highlight all descriptions that were relevant to the topic of inquiry. The criteria for establishing what corresponded to a “relevant” description were defined according to the objectives included in the mission statements of each NGO. Recurrent associations between concepts and categories were detected in order to establish a meaningful relationship that was useful to interpret the research findings. In order to determine the scope of Europeanisation on chosen NGOs, it was decided to look both at the number of references to Europe, the European Union and the project of European integration, and at the context in which manifest or latent references were inserted.

A strength of thematic content analysis corresponds to its openness to a wider interpretation of data and the focus on the frequency of the occurrence of the main themes in the texts. Another advantage is that it gives the means to comprehensively investigate who said what and with what implications. Notably, it is a distinctly independent, flexible and reliable qualitative approach for data analysis, which can provide rich and detailed data resulting from written text materials (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). In addition, it does not require the support of a peer review.

Among the themes emerging from the process of data coding, the dimensions of respect for cultural pluralism, human rights protection, non-discrimination, integration of minority groups, education, international partnerships and financial sustainability recurred more consistently. Another recurrent topic was the reference to EU funds as a crucial factor determining the effectiveness of NGOs strategies and their participation in transnational networks of cooperation. Occasionally, alternative ways of looking at the data dismantled some taken-for-granted notions about the diffusion of EU values and norms among NGOs. While some conversations suggested some recurrent discursive themes, some of them revealed *lacunae* in my own understanding of a topic, thus shifting the discussion to new fields, such as scepticism about European identity issues and different understandings of the concept of interculturalism.

### 3.6 Validity and limitations of the research methods

Although providing a certain degree of flexibility, the qualitative research methods employed in the present research show ambivalent implications in terms of internal and external validity of the findings. Likely, the level of reliability and confirmability of the results can be also assessed. It is important to highlight, however, the fact that the issue of validity in qualitative analysis initiated a debate which is still open.

One of the potential limitations of qualitative interview is that its effectiveness depends to some extent on the articulacy of respondents. As far as internal validity, otherwise designated as “credibility” in qualitative studies, is concerned, it tends to be high as the interviewees were able to talk about specific topics in detail without being directed by the interviewer. However, interviews tend to stand for narrative accounts rather than a perfect reflection of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.53). On the other hand, in semi-structured interviews it is almost impossible to detect potential lies from the part of respondents. Similarly, the concepts and feelings they recall might be imperfect. Nevertheless, the technique of respondent validation was applied immediately after the interview was concluded in order to avoid collecting data from changed perceptions of the interviewees. This also responded to the purpose of preventing the participants to formulate comments that, in a certain moment, might be judged as not socially desirable.

Generally, qualitative studies involve the challenge of applying the concept of credibility since, in this case, the interviewer represents the only measurement device (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, a number of potential factors, such as the psychological and physical status of the interviewees as well as their attitude towards the interviewer, are likely to escape the control of the researcher. However, the fact that this research was based on established techniques for research strategy, sampling, data collection and analysis contributed towards strengthening the credibility of the results.

With regard to external validity or generalisability of the study, the findings are likely to be applicable to other research projects focusing on the Europeanisation of NGOs or other voluntary organisations. One assumption is that the framework developed can provide a valuable support to a deeper understanding of the differential dynamics of

European integration involving subnational actors and of policy fields where the EU has not a direct competence. At the same time, it seems not feasible to generalise the results of the chosen sample to the wider population of interest given the personal nature of the interviews in many respects. Different categories of respondents may react to the same questions in different ways and take into account distinct types of explaining factors while neglecting those recalled by others. In order to overcome the above-mentioned potential weaknesses, generalisability was enhanced by providing an accurate description of the research context, i.e. the Polish non-governmental sector specialised in the area of intercultural dialogue, and the most crucial assumptions related to the research.

Similarly, the reliability of the findings, which is defined as the consistency of measurements when the testing process is repeated by other researchers, appeared to be rather low. It would be, indeed, difficult to exactly repeat a focused interview using non-standardised questions in other contexts. In addition, the sample of qualitative studies is usually small and not easily generalizable to a larger population. As a result, the concept of “dependability” explaining the changing context in qualitative analysis might replace that of reliability, which is more appropriate to the case of quantitative studies. Indeed, interviews are inserted in a defined historical and contextual framework from which they cannot be separated (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p.115). Finally, in order to ensure the principle of confirmability, experienced researchers from the field of European Studies independently reviewed the research findings and data analysis procedures. Notwithstanding, the analysis of qualitative data tends to be a relatively subjective process where a definitive, objective view of social reality is not conceivable (Ratner, 2002). Furthermore, the main limitation of the qualitative nature of the research remained its time-consuming character and the fact that it was extremely demanding in terms of creation of new paths for analysis where previously not path had existed for the same research problem.

In conclusion, this chapter allowed to focus on the main purpose of the research from a methodological perspective aiming to individuate the most appropriate instruments to achieve the main research objectives. Qualitative research methods included a preliminary survey, thematic content analysis, semi-structured interviews and content analysis of interview transcripts. They provided the means to find out how the dependent variables represented by the five dimensions of Europeanisation varied while maintaining constant the independent variable, namely the access of the chosen Polish NGOs to EU funds. The analysis strategies employed in the study responded to the need

of covering a wide spectrum of topics as well as to explore the latent meaning of written and oral statements, vague concepts and life experiences of the participants.

The next chapters will present the research results and discuss how far they supported the main hypotheses and answered the main research questions.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the results of the data analysis are presented. The research attempted to determine whether the process of Europeanisation occurred with regard to a small group of Polish NGOs operating in the field of intercultural dialogue with respect to five dimensions of European integration. As previously mentioned, data were collected through qualitative methods and then processed in response to the hypotheses formulated in Chapter Three. All relevant data were categorised into concepts useful for giving an interpretation to the effects of Europeanisation on the sample of NGOs based on the existing literature on the topic and the theories explored in Chapter Two. The process of categorising the gathered data was carried out through a coding procedure allowing to facilitate the analysis. The codes corresponded to names expressing a specific idea linked to the research questions and provided a focus for thinking about the text and its possible interpretations. The results of content analyses, electronic surveys and semi-structured interviews are reported and discussed separately.

After the results of the thematic content analysis of official documents from EU institutions discussing issues of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are presented, each sub-section describes the research results related to every singular case study. Occasionally, the key findings are reported by using verbatim quotes.

#### **4.2 Analysis of official documents from EU institutions: cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue**

The thematic content analysis of EU-related documents dealing with the topic under discussion. What emerged from the results is a tendency to emphasise the numerous benefits deriving from increased interactions between cultures and social cohesion. The official EU documents that were analysed included the EU Treaties, communications from the European Commission, conclusions of Council meetings issued by the Council

of the European Union and EU publications. The analysis found out such recurring themes as cultural and linguistic diversity, the European cultural heritage, education, intercultural competence, social cohesion and openness of civil society, international cooperation, the protection and promotion of human rights, solidarity, tolerance and democracy.

The main pattern defining the engagement of the EU in the dimension of respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity is addressed in Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>56</sup> proclaiming the safeguard of such values as part of the fundamental rights and freedoms protected by the EU. All texts reported several mentions of the added value of cultural diversity, especially as a result of immigration, in the sense of a condition from which the European Union itself and EU citizens can largely benefit. The concept of dialogue was given a particular emphasis and was regularly referred to as a necessary component for the achievement of a “united in diversity Europe” based on the richness of European cultural and linguistic differences (European Commission, 2007, p.2). In turn, the concept of diversity was often mentioned in association with the themes of integration and social cohesion. Moreover, the value of social cohesion, which had been part of the main goals of the Lisbon agenda,<sup>57</sup> was meant to play a significant role within the EU long-term sustainable development strategy (Council of the EU, 2004, p.3). On the other hand, what emerged from the analysis is the limited attention paid to the concept of European identity, at least in explicit terms. Indeed, it was occasionally reported together with the notion of “intercultural and cohesive society” (European Commission, 2007, p.2).

With regard to the project of European integration, the focus was on its inherent cultural and linguistic diversity. The results of the analysis conveyed the idea that the European Union is a cultural project as well as a sort of “soft power” endorsing the values and norms of human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, freedom of expression, respect for cultural diversity and the enforcement of intercultural dialogue (European Commission, 2007, p.3). With regard to this, the European Union itself appeared as a model of reference in the field of cross-cultural dialogue given its long-standing experience in “building

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<sup>56</sup> The Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union includes in a single document all political, social and economic rights of EU citizens. It was proclaimed in 2000 and it became legally binding with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009.

<sup>57</sup> The Lisbon agenda or Lisbon strategy is the outcome of the European Council of 2000 held in the Portuguese capital during which the objective of making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010 was set out. Its declaratory objectives included economic, social and environmental sustainability.

bridges between cultures” (European Commission, 2007, p.7; European Commission, 2010). Accordingly, the promotion of intercultural dialogue had been included among the main objectives of a “European agenda for culture”<sup>58</sup> (European Commission, 2007, p.8). As far as the external dimension of the EU’s cultural policy is concerned, the documents paid close attention to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue because of its relevance for the promotion of a common understanding between the EU and its international partners. In addition, the findings suggested that the code “dialogue” was often combined with the code “solidarity” in order to communicate the idea that cross-cultural dialogue is an effective tool of conflict prevention and peace building. This introduced another association between the codes “dialogue” and “human rights”, used to argue for the complementarity between intercultural dialogue and the adherence to the shared value of protection of human rights. The analysis found out that the code “education”, in particular human rights education, was manifold associated with the diffusion of European democratic norms and values beyond national borders, especially in terms of “respect for fundamental human rights and the eradication of any form of discrimination” (European Commission, 2009, p.4). Furthermore, the exchange of good practices among the EU and domestic and international actors had been encouraged. Concurrently, the EU designated the occurrence of an inter-cultural dialogue and the acquisition of inter-cultural competences as crucial tools to allow the mobility of artists and workers in the culture field as well as “cultural transfers”<sup>59</sup> among individuals and civil society organisations (European Commission, 2007, p.8).

Given these premises, education was designated as the main vehicle to develop an intercultural competence and raise public awareness about cultural diversity, immigrant cultures and the integration of minority groups in modern society. More in detail, many references were made with regard to the importance of developing “social and civic competences” in order to respond to the challenges emerged in an increasingly culturally diversified world (European Commission, 2007; Council of the EU, 2004). These had

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<sup>58</sup> In 2007, the European Agenda for Culture adopted by the Commission set out three strategic objectives: the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, the promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity and the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations.

<sup>59</sup> The field of research on cultural transfer is a developed branch of linguistic and sociologic studies with a strong multidimensional character. The concept itself describes any form of cultural interference resulting from cultural diversity and it is strongly connected with the dimension of intercultural communication. A wide literature focuses also on the relationship between cultural transfer and foreign language learning. Particularly, the cultural transfer theory is representative of Europe as a cultural space made of bridges for transfers.

been also part of the key competences for “lifelong learning” defined by the European Parliament and the Council of the Union in 2006 (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2006, p.13). Moreover, the Council of the Union had clarified the objective of “strengthening citizenship and social integration through citizenship education”, which was supposed to boost social cohesion and to cross boundaries along cultural and ethnic lines (Council of the EU, 2004, p.6). The European Union initially had dealt with these issues also with regard to their impact on the value of tolerance underlying the European project of an “ever closer Union” of peoples (European Commission, 2001, p.24). Likewise, the results reported how “an important role of education is to promote the humanistic values shared by our societies” including democracy and dialogue between cultures (European Council, 2004, p.6; European Commission, 2009, p.2). In a nutshell, the EU had extensively debated how education and training systems “play an important role in building up social cohesion, in preventing discrimination, exclusion, racism and xenophobia and hence in promoting tolerance and the respect for human rights” (European Council, 2002, p.4; European Commission, 2009, p.2).

On the other hand, the thematic content analysis revealed the absence of a substantial normative dimension within the promotion of intercultural dialogue. For instance, the Treaty of Amsterdam “does not provide for harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States” in any field related to intercultural dialogue (European Commission, 2007, p.4). Indeed, the Treaty had stated that the role of the EU in the culture field is “to support and complement, rather than to replace, the actions of the Member States, by respecting their diversity and stimulating exchanges, dialogue and mutual understanding” (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997, art.151). However, given the fact that increased cultural diversity partly derives from the presence of immigrant communities as well as national and ethnic minorities, the EU has put an ever-stronger focus on the monitoring of fundamental human rights, in particular cultural rights,<sup>60</sup> the rights of indigenous people and those of minorities and socially marginalised people. On the other hand, the Commission had referred to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) established in 2008 as the first initiative “to give expression to best practices and processes of intercultural dialogue” with the main objective of defining a long-term

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<sup>60</sup> Individual cultural rights correspond to human rights formulated in relation to people’s culture. They include the right to develop and preserve one’s cultural identity and, in general, they serve to ensure people and communities the right to equal participation in the cultural stream of their choice. Their main objective is to guarantee equality, the respect for human dignity and non-discrimination while belonging to a certain culture.

strategy and a common normative framework. An outcome of this initiative was the creation of the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue<sup>61</sup> in 2006, a soft instrument for debating and protecting cultural diversity, which had published the “Rainbow Paper” of civil society recommendations on the practice of intercultural dialogue. The Commission had recognised the relevance of the action of civil society organisations but also local and regional authorities in the culture field. Therefore, it had called for strengthened cooperation between them, in line with the EU-related principles of good governance (European Commission, 2007, p.6). The code “dialogue” appeared also in relation to the cooperation between organised civil society and the EU in the form of a “reinforced consultation between stakeholders, professional organisations, non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions” and EU institutions (European Commission, 2007, p.8). On the other hand, the analysis found out how the participation of organised civil society at the EU level remains limited, which therefore jeopardises the visibility of representatives from the intercultural field in Brussels. With regard to this, the European Commission had recommended a “structured dialogue”<sup>62</sup> as a synonym for a deeper and broader exchange of views with the cultural sector (European Commission, 2010, p.11).

Once the thematic content analysis of the official documents issued by EU institutions was completed, the research proceeded with the search for potential respondents to semi-structured interviews through a content analysis of online sources and qualitative electronic surveys.

### 4.3 Pre-selection of the sample and electronic surveys

For the aim of defining a representative sample of Polish non-governmental

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<sup>61</sup> The project for a Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue originated from the initiative of the European Cultural Foundation and the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage, now Culture Action Europe, and it gathered local, national and European civil society organisations. It was entitled to formulate recommendations in the field of cultural policy.

<sup>62</sup> Together with the Open Method of Coordination, the Structured Dialogue is a tool for cooperation in the cultural field at the EU level. Examples of Structured Dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector are the “Voice of Culture” and the European Culture Forum. While the former aims at strengthening the advocacy capacity of the sector in European policy debates, the latter is an event organized by the European Commission every two year that focuses on culture’s contribution to innovation, growth, the digital single market, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, as well as the role of Europe in the global arena. Both initiatives are funded by the European Commission.

organisations for intercultural dialogue, a thematic content analysis was applied to official website of a group of voluntary organisations actively engaged in the field of culture. This stage of the research started from consulting the Portal of NGOs in Poland (*Portal Organizacji Pozarządowych*) in the section “Database of NGOs” (*Bazy NGO*), which categorised all Polish non-governmental organisations according to the city and the area of activity. Based on the selected areas of activity, i.e. culture, identity, social activity, protection of human rights and international activity, the number of NGOs currently active in Poland was surprisingly high. As a result, the search for a meaningful sample turned to be a time-consuming task.

Ultimately, a group of four NGOs was considered eligible to participate in the research according to specific factors, namely their status of recipients of EU funds and their civil commitment in the promotion of intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity. After having individuated a potential sampling for the case study, a survey in the form of electronic questionnaire was sent to all representatives of the chosen NGOs. The questionnaire was made of five short questions structured in the same way for all respondents and leaving limited room for follow-ups. The queries tried to figure out whether the organisations to which the respondents belonged were independent non-governmental organisations, whether they had legal residence in Poland, whether they operated in the field of culture and if their mission included the enhancement of dialogue between cultures. Since they fulfilled all the requirements to participate in the study, online questionnaires were sent to *Interkulturalni* Association in Krakow, Borderland Foundation in Sejny, Other Space Foundation in Warsaw and Homo Faber Association in Lublin. After that stage, maintaining a regular correspondence with the leaders of those NGOs contributed to establish a relationship based on mutual trust, which paved the way for future interviews. Subsequently, the official website of each selected organisation was the object of an accurate thematic content analysis.

#### 4.4 The case of *Interkulturalni* Association

The level of analysis focusing on the website of the selected NGOs brought further details into the research through the collection of relevant and accurate data concerning the organisations’ profile. An in-depth study of the NGOs’ mission statement, the reports

of current and completed projects and eventual publications, both electronic and printed, allowed to explore the scope of the engagement of each organisation and to formulate a suitable interview guide. This section is dedicated to the case of *Interkulturalni* Association in Krakow.

#### 4.4.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO's website and publications

The research on the website of *Interkulturalni* Association was facilitated by the easily accessible content of the online portal. For the thematic content analysis, data were organised into categories corresponding to the five dimensions of Europeanisation playing the role of dependent variables, hence according to the hypothesis under analysis. All data pertaining to each particular category were then assembled. As regards the mission statement and certain online publications, their content was first translated from Polish into English and, subsequently, it was thoroughly analysed.

In relation to the first category of analysis, i.e. the adoption of the EU as a cognitive framework of reference, the mission statement contained mentions of different themes pertaining to different European values and principles. Among the association's objectives, the themes that recurred consistently were the promotion of intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity (art. 8.1, 8.3 and 8.4) together with the protection of ethnic minorities and equality among cultures and social groups (art. 8.1 and 8.3), the openness of host societies (art. 8.4) and intercultural education (art. 8.2 and 8.6). In connection with intercultural dialogue, the preservation of national heritage (art. 8.3), in particular the Polish multicultural heritage, was another recurrent theme. On the other hand, the texts contained sporadic mentions of the concept of European identity. For instance, the underlying message of the manifesto of "Interkulturalia, Let's meet!" festival and the initiative "Skala intercultural meetings" held in 2014 had made an extensive use of the codes "cultural diversity" and "intercultural exchange" in order to emphasise the benefits of cultural exchanges for the social, economic and cultural life of Krakow. Equally, the association had drawn inspiration from good practices implemented by the city of Galway in Ireland as regards the enhancement of mutual interaction and cultural exchange in order to eradicate prejudice. Examples of initiatives celebrating cultural diversity were the project "Tbilisi in Krakow" celebrating the Georgian culture, the project "Catalonia" presenting the Catalan theatre and street art, and the project "The days of St. Petersburg"

created in order to popularise contemporary Russian culture among Poles. Another interesting initiative was the “Open Day of the Municipality”,<sup>63</sup> which had given to citizens the opportunity to learn about the cultural traditions of national minorities living in the city. Moreover, within all the gathered data the promotion of cultural diversity through culture and arts was the dominant strategy used by *Interkulturalni* Association to meet its objectives. According to the NGO’s mission, other emerging topics were those of religious freedom, racism, prejudice and xenophobia (art. 8.13), which were combined with the concepts of tolerance, openness and social cohesion. For instance, the report on the anti-discrimination training called “Multicultural Europe - are we really united in diversity?” of 2012 had highlighted the theme of non-discrimination, intertwined with the theme of human rights, together with the topic of education.<sup>64</sup> What emerged from the analysis of the report called “Examples of good practice combating racism and discrimination implemented under urban local politics: report on the study visits in Galway, Glasgow, Malmo and Berlin” was a strong emphasis on the values of cultural diversity, tolerance and solidarity as referred to the social inclusion of minority groups. Similarly, the project “Foreigners in Krakow” had established a strong relationship between the integration of foreigners and the endorsement of those values within the neighbourhood.<sup>65</sup> In turn, the project had envisaged the participation of foreigners and immigrants in the political life of the city as a solution to the phenomena of ethnic distancing, sectarianism, ghettoization and stereotypes. From the perspective of the likelihood of an increased immigration in the future, the results of the analysis on the project “Local cross policy for the integration of migrants” found out that the codes “integration” and “immigrants” recurred more consistently. However, one text reported that “one of the main obstacles in building an ethnically diverse and open society is that collective identity is often constructed on a mono-ethnic basis, excluding foreigners and remaining close to diversity and tolerance” (Kościółek, Bulandra, Kostecka, Machalewska, 2011). Finally, the code “diversity” was mentioned with the theme of intercultural education that, in turn, was linked to the concept of intercultural and interpersonal communication (art. 8.17) and in order to express the relevance of

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<sup>63</sup> The project was realised through a large set of cultural events organised by the Czulent Jewish Association and the Socio-cultural Association of Jews in Poland, the Armenian Cultural Association, the Roma Educational Association “Harangos” and the Vietnamese Socio-Cultural Association in Poland.

<sup>64</sup> The project was implemented with the financial support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

<sup>65</sup> In that context, the neighbourhood was meant as the ethno-cultural area where people establish social contacts.



intercultural competence in today's world as social and civic competencies allowing to face the challenges of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. More in detail, the notion of intercultural competence emerged in the project "Intercultural Academy-Good practices" aiming at promoting the acceptance of cultural diversity in different contexts, including the workplace.<sup>66</sup>

From the perspective of the analytical category concerning the EU normative influence, the mission statement of *Interkulturalni* Association did not convey any explicit message portraying the Union as a normative model in the area of intercultural dialogue. On the other hand, the text contained several references to the EU laws concerning racial and ethnic discrimination, in particular in the report on the project "Multicultural Europe - are we really united in diversity? Anti-discriminatory training". Similarly, the findings on the report "Foreigners in Krakow" suggested that *Interkulturalni* Association had paid a special attention to foreigners' integration in the host society, especially in terms of legal provisions adopted by the local government in response to immigration and their eventual discriminatory content. Notably, the mission of the NGO referred to the practices of "reporting, monitoring and carrying out watchdog activities" with regard to the public administration (art. 9.6). Similarly, in the report of the project "Local cross policy for the integration of migrants" the references to the recommended implementation of EU anti-discrimination laws at the local level were part of a broader discourse on the reform of national migration policy.

On the other hand, the thematic content analysis did not produce any relevant data concerning the category "representation and participation at the European Union level" as regards the case of *Interkulturalni* Association.

With reference to the analytical category of transnational cooperation, the text of the mission statement contained several codes alluding to the international vocation of *Interkulturalni* Association and the sharing of best practices with other countries and organisations. More in detail, the code "cross-border cooperation" was mentioned manifold with reference to the codes "mobility" and "intercultural cooperation initiatives" (art.8.11) as well as the expression "cooperation with international organisations engaged

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<sup>66</sup> The initiative involved thirteen different organisations from the private sector, the public sector and institutions for higher education, which presented a wide set of good practices related to the promotion of cultural diversity in the region Małopolska.

in intercultural dialogue” (art.8.19). Among the instruments for action, many codes fell under this category, such as those of “cultural transfer”, “mutual contacts” and “international exchange” (art. 9.1 and 9.2). A direct reference to the establishment of transnational cooperative networks was found in article nine, which described the development of “contacts and international cooperation, in particular through the exchange of experience, the realisation of joint programmes, conferences, seminars and other activities”. The research results concerning the project report “Examples of good practice combating racism and discrimination implemented under urban local politics: report on the study visits in Galway, Glasgow, Malmo and Berlin”<sup>67</sup> represented an illustrative example of transfer of ideas and practices between *Interkulturalni* Association and other NGOs in the field of non-discrimination. On the other hand, the findings suggested that the organisation had looked at transnational cooperation as a means to overcome obstacles at the national level to its attempts to foster acceptance of cultural pluralism. Notably, it was underlined how “local politicians and officials are reluctant to admit that the problem of racism and xenophobia exists in the city of Krakow” (Bulandra & Kościółek, 2013).

With regard to the analytical category “relationship between the NGOs and the Polish government”, the results mentioned the idea of “transparency of public institutions” administering public projects that deal with the integration of foreigners and immigrants (art. 8.14). In addition, it contained allusions to the goal of establishing a “cooperation with public institutions” for the implementation of the statutory objectives (art. 9.2). Finally, the code “opinions on draft laws” (art. 9.13) referred to consultative processes taking place between the association and the government in specific fields, such as education and immigration. In connection with the subsidiarity principle, the research results on the project “Local cross policy for the integration of migrants” found out that “the government expects that a significant part of the work of legal assistance to foreigners will be taken on by NGOs” (Bulandra, 2014). Similarly, the project reports emphasised the decentralisation of the cultural field, especially in terms of cultural and social integration of foreigners, which is “a task that is increasingly taken over by local NGOs that have more experience in implementing effective projects for the local community” (Bulandra, Kościółek, Kostecka & Machalewska, 2011). What is more, the study visit to the city of Galway, Ireland, had allowed the association to import models

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<sup>67</sup> At the time of the research, these cities were members of the European Network of Cities against racism supported by UNESCO.

for consultations with minority groups and development of good practice.<sup>68</sup> Notably, Ireland had been seen as a model country because of the creation of an “Intercultural Forum” as a mechanism for consultation and public participation of minorities in the life of the local community. In this sense, the thematic content analysis revealed a strong emphasis on the notion of civil dialogue meant as a large consultation among social organisations, politicians, public authorities, citizens and the media. Accordingly, the theme of participation introduced the value of democracy.

#### 4.4.2 Content analysis of interview transcripts

This section aims at covering the results of thematic content analysis applied on the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews carried out with the leaders of *Interkulturalni* Association. In examining the interview responses, which provided a rich descriptive account of the study, some major themes were covered. In particular, what emerged from the findings was a certain affinity between the values endorsed by the leaders of the NGO and the political discourse of the European Union on intercultural dialogue. The themes recurring more consistently in the data included interculturalism, the integration of immigrants and foreigners, the competition for EU funds, a certain scepticism towards the project of European integration and a troubled relationship with the Polish government.

As far as the category concerning the EU cognitive influence on the NGOs is concerned, the codes “culture”, “cultural diversity”, “multiculturalism”, “immigration”, “integration”, “discrimination” and “education” referred to the most salient issues. The values of cultural diversity and respect for human rights were the only subjects to be associated with the code “European Union”. According to what affirmed by one respondent, “the promotion of an inter-cultural dialogue is the main priority in the mission of *Interkulturalni* Association and it is meant as the promotion of cultural diversity deriving from the presence of immigrants in the Polish society” (A. Bulandra, personal communication, June 23, 2015). Generally, the concepts of cultural diversity, discrimination, stereotype and integration appeared in association with the values of tolerance, democracy and equality among cultures and social groups. However, the interview transcripts mentioned the importance to complement tolerant attitudes with

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<sup>68</sup> The discourse on good practices in particular refers to the adoption by the police of elements of cultural sensitivity in its code of conduct.

intercultural education in order to develop an intercultural competence. With regard to this, one respondent had argued: “Language is a crucial element for the integration of foreigners into the host society; it is a mechanism of socialisation and integration” (J. Kościółek, personal communication, June 23, 2015).<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, another respondent had highlighted the necessity to combine this measure of integration with intercultural dialogue. As regards democracy, it had been emphasised as the result of active citizenship, participatory democracy and a balanced decision-making process. One of the respondents had mentioned: “Within the mission of *Interkulturalni* the value of democracy is a priority; it is linked with the active participation of citizens and the capacity to influence the decisions of local government” (J. Kościółek, personal communication, June 23, 2015). On the other hand, what emerged from the analysis was that the passive, static and not cohesive character of Polish civil society had been seen as an obstacle to the implementation of the association’s mission. In this regard, one interviewee had mentioned the importance of social cohesion when he had declared: “A multicultural society represents more a need than a constraint for Poland and serves to prepare the ground to build a cohesive society, which is almost missing” (A. Bulandra, personal communication, June 23, 2015). On the other hand, the interviewees had pointed out that European identity is undergoing a crisis among Poles due to the fact that Poland is turning back towards nationalistic sentiments based on the national language and traditions as symbols of the country’s exceptionalism. Indeed, J. Kościółek had admitted, “we are not really united in diversity” (J. Kościółek, personal communication, June 23, 2015). Accordingly, for Poland, building a European identity would mean fighting the legacy of nationalism and xenophobia.

With respect to the analytical category of the EU as a normative framework, what emerged from the responses was the tendency to stress the absence of a common legal framework in the fields of respect for cultural diversity and non-discrimination, especially in the public administration and the education system in Poland. Moreover, the interviewees had declared to consult the EU directives regularly in order to obtain information on issues concerning the eradication of racism, the qualification of asylum-seekers, the status of refugee,<sup>70</sup> the integration of immigrants, and appropriate measures

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<sup>69</sup> The association arranged free Polish language training courses for foreigners the Center of Polish Language “Varia” as part of a programme dedicated to the integration of foreigners in the host society.

<sup>70</sup> The Council of the EU Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 “on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third-country nationals and stateless persons as refugees or as persons who

for the reception of foreigners. Moreover, as I examined my observations in the margins of the transcripts, I noted that the issue of discrimination<sup>71</sup> emerged in several contexts and it was not present in the same measure in the rest of the sample. Particularly, it was frequently associated with the adoption of policy models and good practices implemented by other European countries in the field.

With regard to the analytical category concerning the NGO's participation and representation at the EU level, one respondent had mentioned that attempts to establish contacts with Members of the European Parliament and to participate at the EU level were not successful. Adam Bulandra had explained the reason for that in the following way: "You need to be active in Brussels to establish close contacts and build solid networks with EU institutions or key personalities" (A. Bulandra, personal communication, June 23, 2015). Furthermore, the data reported mentions of how the highly bureaucratic character of EU decision-making procedures had jeopardised the representation and the participation of *Interkulturalni* Association at the EU level. Furthermore, the interview transcripts alluded to a possible connection with the challenge to gain the EU financial support: "It is very hard for a non-governmental organisation like ours to become visible: NGOs need to be big enough, well-known and with a solid financial sustainability" (J. Kościółek, personal communication, June 23, 2015).<sup>72</sup>

In terms of references to the category of transnational cooperation, the interview transcripts reported few mentions of transnational cooperative networks involving *Interkulturalni* Association and other NGOs and focused on the difficulties to gain visibility in the European arena. However, a recurring theme that was associated with the code "European Union" was that of mobility, which was meant as the possibility to cross

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otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted" and the Council Directive [2005/85/EC](#) of 1 December 2005 "on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status" are the main binding acts of the European Union in this policy area.

<sup>71</sup> The interviewees indicated the Roma, the Jews and the Muslims as the most discriminated social categories.

<sup>72</sup> *Interkulturalni* Association was granted European Union funds just once, in 2012, within the framework of Grundtvig Programme 2007-2013 in order to finance the project "Multicultural Europe - are we really united in diversity? Anti-discrimination training". Moreover, the organisation applied twice for the European Fund for Integration of third-country nationals (EFI) to sponsor the creation of an Intercultural Forum within the City Council of Krakow and a Multicultural Center on the model of that established in Warsaw, but in vain. In 2014, in partnership with other eight NGOs active at the EU level, it applied unsuccessfully for the project "Citizen Reporting Network to Counter Hate Speech Online (CRUNCH)" under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme financed by the European Commission.

national borders and allow cultural exchanges between individuals and organisations. For instance, Jakub Kościółek had associated mobility with the possibility for individuals, especially students and researchers, to take part in such EU programmes as the Utrecht Network,<sup>73</sup> Leonardo Da Vinci and Erasmus Plus. The other respondent had supported this argument as follows: “Building cooperative relationships with other institutions from other countries allows the transfer of best practices that can be applied to the strategy for the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination” (A. Bulandra, personal communication, June 23, 2015). More in detail, he had referred to the project carried out in partnership with NGOs from Galway, Glasgow, Malmö and Berlin, which had made possible to import a set of good practices based on shared values and objectives in the fields of intercultural dialogue, integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities. However, because of the lack of financial resources to support long-term projects, collaboration with partners in other European countries was generally associated with the terms “complication” and “uneasiness”.

With regard to the analytical category of the NGOs’ relationship with Polish government, the interview transcripts contained recurrent mentions of the challenges encountered by the leaders of *Interkulturalni* Association in attempting to influence the national migration policy and to achieve the integration of human rights education in the school curricula.<sup>74</sup> This case study represents a good example of how an NGO challenged the government in order to demand more proactive policies and solutions to sensitive issues. According to the findings, since three years the organisation had appeared on the list of consultations with the national government for the preparation of draft resolutions concerning the status of foreigners in Poland. Moreover, the interview transcripts recalled the participation of *Interkulturalni* Association in the local decision-making during the 18-month project “Hate speech alert-Against hate speech in public” in the form of consultations with the offices of Krakow City Hall. However, the interviews suggested that consultations had been more often ineffective as they had not met the NGO’s expectations on transparency, accountability and participation. One respondent had reiterated this as follows: “Civic participation is seriously underdeveloped because of the

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<sup>73</sup> The Utrecht Network is a European-wide network of universities that cooperate in the area of internationalisation, which was launched in 1987. Until the creation of the Erasmus Plus programme or mobility, it was part of the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme financed by the European Commission.

<sup>74</sup> The inclusion of human rights in the school curricula in Poland refers to the introduction of monitoring measures with regard to non-discriminatory practices addressed to students, schoolteachers and school personnel.

tendency of the government to centralise the decisional power on these issues” (A. Bulandra, personal communication, June 23, 2015). The data reported also that the centralised character of the national migration policy had led the local government to deny its responsibility in dealing with the integration of foreigners and immigrants. One interviewee had openly declared that “issues affecting the local or the national level of Member States should be handled by the respective government at these levels and not delegated to an incompetent supranational administration” (A. Bulandra, personal communication, June 23, 2015). The transcripts mentioned also the low level of public awareness with regard to intercultural issues and the absence of cooperation given that “the local government does not perceive increased immigration neither as a problem nor a reality” (J. Kościółek, personal communication, June 23, 2015).

In conclusion, the categories of data resulting from the thematic content analysis of the NGO’s website and publications expressed the following key ideas:

- The values and principles endorsed by *Interkulturalni* Association, especially as regards respect for cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, non-discrimination and social cohesion, appeared to be in line with the democratic values underlying the project of European integration;
- The mission and action of *Interkulturalni* Association had been deeply affected by the EU anti-discrimination laws and the EU norms regulating the respect for cultural diversity in the integration of foreigners and immigrants;
- Forms of participation and representation of the NGO at the EU level had not occurred;
- Transnational cooperative networks had been facilitated by the access to EU funds and they had usually allowed the transfer of ideas, experiences and practices between *Interkulturalni* Association and NGOs in other countries;
- The nature of the relationship between the NGO and the local and national government had not satisfied the principles of accountability, participation and subsidiarity.

## 4.5 The case of Borderland Foundation

### 4.5.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO's website and publications

This section reports the results related to the thematic content analysis applied to the website and publications of the Borderland Foundation in Sejny. A thematic content analysis was carried out with regard to the official website of the organisation entitled "Borderland Archipelago", both in the Polish version and in the English one, given that the former contained different kind of information in respect to the latter. As far as the findings related to the foundation's publications are concerned, the analysis provided a wide spectrum of detailed data both from electronic sources and printed materials, such as books and journals.

What emerged from the findings was a strong emphasis on the necessity to provide a viable solution to growing social divisions, cultural conflicts and an erosion of interpersonal relations in Poland and in Europe, and to do it through culture. The distinctive mark of the Polish foundation appeared to be the exploration of intercultural dialogue by a group of artists in multicultural communities all over the world, mainly through arts and culture. The core message underlying the mission of Borderland Foundation claimed that dialogue goes far beyond the mere celebration of diversity. According to the "ethos of the borderland", a synonym for a philosophy of dialogue as bridge building, every form of social contact between people with different cultural backgrounds should be encouraged. The term "borderland" itself (*pogranicze* in Polish) suggested the idea of a dialogue between cultures as it represented an overlapping of ethnicities, religions and cultures usually on peripheries. Interestingly, the mission of the foundation had adopted the perspective of "urban interculturalism" supporting an understanding of the city as the crucial place where conflicts arise and coexistence is tested.

According to the analytical category of Europeanisation as a cognitive influence exerted by the EU on the NGOs, the themes recurring more often on the foundation's website resulted to be those of European integration, multicultural heritage, identity, intercultural dialogue, interpersonal solidarity, tolerance and education. The codes "Europe" and "European Union" were frequently associated with such universal ideas as the rule of law, a liberal democratic system and the constitutional respect for human rights. At the same time, the code "intercultural dialogue" recurred more consistently



in the data and it was usually linked to discourses on the coexistence of different ethnic groups. Moreover, the research results emphasised the “European dimension of the Polish traditions of tolerance and multiculturalism”<sup>75</sup> together with the importance of building good neighbourly relations. For instance, in the “Handbook of Dialogue” published by the foundation’s publishing house, the notions of multiculturalism<sup>76</sup> and multicultural heritage were ever-present and they were usually mentioned together with the values of tolerance, social cohesion and respect for cultural diversity. A cycle of lessons conducted by Krzysztof Czyżewski with the title “Identity-dialogue-trust: The culture of coexistence in Central and Eastern Europe”<sup>77</sup> had recalled the themes of inter-cultural and inter-group dialogue, solidarity and tolerance between different socio-cultural groups. The theme of cultural diversity and the diffusion of good practices of intercultural dialogue were recurrent in the reports of the projects “Muslims: partners in dialogue” and “Glass Bead Game-Laboratories for intercultural practices”. In the article “Culture and solidarity” written by the foundation’s director and appearing on the bimonthly journal *New Eastern Europe*, many themes recalling such European democratic values as cultural pluralism and intercultural dialogue were explored. More in detail, the author had highlighted the added value of cultural diversity by affirming that “the real revolution in culture is taking place by an increasingly growing presence of the other in our lives” (Czyżewski, 2014, p.28). In addition, within the recommendations prepared by the NGO for the Culture Congress of the Eastern Partnership<sup>78</sup> in Lublin, respect of cultural diversity was given a European dimension as “the promotion of mutual knowledge of the cultures and languages of the

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<sup>75</sup> The expression alluded to the multicultural Jagiellonian Commonwealth, also called Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which lasted from 1386 to 1795. It which was first a dynastic and then a federal multi-ethnic and multireligious union of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was one of the largest and most powerful early modern European states as well as a model of democracy, religious tolerance and social cohesion. The Commonwealth represented an illustrative example of cultural diversity because of its geographical location as border region between the Latin civilisation of Central and Western Europe and the Orthodox regions of Southern and Eastern Europe.

<sup>76</sup> In this context, the understanding of the notion of multiculturalism is limited to the presence or promotion of multiple cultural groups and traditions within a single country, according to which the concept of cultural diversity is usually combined with ethnicity and the existence of diverse ethnic groups.

<sup>77</sup> The cycle of lessons took place at the *Faculty of Political Science of Forlì* within the programme “Visegrad Countries as a Post-socialist Geopolitical Region”, which was launched by the University of Bologna in Italy. The programme consists of interdisciplinary research and studies on Eastern Europe

<sup>78</sup> The Eastern Partnership Culture Congress is an initiative gathering artists, intellectuals, representatives of ministries and local governments, members of NGOs and mass media partners from the Eastern Partnership countries, European Union, as well as Russia and other European countries. It represented an avenue for dialogue and a platform to present different examples of good practice in the culture field. Its objectives are the establishment of Eastern Partnership as a common cultural project, the engagement of culture in social change and the development of a cultural cooperation with the EU. The two first editions of the Congress were held in Lublin in 2011 and 2013. The co-founder of Borderland

Eastern Partnership<sup>79</sup> countries” (Czyżewski, 2011, p.3). The results demonstrated a tendency to perceive Poland as part of a common European culture and civilisation. In this context, the concept of culture was consistently linked to the “cultural integration of Europe” and an understanding of the European Union as a cultural project. Notably, the results reported, “the principle of peaceful coexistence between different cultures lies at the basis of the project of European integration” (Czyżewski, 2014, p.2). In turn, the code “intercultural dialogue” was associated with the concept of intercultural competence, meant as the premise for building the “connective tissue of Europe” and an instrument for conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Sporek-Czyżewska & Czyżewski, 2010, p.38). Similarly, within the thematic areas of the 2011 edition of the Eastern Partnership Culture Congress in which the foundation had taken part, the theme of culture as factor of social integration occupied an important place. The thematic content analysis found out a recurrent criticism concerning fashionable *multi culti* products like festivals and folkloristic events, which were thought to be symptoms of a crisis of multiculturalism<sup>80</sup> undermining rather than supporting social cohesion. Accordingly, the results of the analysis called for a process replacing the model of multiculturalism with “a model of interculturalism or trans-culturalism” according to which “culture itself became the instrument for building a cohesive community” (Sporek-Czyżewska & Czyżewski, 2010, p.109). Moreover, according to a journal article written by the foundation’s director, culture was compared to “the spiritual anchor” of a “united in diversity Europe” (Czyżewski, 2014, p.28). In this regard, Krzysztof Czyżewski had affirmed that “one of the essential issues of cultural dialogue in the borderland community is that of language competence: the languages the inhabitants speak, knowledge of the language spoken by one’s neighbours and command of the common language” (Czyżewski, Mutevelic, Orucevic, Jackson & Szuminski, 2006, p.23).

What stemmed from the findings was also the tendency to envisage intercultural education through workshops, lectures, study visits and summer schools as an effective

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Foundation, *Krzysztof Czyżewski was the Chairman of the Programming Council of the Congress in both the editions.*

<sup>79</sup> The Eastern Partnership is a joint initiative of the EU and its Eastern European partners that was established in May 2009 at the EU Prague Summit. It involves Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and it supports a wide set of reforms in different policy areas. The partnership is based on the democratic values and principles underlying the project of European integration, including democracy, respect for human rights and good governance.

<sup>80</sup> The text uses the term “multiculturalism” as a set of policies designed to provide recognition for diverse ethno-cultural groups or multiple cultural programs within a country, therefore ensuring a separate but equal treatment for them.

tool for social change. The data defined it a medium to export innovative practices worked out in Sejny in troubled multicultural areas all over the world, in order to educate people to dialogue and combat social exclusion. In the book “Limes, Pontes, Agora”,<sup>81</sup> the Center “Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations” was compared to a “pedagogical province”, which evoked the educational dimension of intercultural practices (Sporek-Czyżewska & Czyżewski, 2010, p.109). The book “A Handbook of Dialogue” reiterated that, since Western societies constitute an “archipelago of detached cultures”, only education might foster dialogue as a daily practice and a way of life (Sporek-Czyżewska & Czyżewski, 2010, p.63; Czyżewski, Kulas & Golubiewski, 2011, p.11). However, one publication contained the belief that “united Europe remains a dream”, which appeared to be a reflection of the “invisible character of Europeanness” (Czyżewski, 2011, p.111). On the other hand, the themes of social cohesion and integration of migrants and ethnic minorities were ever-present in the data, especially in the “Book of the Bridge”,<sup>82</sup> the outcome of cultural and artistic workshops held in the cities of Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sejny. For instance, the online report on the intercultural integration workshops “Native Realm, Europe of Bridges” held by the foundation’s director in 2012 in Brussels discussed the cultural tensions and integration difficulties experienced by immigrants in Europe. Likely, during the international festival “*Euromediterranea*” entitled “Europe of the 25, Polish example”, the NGO had received the Alexander Langer Award for its continued engagement in salient socio-cultural issues brought forward by the integration of old and new minorities in the context of re-emerging borders based on ethnicity.

In terms of Europeanisation as synonym for the adoption of an EU normative framework, the thematic content analysis revealed that a limited number of codes were included under this analytical category. Particularly, references to the normative dimension of intercultural dialogue were rather vague and limited to recommendations about good practices to be adopted by Polish local, regional and national government.

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<sup>81</sup> According to the title of the book, the concepts of “limes”, “pontes” and “agora” were associated respectively with borders or exclusion, with bridges as the element allowing encounters and intercultural communication, and with a space of coexistence between people with different cultures.

<sup>82</sup> The Book of the Bridge was published in 2006 and it was realized through the financial support the European Commission.

The publications also contained sporadic allusions to common practices in the field that should be available to intercultural dialogue practitioners.<sup>83</sup>

As far as the analytical category concerning the representation and participation of the NGOs at the EU level is concerned, the results of thematic content analysis revealed that the Borderland Foundation had been particularly active at the European level, mainly in order to influence the European intercultural policy. The content of publications focused on its goal to persuade the Union to invest more resources in culturally diversified local communities through long-term projects ensuring sustainability to the NGO. For instance, in order to raise its voice in the EU, in 2011 the foundation had initiated the Cultural Workshops in Lublin during the first Culture Congress of the Eastern Partnership where it had addressed a list of recommendations to the European Commission about the adoption of a new approach to cultural education. In the same year, Borderland Foundation had taken part in the session of the programme New Agora Symposium<sup>84</sup> called “Europe Native Realm” and, in 2012, in the “Brussels Conversations”<sup>85</sup> discussing the future of the project of European integration and the role of culture in inspiring a sense of citizenship. On the other hand, what emerged from the results of the analysis was a widespread mistrust of EU institutions, which seemed to limit the NGO’s participation in Brussels. More in detail, the director of Borderland Foundation had shown his disillusionment when he had argued that neither an “association of equals” nor a “unity in diversity” have been achieved (Czyżewski, 2011, p.109).

Mentions of the process of European integration were often accompanied by references to the themes of mobility and cultural exchange, representing two strategic factors for the NGO’s mission in the area of interculturalism. From the perspective of transnational cooperation, the Borderland Foundation defined itself an “international network of practitioners of intercultural dialogue” (Czyżewski et al., 2006, p.12; Sporek-Czyżewska & Czyżewski, 2010, p.105). Since its creation, it established mutual contacts and solid partnerships with many regions and countries in the world, including with such

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<sup>83</sup> The notion of intercultural dialogue practitioners include all those individuals who carry out activities in a cross-cultural environment, such as students and teachers but also NGO activists and government authorities.

<sup>84</sup> The New Agora Symposium or “New Agora” refers to an international educational-cultural project consisting of a series of debates about the future of multiculturalism and the challenges brought about by increased cultural diversity in modern societies. It was launched by the Borderland Foundation in 2006 and gathered practitioners of intercultural dialogue, such as NGO activists, intellectuals and artists, but also students. It allowed the exchange of ideas, experiences and practices among leaders of intercultural projects from many countries, including Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Greece and Italy. The main editions were held in Wrocław, in Bosnia and in Brussels.

<sup>85</sup> The title of the event was “A Cultural Coalition for Citizens’ Europe”.

universities as the New School University in New York, the University of Michigan, the Syracuse University, the University of Chicago, the University of Warsaw and the Oranim Academic College in Israel. In particular, the work “A Handbook for Dialogue” had been designed to allow the transfer of new ideas and practices beyond Poland’s national borders as well as to suggest new paths of cooperation in the field of education. The thematic content analysis found out that the codes “transfer” and “exchange of ideas”, often associated to the terms “international project”, recurred more consistently. For instance, for years the NGO had maintained a close cooperative relationship with multicultural communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Great Britain and Georgia. To mention further examples, international exchanges had taken part place in the form of conferences within the “New Agora Symposium” held in Sarajevo in 2006, in Wrocław in 2007, in Sejny in 2008 and in Berlin in 2009. Moreover, the website of the foundation contained a section dedicated to the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe (MIREES) organised by the University of Bologna and aiming at raising cultural awareness about the contribution of Central and Eastern Europe to European integration, with which Borderland Foundation had maintained close contacts through the figure of Krzysztof Czyżewski. The leaders of Borderland Foundation had reached remote regions of the world through international workshops, like the cities of Dyushambe and Varzob in Takjkstan in October 2004, in order to exchange ideas on how to spread the dialogue among cultures. In 2005, the foundation inaugurated a three-day colloquium in Georgia within the programme “Dialogue in Tbilisi” whose objective had been to educate animators of intercultural dialogue and promote educational projects in multicultural communities.

In conclusion, as far as the analytical category concerning the NGOs relationship with Polish government is concerned, the results did not report any mention of relevant codes. However, a journal article written by the director of Borderland Foundation discussed the negative role played by historical legacies with reference to a “still strongly present post-totalitarian heritage” in Poland involving also political institutions, which he had considered an important source of resistance to intercultural dialogue (Czyżewski, 2014, p.31).

#### 4.5.2 Content analysis of interview transcripts

The semi-structured interviews carried out in Sejny involved the four leaders of Borderland Foundation, who were also the main managers of all the projects, namely Agata Milewska, Krzysztof Czyżewski, Ksenija Konopek and Wojciech Szroeder.

According to the first analytical category concerning the EU as a cognitive framework, the major themes explored by the respondents included cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, the Polish multicultural heritage, education, international cooperation and the local dimension of intercultural dialogue. As stated by the co-founder Krzysztof Czyżewski and Wojciech Szroeder, according to the NGO's mission, culture is encompassed in a long-term strategy focused on teaching local level communities how to use it as an instrument for social change (K. Czyżewski & W. Szroeder, personal communication, July 18, 2015). One of the leaders, the cultural anthropologist Agata Milewska, had defined the action of "building intercultural bridges" through education, arts, music, theatre and storytelling as the main strategy inspiring the mission of the foundation and allowing to recollect Poland's multicultural heritage. This idea had been recalled also by the co-founder Ksenija Konopek who had been working with children from seven ethnic groups in the Vojvodina region by using culture, mainly theatre and plastic arts, as a method to stimulate tolerance and mutual contacts between them. Accordingly, education was mentioned in connection with the role played by language as an essential element of integration and socialisation with other cultures. For this purpose, the foundation had decided to create a "Borderland School" involving Georgians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians besides Poles. Interestingly, the interviewees had often referred to the concept of intercultural competence and its crucial role in the local context characterized by the coexistence between Poles, Lithuanians and Russian Old Believers, but also in multicultural areas inhabited by several minorities and vexed by ethnic tensions. The director had also added: "The work that the foundation carried out is increasingly needed in Poland, and to a certain extent also in Western Europe, where narrow nationalistic patterns are re-emerging" (K. Czyżewski, personal communication, July 18, 2015). One educational strategy adopted by the leaders consisted in projects carried out at the Center "Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations" with young generations from the age of kindergarten, while another involved intellectuals, artists and members of different social groups. One respondent had affirmed that the Borderland

Foundation had used to grant the award for the “Man or Woman of the Borderland”<sup>86</sup> to teachers and intellectuals from various countries who had devoted their career to borderlands’ issues and the culture of immigrant communities. For the same purpose, an “Academy for Borderland Teachers” had also been launched. On the other hand, the results revealed that, among others, the promotion of cultural diversity represented the theme that recurred more persistently in the respondents’ talks. For instance, it was mentioned with reference to the project “Open regions of Central and Eastern Europe” whose objective had been the promotion of multicultural regions such as Bukovina between Romania and Ukraine, Spisz between Slovakia and Poland, and multicultural cities like Vilnius and Tbilisi, through conferences, artistic presentations, movies and book publications. With regard to her personal experience, Agata had referred to tolerance and respect for cultural diversity as two crucial values that had inspired her whole life. The value of democracy and the principle of good neighbourliness<sup>87</sup> were equally present in the transcripts. Instead, contrary to the rest of the sample, the interviewees had not mentioned the principles of respect for human rights and non-discrimination, at least not in explicit way. As regards their sense of Europeanness, two interviewees had considered the concept of European identity of secondary importance and described it as rather abstract.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the others had recognised European identity as a necessary component of the process of European integration and one of them had defined it as “the combination between the preservation of local cultural heritage and the value of tolerance” (A. Milewska, personal communication, July 18, 2015).

In line with the initial expectations, the results related to the analytical category of the EU as a normative framework revealed few mentions of EU-related norms in the field of intercultural dialogue. The findings suggested an overall lack of information about EU legislation, except for non-binding recommendations on good practices of

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<sup>86</sup> The Italian scholar, translator and writer Claudio Magris received the price “Man of the Borderland” in 2009 for his literary engagement in focusing his works on borderland issues, particularly with regard to Istria and Italy.

<sup>87</sup> The notion of “good neighbourliness” refers to the principle based on harmonious relations between countries and regions and it is regulated by a binding international legislation. In the context of the present research its understanding is limited to the establishment of friendly relationships between neighbouring ethnic groups grounded on common democratic values such as the enhancement of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and safeguard of cultural diversity. According to the interview transcripts, good neighbourly relations are considered the motor of social integration and cohesion.

<sup>88</sup> The point that the respondents raised concerned the difficulty of drawing a clear line between the sense of Europeanness and other forms of local, regional or national identity.

intercultural dialogue formulated by the EU. More in detail, only Ksenija Konopek had declared that she had occasionally consulted official documents of the EU institutions in order to get specific information on how to manage EU projects. Generally, all interviewees had considered the notion of EU best practices<sup>89</sup> with a certain scepticism and one of them reacted in the following way: “I think that if a strategy works here in Sejny or elsewhere it does not mean that it necessarily works in other contexts” (K. Konopek, personal communication, July 18, 2015).

From the perspective of the third analytical category corresponding to the representation and participation of the NGOs at the EU level, two of the respondents had not alluded to this issue neither directly nor indirectly. Notably, one of them had declared, “According to me, the EU is far, I do not think about it in the everyday life” (A. Milewska, personal communication, July 18, 2015). On the contrary, the other interviewees appeared to be involved in EU issues, even though to a different extent. According to the interview transcripts, only one respondent had affirmed to have participated more than once in consultations with EU officials<sup>90</sup> in Brussels in order to present his own view on issues related to intercultural dialogue and promotion of cultural diversity through education, but also to influence the EU funding policy.<sup>91</sup> In particular, he had taken part in conferences organised by EU institutions under the role of Ambassador of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.<sup>92</sup> In 2012, he had participated in a debate held in Brussels during the conclusion of the Polish presidency to the EU Council and Jerzy Buzek’s term as President of the European Parliament, involving the participation of Members of the European Parliament, European Commission officials and representatives of European think-tanks. Finally, in 2000 he had been involved in the project of European Cultural

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<sup>89</sup> Literally, a best practice is defined as a reliable method, technique or strategy whose pragmatic results proved to be superior to those achieved through different means. In certain contexts, it represents a synonym for benchmark. It is widely conceived as the process of developing a standard approach that can be adopted by many actors in the same field. The UNESCO “Collection of good practices of intercultural dialogue in support to quality education”, the council of Europe defined a set of best practices in the field of fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance. The European commission (DG Education and Culture) prepared two manuals of best practice during the European year of Intercultural Dialogue.

<sup>90</sup> Consultations in Brussels took place in different occasions, such as in 2012 during the “Brussels Conversations” sponsored by the civil society initiative “A soul for Europe” and during the edition of the New Agora Symposium entitled “Europe-Native Realm” held in 2011.

<sup>91</sup> The participation of Borderland Foundation in Brussels was mostly motivated by the willingness to replace a relationship with the Union based on economic dependence with one contributing to the sustainability of the NGO in financial terms. As a result, participation itself was likely to be jeopardised by the intermittent support provided by EU institutions to the foundation.

<sup>92</sup> He was a member of the Council of the EYID in Poland, which was composed of representatives of NGOs, ethnic and national minority organisations and academic communities playing the role of “Ambassadors of the EYID in Poland”.



Capitals for the city of Krakow. However, the Borderland Foundation had never participated in networks with European NGOs active at the EU level. On the other hand, what emerged from the thematic content analysis was a criticism addressed by some leaders to the logic of power followed by EU policy-makers, which prevailed over the goal of social cohesion. More in detail, the codes “Europe” and “European Union” were often associated with the codes “distrust”, “bureaucracy”, “hypocrisy” and “complications”. According to Krzysztof Czyżewski mismanagement in the field of intercultural policy had been caused by the fact that “in the EU, officials are clerks in a Kafka’s castle who are driven by numbers and they do not have a real interest in the work we carry out at the grassroots level” (K. Czyżewski, personal communication, July 18, 2015). Similarly, another criticism had been addressed towards the process of applying for EU grants,<sup>93</sup> which the interviewees had described as “slow and not flexible”. In this regard, one respondent had openly declared: “In managing application forms for EU projects I came across more and more bureaucracy, which is reaching the level of absurd. What is more, the EU documents are increasingly complex” (K. Konopek, personal communication, July 18, 2015). At the same time, the respondents had agreed that the financial support from the Union had the effect of increasing the pressure on the organisation to acquire further managerial skills. Although, they had recognised the impact of EU funds as generally positive, especially with regard to increased possibilities of reaching international partners for projects.

According to the results of the analysis of interview transcripts, the analytical category on transnational cooperation included many references alluding to the worldwide recognition and reputation achieved by Borderland Foundation. For instance, one interviewee had affirmed with enthusiasm: “We worked in almost every country all over the world, from Ukraine and Belarus to Bhutan, Indonesia and Uganda” (A. Milewska, personal communication, July 18, 2015). The code “European Union” was persistently associated with the advantages deriving from mobility. In turn, the codes “mobility” and “cultural exchange” recurred consistently together with the theme of “transfer of practices, ideas and experiences” from one country to another. For example, Agata had explained: “Our partners from abroad bring here in Sejny their experiences

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<sup>93</sup> Borderland Association was granted EU funds from the European Commission for the project “New Agora Symposium. Muslims: Partners in Dialogue” taking place from 2009 to 2010, the project “Glass Bead Game-Laboratories of intercultural practices” from 2007 to 2009 and the project “The Book of Grand Duchy of Lithuania” taking place in 2008.

and ideas to share them with us” (A. Milewska, personal communication, July 18, 2015). For instance, Borderland Foundation had imported models for cultural diversity management from the cities of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Chernivtsi on the border between Romania and Ukraine, while it had exported good practices in other neighbourhoods. One respondent had explained that “the aim of the organisation is mainly to recreate the Borderland of Arts, Culture and Nations Center as well as the ethos of the borderland<sup>94</sup> in other parts of Central Europe but also and especially in Western Europe” (K. Czyżewski, personal communication, July 18, 2015). In this context, one interviewee had mentioned how the access of the NGO to EU funds had brought about significant changes in terms of international cooperation. She had recalled an example in the following way: “Without the grants provided by the EU the project *Bosnian Tryptic* carried out in 2005 with the participation of partners from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the United Kingdom and Bulgaria would not have been feasible”<sup>95</sup> (K. Konopek, personal communication, July 18, 2015).

As far as the category of analysis focusing on the relationship between the NGOs and the Polish government is concerned, the findings demonstrated that such a relation tended to be largely informed by the political culture of the government members at different institutional levels. In general, the results of the analysis reported mentions of a positive relationship with the Polish Ministry of Culture, the regional government (*voivodship*) that had partly funded the “Borderland for Arts, Cultures and Nations” center, and the local government in Sejny. According to the interview transcripts, consultative processes had taken place mostly with the local government, while the national government had not given proof of being open towards a collaboration with Borderland Foundation. One interviewee had added: “We are generally consulted by the mayor of the city with regard to some decisions that need to be taken in the fields of cultural education, public investments for the local community and public goods maintenance” (A. Milewska, personal communication, July 18, 2015). During its twenty-five years of existence, the foundation had regularly invited the citizens of Sejny, together with members of the local and regional government, to participate in open debates held

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<sup>94</sup> The “ethos of the borderland” was meant as a philosophy or ethos based on the values of tolerance, dialogism, freedom, self-criticism and openness to the world.

<sup>95</sup> The partners of the project were Pozoriste lutaka (BiH), Fondazione Alexander Langer Stiftung (Italy), The Public (UK), Mediacentar (BiH), P.E.N. Center of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Project Funding: European Cultural Foundation and the European Commission Culture 2000 Programme.

at the White Synagogue<sup>96</sup> within the “Symposium” programme. The respondents had defined it as a good practice of dialogue with ordinary citizens and the political elite aimed at raising cultural sensitivity towards issues of cultural pluralism and social cohesion. However, one interviewee had explained: “The nature of our relationship with public officials largely depends on which party<sup>97</sup> is elected at the government and, occasionally, the situation is quite difficult; every day we must prove that our educational work is needed in Sejny” (A. Milewska, personal communication, July 18, 2015). For instance, the relationship with local government had encountered more obstacles when it had been composed by members of the party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice), who tended to be more conservative, in comparison to the cooperative relationship established with the currently elected Mayor of Sejny, Jan Stanisław Kap. Indeed, one of them had affirmed: “Sometimes they accused us, the leaders of the foundation, of being cosmopolitan” (K. Konopek, personal communication, July 18, 2015). Accordingly, the term “interdependence” was used to define the ideal relationship with the government at all levels, which should be based on continued dialogue and financial sustainability.<sup>98</sup> As regards the dialogue with the government at the national level, the director of the NGO had stated: “I personally wrote several recommendations and opinions concerning the ethnic minorities living in Poland, their role in Polish multicultural heritage and the urgency to introduce these issues as well as intercultural education in the school curriculum” (K. Czyżewski, personal communication, July 18, 2015). The relationship with the national government was linked to discourses on the dominant political culture, given that “in Poland most people understand the concept of identity in a very narrow sense: feeling European is seen as a treachery to Polish identity” (K. Czyżewski & W. Szroeder, personal communication, July 18, 2015).

In conclusion, in accordance with the findings emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts, some general observations can be summarised as follows

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<sup>96</sup> The interviewees described the White Synagogue of Sejny, also called “the Old Synagogue”, as the place allowing the recreation of a public sphere lost during persisting cultural conflicts and social divisions afflicting the border with Russia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

<sup>97</sup> At the time of the research, the Polish political system was overly polarized between the two main political parties, i.e. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) and *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform).

<sup>98</sup> The respondent underlined the atypical nature of such a relationship involving forms of financial support from the government, which usually NGOs do not accept because of their declared independence.

- The mission and action of Borderland Foundation were consistent with European democratic values connected to the field of intercultural dialogue;
- A normative influence in terms of the adoption by the NGO of EU laws and norms does not occur;
- Based on solid networks in Brussels, the Borderland Foundation appeared to be actively engaged at the EU level, where it had used the European avenue to influence both the Polish educational system and the EU funding policy towards NGOs;
- The transfer of ideas and practices of intercultural dialogue appeared to be a persistent outcome of transnational cooperative networks established by the NGO;
- The relationship with the government seemed to be influenced by the conservative political culture characterising Polish political institutions and society.

## 4.6 The case of Other Space Foundation

### 4.6.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO's website and publications

This section introduces the results of the research conducted on the case of Other Space Foundation based in Warsaw. Given that it was not possible to conduct interviews with the NGO leaders, the research findings concern the official website of the NGO and online publications, including the annual reports summarizing all completed projects from 2006 to 2014. Part of the information collected from the online materials was translated from Polish into English, given that certain categories of data were not available in both languages.

According to the research results, the trademark of the city of Warsaw is the coexistence of different ethnic groups. The Other Space Foundation had been founded in 2006 by a group of social activists and had provided a new space for social and artistic expression endorsing such values as the promotion of democracy, human rights, multiculturalism and tolerance. For instance, the same values were reported in article 5 of the general provisions contained in the mission statement. In this context, culture and arts were envisaged as the main instruments to serve social change and foster dialogue

between different social and ethnic groups through exhibitions, festivals, conferences, meetings, theatre performances and publications. Accordingly, the code “education” occurred consistently in the data and it was defined as a suitable channel to disseminate knowledge about other cultures and religions, hence to promote cultural pluralism. The thematic content analysis revealed an emphasis on the support to cultural activities carried out by representatives of various communities of foreigners and minorities as a reflection of their participation in the cultural life of Warsaw. For instance, the initiative called “Warsaw without border-Multicultural Warsaw Street Parade” had been designed to meet this objective. With regard to the mission’s objectives, article 6 reported the protection of Polish cultural heritage, human rights protection, the promotion of contacts between national and ethnic minorities and their integration in the Polish society. Indeed, the multicultural heritage of Warsaw was persistently connected with the integration of foreigners and minorities in the host society. For instance, the creation of the SINTAR Self-Help Refugee Centre had responded to the necessity of fostering the acceptance of the Chechen diaspora and its participation in the social and cultural life of the city. Similarly, the project “Machine Chechen Culture”, implemented in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, had the aim of fostering the cultural integration of Chechen refugees. Accordingly, also the code “intercultural dialogue” was mentioned in combination with the code “integration”. For instance, it was recalled in the projects of cultural cooperation “They Caucasus” and “One Caucasus: culture instrument of agreement” involving artists from Poland, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in innovative activities in the field of visual arts, as well as in the international festival of Caucasian cultures “*Transkaukazja*”.<sup>99</sup> Notably, the projects with the partners from Caucasus had proved that culture might be a powerful way of connecting people. On the other hand, the foundation’s activities in the field of intercultural dialogue had focused mainly on the programme “Continent Warsaw-Warsaw of many cultures”, an online portal presenting the cultural heritage of minorities living in the city and aimed to encourage dialogue between writers and journalists affiliated to different ethnic groups. Similar projects committed to the cultural activation of migrant communities were “Vietnamese Warsaw”, “Japanese Warsaw”, “Syrian Warsaw”, “Russian Warsaw”, “*Fajna Jukrajna*” and “Somalia’s Day” whose objective was to present and debate the

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<sup>99</sup> The so-called “*Transkaukazja*” was an international program created by independent artistic organisations from twelve among European and non-European countries for the exchange of artistic experiences, which was realised in 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2011.

culture of each community through artistic projects such as painting, photography, meetings with artists, music shows and films. The Other Space Foundation also encouraged intercultural dialogue and cooperation between ethnic minorities in Myanmar through the project “Voice of social change”, involving residents from the Shan and Arakan regions. At the same time, the project “Together for Burma: Civic education” carried out in Myanmar between April and November 2013 brought together pro-democracy activists and educators representing seven ethnic groups who attempted to create a space for dialogue and to prevent violent nationalism. However, the results of the analysis suggested a stronger focus on human rights protection rather than on intercultural dialogue *per se*.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the results reported sporadic references to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue that were limited to highlight the recognition of Other Space Foundation as one of the fifteen intercultural dialogue practitioners next to the European Cultural Foundation and the Borderland Foundation. The content of the website put a close attention on the theme of intercultural education, mentioned in connection to the work carried out by the Warsaw Multicultural Centre. For instance, one project addressed to 19 children coming from multicultural families based in Warsaw had envisaged the acquisition of an intercultural competence, besides being designed to stimulate their interest in learning the language and the culture of their country of origin.<sup>101</sup> The code “intercultural education” occurred also in association with the value of solidarity and the promotion of inclusiveness as vehicle for social cohesion. Particularly, the report on the project “Modern education” implemented in Myanmar illustrated the role of civic education in intercultural contexts and, in that case to prevent conflicts between the Arakanese and the Rohingya minority.

The category of the EU normative influence and that of participation and representation at the EU level were never mentioned in the content of the online portal of Other Space Foundation. By contrast, in terms of transnational cooperation, the establishment of collaborative relationships between artists and social activists as well as the action of “inspiring social change in different regions of the world” were included among the main objectives incorporated in the mission of the organisation. For instance, the results mentioned “local partnerships and knowledge transfer” as concerned the

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<sup>100</sup> The underlying message of the foundation’s mission argued that intolerance comes from ignorance but also and above all from unawareness of the “other” and non-respect for each other’s values.

<sup>101</sup> The children came from mixed families combining the Polish culture with the German, the Georgian, the Russian, the Italian the Ukrainian, the Belarusian, the Japanese, the Colombian, the Tanzanian, the Nigerian, the Senegalese and the Vietnamese cultures.

diffusion of good practices to support mechanisms of cooperation between minorities in the border regions of Georgia, which had been implemented in 2006 in cooperation with Borderland Foundation. Alike, the findings mentioned the code “transfer” with reference to good practices and experiences of social change exported by Poland to Azerbaijan and Georgia, such as within the project “ArtZone Poland/Tbilisi”. In the field of migration policy, the “Local Migration Policies-Exchanging Experiences of Different States on Migration Management in Cities”, planned in 2013 in cooperation with *Interkulturalni* Association from Krakow and *Interkulturelles Zentrum* from Wien, was an illustrative example of transnational cooperation in the area of innovative migration policies facilitating the integration of immigrants. What emerged from thematic content analysis was also the fact that the availability of EU funds<sup>102</sup> was recognised as a factor facilitating the implementation of international projects or the extension of their scope to other countries, like the enlargement of *Transkaukazja* to Austria, Czech Republic and Germany.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, the results reported few mentions as regards the analytical category focusing on the relationship with the government. In 2009, for the first time, the projects related to the programme “Continent Warsaw” had been co-financed by the Warsaw City Council within a three-year support programme inscribed in the Culture Development Programme 2020. The only reference to consultative meetings concerned the participation of Other Space Foundation in the Forum on Immigration at the Mazowieckie Province Office and in the Social Dialogue Commission for Culture in Warsaw. However, the analysis did not capture further details with regard to the cooperation. On the other hand, the relationship of the foundation with the national government appeared to be based on a solid financial support, mainly as regards the funds provided by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In conclusion, according to the results of the thematic content analysis presented above, the following observations summarise the main findings:

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<sup>102</sup> The text refers to the financial resources provided by the European Commission within the framework of the Culture Programme 2007-2013.

<sup>103</sup> Generally, the Other Space Foundation received funds from the European Commission Culture Programme for the implementation of the project *Transkaukazja* in 2011; the European Fund for the Integration of third country nationals for the periods 2009-2011 and 2014-2015; the European Refugee Fund for the periods 2009-2011 and 2012-2015 and funds from the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission in 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2011.

- The promotion of intercultural dialogue had served the integration of minority groups in the cultural and political life of the city and functioned as a tool for conflict prevention;
- It is quite unlikely that the EU exerts a normative influence on the mission and action of Other Space Foundation, except for issues of human rights protection;
- The Other Space Foundation had not participated at the EU level;
- The objective of inspiring social change in different regions of the world was consistent with the theory on the transfer of ideas, practices and experiences to other countries;
- Continued financial support and public consultations had characterised the relationship between Other Space Foundation and the Polish government.

## 4.7 The case of Homo Faber Association

### 4.7.1 Thematic content analysis: the NGO's website and publications

With regard to the results of thematic content analysis conducted on the online sources pertaining to Homo Faber Associations, the content of the official website including the publications on completed projects was first translated from Polish into English and then carefully analysed. The findings reported a series of salient themes falling under each of the five analytical categories used in the rest of the sample.

Within the analytical category corresponding to the cognitive influence of the EU on the sample of NGOs, the analysis found out that the integration of foreigners and national and ethnic minorities recurred more consistently. In turn, the concept of integration was associated with a sense of security, social order, prosperity and happiness and it was meant as an instrument allowing people to establish peaceful neighbourly relations. The results reported mentions of a high number of measures to integrate the communities of refugees living in Lublin, including the projects “Support the integration of refugee children”,<sup>104</sup> “Encounters with Chechen Refugees” carried out in 2012 and the film review “Refugee Review” implemented in June 2011 in occasion of the World

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<sup>104</sup> The initiative was funded by the European Refugee Fund and by financial resources of the City of Lublin.



Refugee Day. Likely, the project “Lviv 7” financed by the Lublin City Hall had been intended to encourage the participation of different cultural groups in artistic activities aimed at redecorating a block of flats in the town of Kalinowszczyzna to transform it into a “house of culture” functioning as a place for regular weekly events including literary meetings, exhibitions and concerts. More in detail, the website of Homo Faber Association contained several references combining minority issues with the themes of multiculturalism and the promotion of cultural diversity. With reference to the first topic, in September 2014, the Municipality of Lublin had been awarded with four “Open City” prizes for migrants’ integration initiatives and Homo Faber Association had been recognised as a valuable contributor to that achievement. More in detail, the aim of the activities devoted to raise awareness about minority issues about, for instance, the Jewish and Ukrainian minorities was part of a broader strategy focusing on the celebration of the multicultural heritage of the city of Lublin and the Lublin region through culture and arts. For instance, the project “Protestant Tavern” held between September and October 2008 had been the result of an initiative whose aim had been to encourage young people from Central and Eastern Europe to take joint action to protect European cultural heritage, including its religious expressions, by stimulating them through debates, competitions and film screenings.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, another theme that recurred persistently was that of Intercultural European cities, which had also been the subject of debates between the association’s leaders and the director of Borderland Foundation Krzysztof Czyżewski. The pronounced European character of Homo Faber Association was underlined with regard to its efforts to support the candidacy of the city of Lublin on the list of the European Capitals of Culture for the 2016 edition with the motto “The City in Dialogue”. The code “intercultural dialogue” was usually mentioned in connection with the code “education”, “tolerance” and “non-discrimination”. Notably, the initiative “Dummy or a real threat? Debate about hate speech in Lublin” taking place in December 2011 had discussed the concepts of racism, xenophobia, non-discrimination and respect for cultural diversity more in depth. To give another example, the educational contest “MythBusters” taking place in 2012 had focused on the use of a language of hostility and hate speech on

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<sup>105</sup> The project was sponsored by the program “Memoria: Volunteering for Cultural Heritage in Europe” launched by two Polish foundations and financed by the City of Lublin, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Civic Initiatives Fund.

the internet. Furthermore, along with the themes of intercultural dialogue and education, the code “intercultural competence” was consistently mentioned in the data. For example, several language courses and an “Intercultural Competence Workshop” had been organised in 2010. Particularly, a conference entitled “The role of cultural assistant at school” had been devoted to debates on the role of culture in the education of foreign children living in Lublin, given that culture is a factor determining people’s perceptions and behaviour towards the other. In terms of respect for cultural pluralism, the Poland-Israel exchange among students taking place in October 2008 had represented an opportunity to familiarise with another culture and the rich multicultural heritage of Poland. The codes “multiculturalism” and “multicultural heritage” emerged also in the data concerning both the project “Lublin is friendly-Meeting for foreign students” held in March 2009 under the programme “Intercultural Cities”<sup>106</sup> and the initiative called “Multicultural Lublin” consisting of a series of school trips devoted to the discover of national and ethnic minorities. Similarly, the film festival “Jewish Motifs” had opened a debate on the Jewish national and cultural identity while combating intolerance and fostering acceptance between different religious and cultural groups. Generally, the results revealed that Homo Faber Association had tended to put a close attention on the assistance to marginalised groups and human rights protection. With the contribution of the NGO, in 2013 the Lublin City Council had voted for the “Lublin Development Strategy 2013-2020” in which building a diversity management programme and maintaining good relations with Lublin’s cultural minorities had been put as priority. In terms of international projects, the meeting on the theme “Burma, China, Tibet and human rights” held in November 2008 had the goal of shaping citizens’ attitudes according to the respect for cultural diversity and fostering intercultural communication.

On the other hand, in terms of normative influence exerted by the European Union on the mission and action of Homo Faber Association, the research results did not cover a high number of references falling under this analytical category. The relevant codes contained in the texts were limited to the mention of an informative meeting on the legal procedures regulating the reception of refugees in Poland held in April 2010. Moreover, the materials present on the website of Homo Faber Association occasionally mentioned

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<sup>106</sup> The programme “Intercultural Cities” was a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

the EU anti-discrimination laws in the context of measures for the integration of foreigners, immigrants and refugees in the host society. The results of thematic content analysis did not contain any reference to the third analytical category.

The results pertaining to the analytical category of transnational cooperation maintained that Homo Faber Association had a strong international vocation and had taken part in transnational networks involving both NGO representatives and institutions. For instance, in 2010 the leaders of the association had arranged a cycle of meetings with teachers from Belarus with the aim of discussing forms of NGO cooperation with schools and exchanging practices of intercultural education. Moreover, the results of the analysis mentioned a project realised in 2013 and made of six study visits in Lutsk, Ukraine, which had allowed to exchange experiences between Polish and Ukrainian public institutions in terms of integration of foreigners. Interestingly, in 2014 such initiative had received the award for the joint project of cross-border exchange of experience between NGOs in the field by the Eastern Europe Initiatives Congress.<sup>107</sup>

As far as the relationship between the NGOs and the government is concerned, the results suggested that the mission of Homo Faber Association had put a particular emphasis over the cooperation with the Lublin City Hall and the openness of the City Council towards a structured and comprehensive civil dialogue.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the association from Lublin had initiated the programme “Homo Faber good governance”, sponsored by the European Fund for the Integration of third country nationals, which had the aim of strengthening the integration of foreigners and combating discriminatory behaviours against them through an effective coordination between institutions and civil society organisations.

On the other hand, the thematic content analysis revealed a troubled relationship with the local government with regard to the openness and participation of public consultations. The findings reported mentions of a long and tortuous process of social change initiated by the association in this regard. Notably, the leaders of Homo Faber Association had addressed a strong criticism towards the Lublin City Hall because of the persistent violation of the rule of law and the principle of social dialogue. The results of

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<sup>107</sup> The first Congress was organised in Lublin in 2012 and it worked like a variant of the Eastern Partnership Culture Congress. It mainly aims at fostering effective cross-border cooperation and strengthening dialogue between local and regional authorities. The Congress specialised in the preparation of recommendations in the areas of good governance, civil society, transnational cultural cooperation and education.

<sup>108</sup> The results mentioned the exchange of experiences and good practices about local government cooperation with NGOs between Homo Faber Association and NGOs from Białystok, Warsaw and Słupsk.

thematic content analysis suggested that, while the Polish government had generally observed the principle of subsidiarity, the lack of mutual trust and accountability had appeared to strain the relation at the local level, which had been clearly marked by suspicion and mistrust. In a letter to the President of the Office of the City of Lublin it had been underlined that only the Department of Culture and the Department of Sport and Tourism had conducted transparent and open public consultations with representatives of NGOs. While, for instance, the former had announced the date, place and subject of consultations on several websites and distributed several leaflets in the city, the meetings held by the Lublin Public Benefit Council had been defined as “secret social gatherings” (Choroś, 2010). In particular, in April 2010, during the preparation by the Council of a resolution on public consultations, participation had not been guaranteed to the representatives of Homo Faber Association but it had been limited to registered organisations. Finally, only in 2012 the organisation had been included in the advisory body functioning under the President of the City of Lublin. As regards its relationship with the government at the national level, the results reported that, more than once, the NGO leaders had addressed a letter to Prime Minister Donald Tusk questioning the lack of exhaustive dialogue with responsible government entities. Another accusation referred to the violation of such governance principles as the freedom of access to information, the freedom of expression and the principle of transparency of the legislative process.

#### 4.7.2 Content analysis of interview transcripts

The interview with the leader of Homo Faber Piotr Skrzypczak was conducted on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015. Right after the interview was completed, the talk was transcribed and its content thoroughly analysed through a content analysis, whose results are given below.

As far as the first analytical category referring to the EU as a cognitive framework of reference for the NGOs is concerned, the major theme recalled by interviewee was that of human rights protection. This topic appeared to be strictly linked to his past personal experience in the Amnesty International group based in Lublin, which is a well-known international non-governmental organisation actively engaged in the promotion and defence of human rights. In turn, this subject was repeatedly associated with human rights education, non-discrimination and equality. Moreover, the code “human rights” was often mentioned in combination with the code “European Union” in order to show a connection with the underlying European value of human rights protection. With regard to

the association's engagement in the field of non-discrimination, its strategy aiming at building a more open civil society had envisaged the creation of a "Non-discrimination Support Center". More in detail, it had functioned as a system providing non-discrimination trainings and ensuring the protection of violated rights through a platform of prompt response to people's request for advice. In connection with the NGO's programmes on integration and non-discrimination, the respondent had mentioned the code "intercultural dialogue" in association with the theme of integration of minority groups and foreigners in Lublin. In most of the data, a certain emphasis was put on the concept of cultural diversity, which had been defined as a "necessary element to overcome the homogeneous character of Polish society" (P. Skrzypczak, personal communication, July 14, 2015). Finally, the interviewee had defined the concept of European identity as "a crucial component of every individual living in present-day Europe" (P. Skrzypczak, personal communication, July 14, 2015).

With regard to the category corresponding to a normative influence from the EU, the interviewee declared that he had been consulting regularly specific EU directives, in particular the Racial Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive issued by the European Commission and the Equal Treatment Directive of the Council of the EU. The normative dimension of the principle of equality was also recalled with regard to its recognition by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. In general, the findings emphasised the importance of EU norms to fulfil the organisation's objectives.

In terms of participation and representation at the EU level, the analysis did not report any finding. In contrast, according to the analytical category of transnational cooperation, the respondent had mentioned the Canton of Neuchatel in Switzerland, with which the association had maintained long lasting contacts, as a model of harmonious coexistence between different cultures. Besides, the European Commission and the Council of Europe had acknowledged the approach adopted by the canton as a textbook example of effective strategy for social cohesion. The interviewee had referred to this idea as follows: "We have been in Neuchatel several times and we had the opportunity to get to know a lot about solutions that the local government has applied with regard to cultural integration of diverse communities" (P. Skrzypczak, personal communication, July 14, 2015). He had added that, for the ultimate goal of establishing a sustainable system of diversity management, the project "Lublin 4 All" had been implemented in cooperation with the Swiss canton. Finally, the interview transcript reported that, in the past, Homo Faber Association had participated in several coalitions and networks

with both Polish and European NGOs. However, further details on that cooperation were not provided during the interview.

As far as the relationship between Homo Faber Association and the Polish government is concerned, the results of content analysis revealed several references to the regular participation of the NGO in public consultations at the national and local level, in particular as regards Poland's migration policy. For instance, the association had been a member of the Coalition for Equal Opportunities (*Koalicja Równych Szans*) carrying out activities to shape the national anti-discrimination laws. At the local level, it had participated in the "Local Network" of the city of Lublin, a municipal network of representatives of local NGOs, public and cultural institutions. At the level of Lublin Voivodship, Homo Faber Association had been part of the Regional Network of Immigrants' Support in Lublin.<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless, what emerged from the transcribed talk was the conservative political culture characterising the City Council. Based on the results, only since 2012 the relationship had turned to be rather positive and nurtured by trust and constructive cooperation, partly because of the presence of a more liberal and less conservative Mayor.

In conclusion, the gathered data allowed to draw the following observations:

- The mission and action of Homo Faber Association were consistent with European democratic values, especially as regards respect for cultural diversity and human rights protection;
- The NGO had adopted the EU norms on equality in order to implement the objectives related to non-discrimination and human rights protection;
- The NGO had never participated in networks or policy-processes at the EU level;
- The involvement in forms of transnational cooperation had been connected with the exchange of good practices in fields close to intercultural dialogue;
- The relationship between the NGO and the local government had been marked by mistrust and had not respected the principles of participation, accountability and transparency.

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<sup>109</sup> The project was implemented with the financial support of the European Fund for Integration of Third Country Nationals.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the main findings with regard to the research hypotheses formulated in Chapter Three are discussed in the context of the literature and the existing knowledge on the topic of Europeanisation presented in Chapter Two. More specifically, five hypotheses were formulated for this research by looking at different dimensions of influence that the European Union would exert on a small sample of Polish NGOs with respect to five dimensions of analysis.

The empirical research was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted in conducting a thematic content analysis concerning official documents of EU institutions dealing with intercultural dialogue on the one hand, and the NGOs' website and relevant publications on the other. The main goal was to collect information about eventual confirmations of Europeanisation processes. In the second phase, the research examined the personal accounts of the leaders of each NGO in order to collect data about their perceptions and experiences that could suggest the occurrence of Europeanisation dynamics.

The field work through qualitative interviews was conducted in four cities in Poland presenting particularly culturally diversified societies, namely Krakow, Warsaw, Lublin and Sejny. Notably, semi-structured interviews, which were tape-recorded, were carried out between June and July 2015. At a later stage, the interviews were transcribed by hand and the transcripts accurately analysed through a content analysis. Finally, from the research results pertaining to each case study general observations were drawn.

Accordingly, the main findings are reviewed for each hypothesis followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings for future studies. A discussion of the pertinence of the results for the Europeanisation of Polish NGOs for intercultural dialogue is presented together with general conclusions, recommendations and the limitations of

the study. Therefore, this section outlines the contribution of the present research to better understanding of the processes of Europeanisation.

## 5.2 The cognitive influence of the European Union – Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis argued that the European Union exerts a cognitive influence on Polish NGOs operating in the field of intercultural dialogue, developing through a process of socialisation involving the organisations and their leaders. According to such a process, their mission and action would be inspired to such European values and principles as respect for cultural diversity, tolerance, solidarity, democracy, respect for human rights, social cohesion and promotion of intercultural competence, which are closely intertwined with the promotion of intercultural dialogue. On the other hand, it was supposed that NGOs articulate in different ways the values and principles underlying the European integration project.

The overall results are fully consistent with the initial expectations and the literature on the process of Europeanisation, namely with social constructivist theories and the literature on top-down Europeanisation or downloading. In general, the findings give the impression that the sample of Polish NGOs is relatively Europeanised from a cognitive point of view.

The first hypothesis is fully supported for the cultural resonance between the values and principles endorsed by the EU in the Treaties and official documents of EU institutions on the one hand, and those endorsed by the NGOs on the other. Particularly noteworthy is that, in line with the first hypothesis, the selected NGOs tend to refer to the EU cognitive framework in different ways according to the local context in which they operate. While certain among them give priority to integration of ethnic minorities and inter-group dialogue, others focus more on anti-discriminatory practices and human rights education. However, it should be noted that all case studies support the vision on interculturalism prevailing in the EU.

The consonance between the EU system of values and the cognitive framework used by the NGOs as a reference was identified as potentially supportive in clarifying the effects of Europeanisation in terms of downloading and socialisation processes.



According to the results of the content analysis of NGOs' website and interview transcripts, all the NGOs in the study seem to have internalised a set of values and principles underlying the project of European integration, which they adopt as a cognitive framework of reference for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Evidence from the semi-structured interviews with the NGOs' leaders suggests that they adopt the values of cultural diversity, democracy, solidarity and social cohesion and the principles of human rights protection, non-discrimination and social integration included in the EU Treaties, the European Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and other EU official documents. The recurring references to the EU motto "united in diversity" partially support this argument, given that all NGOs look at fostering an open and pluralistic European society as their mission's priority. Cultural diversity and social cohesion, in turn, represent the foundational values of a multicultural, open, tolerant and democratic Europe envisaged by the EU. In addition, in recalling those issues, the results explicitly refer to the EU and the project of European integration.

The findings suggest that a process of socialisation with the system of EU values and principles occurred both with regard to the organisations' mission and action and to the NGOs' representatives. With regard to this, a downloading mechanism of Europeanisation was perceived as synonym for a top-down indirect effect of EU influence on the analysed NGOs. Particularly, such a process involve also the NGOs' understanding of intercultural education and intercultural competence, the relationship between intercultural dialogue and good neighbourliness, and the support to the integration of minority groups. Furthermore, the emphasis they put on the added value of education is linked to its role in fostering individuals' socialisation with democratic values and principles supported by the EU.

In particular, the results are consistent with the social constructivist theories according to which the NGOs respond to a "logic of appropriateness" in internalising the EU system of values, which in turn affects their discourses and identities (Sedelmeier, 2011). For instance, the understanding of intercultural dialogue and culture as instruments for conflict prevention by the Polish NGOs is in line with the EU discourse on the role of culture in its external relations. Similarly, references to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and its motto "Dialogue is building mutuality", the project of European Capitals of Culture, the Intercultural Cities initiative and EU funding programmes in the field of intercultural dialogue provide further evidence to validate the first hypothesis. By contrast, it should be noted that the concepts of "Europe" and "EU" are not at the forefront

of respondents' lives and they do not appear as a meaningful referent in their talks. Instead of the consolidation of European identity, a strong identification with the Polish nation is the rule in most of the cases.

However, it should be taken into account that, as argued in previous studies on the topic, the process of socialisation is neither sufficient nor necessary for the occurrence of Europeanisation (Radaelli, 2004). In spite of this limitation, the findings of this study demonstrate that, in policy fields where the EU-related pressures or opportunities are vague or inexistent, the constructivist model may better explain indirect effects of Europeanisation on domestic actors. Nonetheless, testing the process of socialisation empirically remains a relatively complex task. It is difficult to determine whether Europeanisation occurs in terms of cognitive influence without conducting a counterfactual analysis, which would be equally problematic. Similarly, it must be noted that the EU, mainly through its Culture Programmes, does not offer any indication on what it defines as the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the field is left to the subjective interpretation of beneficiaries of EU programmes such as NGOs.

Notwithstanding, a potentially important finding of this research is that, according to Polish NGOs, intercultural dialogue tends to be interpreted as the strengthening of the common values of European culture, dialogue and cooperation with neighbouring countries, preserving and presenting minority cultures and ensuring social cohesion. In conclusion, this study makes a contribution to the field of Europeanisation by exploring a dimension, that of socialisation, that was largely neglected by the first studies on Europeanisation and with regard to a policy field where the Union maintains a supporting competence (Sedelmeier, 2011).

### 5.3 The normative influence of the European Union – Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis contended that, given the nature of culture and intercultural dialogue as a policy area excluded from the jurisdiction of the EU, European normative standards related to this field do not affect the mission and action of the selected NGOs. As a result, it was supposed that a process of Europeanisation informed by the adoption of the EU as a normative framework of reference does not occur. Accordingly, the EU is

not held responsible for the promulgation of binding legal acts in the field of intercultural dialogue, except for EU laws on non-discrimination.

The results of the research confirm what I thought to hold true so far given that the EU has not provided (and is not entitled to do it) a common normative framework in the field of intercultural dialogue. The findings are fully consistent with the initial expectations and the existing literature on the topic under discussion.

However, the findings reveal that, although the role of the European Union is to support and complement, rather than to replace, the actions of the Member States in this dimension, all NGOs demand the formulation of a legal environment for intercultural dialogue. On the other hand, the results support the existence of EU instruments that influence national policies and legislation on non-discrimination, which, in turn, impact on intercultural dialogue processes involving the Polish NGOs. In particular, the measures allowing the integration of foreigners and minority groups are included among the national strategies directly related to intercultural dialogue. According to the results of the study, the selected NGOs tend to put increasing attention on the monitoring of fundamental human rights protection, especially with regard to the cultural rights of national and ethnic minorities and socially marginalised people.

Finally, a potentially important finding of this study is that some of the analysed NGOs seem to contribute to a more coordinated EU policy-making approach in the field of intercultural dialogue by recommending best practices to be adopted by civil society and political institutions.

The evidence discussed above is consistent with the initial expectations and the existing literature. The character of intercultural dialogue as supporting competence of the Union strengthens the validity of the second hypothesis. Nonetheless, the EU is recalled consistently in association with binding EU anti-discrimination laws, which are encompassed in the EU legal framework of human rights protection. Particularly, some of the NGOs in the study explicitly refer to the EU laws on racial and ethnic discrimination, especially in the context of the integration of foreigners and minority groups. Few of the selected organisations use EU legal acts in their work, such as the Racial Equality Directive and other pieces of the EU binding legislation. In some cases, the NGOs carry out monitoring tasks and watchdog activities on the respect of fundamental human rights of third-country nationals with respect to the public administration in Poland.

It should be noted that the Polish NGOs would have never referred to the EU binding legislation in that field outside the context of deepening European integration, increased migration flows and historical confrontations between ethnic groups living in Poland. Accordingly, the research supports the interpretation of references to EU laws as a symbolic allusion to the EU as a normative frame for the analysed NGOs. The findings support the claim that a process of socialisation with EU norms involves only *Interkulturalni* Association and Homo Faber Association, which focus their mission on non-discrimination and human rights protection more than the others.

This study provides a clear illustration of how NGOs tend to both influence and to be influenced by the EU policy-making, even in the cultural sector, which largely remains under the control of the national government. As was explored in the literature review, according to constructivist theories, domestic subnational actors like civil society organisations tend to be both rule-makers and rule-takers in the EU decision-making process. It should be pointed out, however, that quite often the recommendations or the good practices addressed by the NGOs are not incorporated into the EU legislation. A potentially important finding of this study is that policy models and good practices of non-discrimination imported from other countries represent a contribution to the formulation of a common normative framework that could impact on intercultural dialogue processes. Moreover, EU best practices in the field were never framed clearly and the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue rather failed to formulate a set of recommendation valid for all Member States.

On the other hand, evidence from the interviews with the NGOs' leaders suggests that the concept of good practice of intercultural dialogue is ambivalent given the absence of a framework to define whether or not a project constitutes a good practice. One possible avenue for further research would be to explore the role of NGOs in contributing to a system of national action plans for intercultural dialogue, for instance, on the model of the national plans for lifelong learning that proved to be effective for the exchange of common good practice between Member States.

#### 5.4 Participation and representation at the EU level – Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis claimed that the participation and representation of the NGOs at the EU level do not take place or they are rather limited to bigger and more

professionalised organisations maintaining Brussels-based networks. Therefore, smaller and more isolated organisations are likely to be marginalised in terms of representation and participation in the EU policy-making.

The above results are partially consistent with the initial expectations and the existing literature on Europeanisation reviewed in Chapter Two. Only one among the selected Polish NGOs, namely the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, prove to be rather active at the EU level given its regular participation in consultations in Brussels aiming to influence the European intercultural policy. The fact that the lack of understanding of EU policy processes by the NGOs, the absence of solid networks with EU institutions and key personalities, and the highly bureaucratic procedures characterising the EU system of interest representation may constitute a deterrent for participation at the EU level, makes it crucial to take into account these variables.

Evidence from the interviews with the NGOs' leaders suggests that, besides the dimension and the financial sustainability of NGOs, a strong link exists between those factors and the NGOs' representation and participation at the EU level. The status of the Polish NGOs as recipients of EU funds does not necessarily represent a blessing for them. On the other hand, the findings explored the instrumental use of the EU by the Borderland Foundation in order to exert pressure on political representatives at the national level and bypass national vetoes in the promotion of intercultural practices.

Further research on interest representation at the EU level should take into account these aspects, especially when exploring dynamics of bottom-up Europeanisation initiated by domestic subnational actors.

The third hypothesis is partially supported for the absence of NGOs' participation in policy processes at the EU level. In particular, while most of them never take part in public consultations with EU institutions and officials, one among them proves to be proactive in creating solid networks in Brussels and in representing its interests in the area of intercultural dialogue at the EU institutions.

According to the theories explored in the literature review in Chapter Two, the EU does not only represent a bureaucratic structure of normative production but it is also instrumentalised by domestic subnational actors (Liebert & Trenz, 2008; Radaelli, 2004). In particular, as was reviewed in the literature on bottom-up Europeanisation, a strategic usage of the EU enables NGOs to enter the EU system of multilevel governance and influence policy decisions that have an impact at the national and subnational level (Jacquot & Woll, 2013). A potentially important finding of this study is that a limited

understanding of EU policy processes, the absence of solid networks with EU institutions and key personalities,<sup>110</sup> and the highly bureaucratic procedures characterising the EU decision-making impact on the projection of NGOs' interests at the EU level. This represents an example of how immaterial resources associated with participation and representation in the European arena partly determine the outcome of Europeanisation. Therefore, it should be noted that where the EU offers opportunities to NGOs it also provides constraints (Sudbery, 2008).

The findings of this study demonstrate that the EU tends to be regarded as a bureaucratic and elitist entity rather than a cultural and social project. Many of the interviewees in this study made general observations about their own mistrust of EU institutions. In particular, they referred to the logic of power adopted by EU policy-makers and a relationship with NGOs that is based on hypocrisy instead of trust. Similarly, the findings demonstrate that such perception is strengthened by the absence of flexibility in the process of applying for EU funds. The failure to gain access to EU funding programmes seems to determine the difficulties of the NGOs for intercultural dialogue to gain visibility at all institutional levels (Gasior-Niemec & Gliński, 2007). There is considerable support in prior literature that the competition for EU funds contributes to a process of oligarchisation involving the NGO sector (Gasior-Niemec & Gliński, 2007, p.262). In other words, the results of the study demonstrate that only few influential organisations achieve a certain visibility at the EU level, while smaller and poorer ones tend to be excluded from the EU decision-making and the access to EU funds (Lundberg, Brundin & Bozzini, 2011; Rek, 2010).

As a result, the way in which domestic actors react to Europeanisation is largely affected by material and immaterial resources associated with a specific policy field. However, it is hard to demonstrate whether the availability of EU funds is correlated to the level of NGOs' participation in Brussels based on the reported data. Indeed, other variables may intervene. For instance, NGOs may not be interested in taking part at policy debates at the EU level because their mission is rather focused on the national level or they do not see the European venue as a valuable alternative to the national arena as a place to defend their interests.

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<sup>110</sup> In the text, the expression "key personalities" include Members of the European Parliament, European Commission officials as well as representatives of EU-based NGOs and think-tanks.

In spite of these limitations, the argument supported by the third hypothesis is consistent with the theories in Chapter Two arguing for a generally limited interaction between EU political structures and civil society (Lundberg, Brundin & Bozzini, 2011; Pleines, 2006; Salgado, 2014). This, in turn, reveals the challenges in building an inclusive “European public sphere” where all societal interests can make their voice be heard. However, the Europeanisation literature shows that research on the interest intermediation at the EU level is still in a developmental stage (Rek, 2010).

This study makes a contribution to the field by exploring the impact of the European integration on the third sector, which has not been developed enough by the Europeanisation literature. Further research in the field should take into account the fact that an equal representation of societal interests at the EU level has not been achieved, which jeopardises the effectiveness of participatory democracy. Given that participation of civil society organisations in the EU decision-making remains also limited, future studies should consider the contribution of NGOs in strengthening the EU’s input legitimacy.

## 5.5 Transnational cooperation and cross-loading – Hypothesis 4

According to the fourth hypothesis, the EU funding policy tends to facilitate the participation of the Polish NGOs in transnational cooperation programmes in the area of intercultural dialogue. The European Union, indeed, makes available to non-profit organisations a wide set of opportunities, such as international conferences, workshops and projects, and European exchange programmes, which are financed by EU public funds. However, this argument is counteracted by discourses on a high material differentiation among non-governmental organisations, which tends to favor NGOs with a higher economic potential. A related assumption is that the establishment of transnational cooperative networks allows the transfer of EU values, experience and good practices of intercultural dialogue between Polish NGOs and voluntary organisations or institutions in other European countries through processes of cross-loading. In this regard, the research presupposes that most of the organisations in the sample experience a process

of social learning with regard to good practices of intercultural dialogue imported from abroad.

The results of the research are fully consistent with the initial expectations and the existing theories on the topic. All the Polish NGOs of the sample prove to be rather active in forms of transnational cooperation with NGOs or institutions in other countries in fields related to the promotion of intercultural dialogue. As was showed by the responses of interviewees, all the NGOs associate the project of European integration with the advantages of increased human mobility and cultural exchange as well as the access to EU funding programmes for their projects. A potentially important finding of this study is that the availability of EU funds for NGOs' international projects tends to have a positive influence on the development of transnational cooperative networks.

Furthermore, the findings suggest the existence of a strong relationship between the establishment of international cooperative relationships on the one hand, and the transfer of ideas, experience and good practices among NGOs or between NGOs and institutions on the other. Accordingly, the study argues that the analysed organisations are involved in a social learning process according to which they internalise and socialise with good practices and experiences imported from foreign countries, which are consistent with specific EU democratic values and principles.

The fourth hypothesis is fully supported for the active involvement of the selected NGOs in forms of transnational cooperation with organisations and institutions in other countries in Europe and worldwide, in the form of international exchanges, conferences and workshops, and joint projects of cross-border cultural exchange.

Based on the recurrent references to the importance of EU financial support for the implementation of projects with international partners, I saw the possibility that for these NGOs the access to EU funds largely contribute to processes of transnational cooperation. More in detail, the findings suggest that the EU grants allow the NGOs to reach a higher number of international partners and that, without them, many international projects would not be feasible. This counterfactual reasoning is supported by the replies of the interviewees. The strong link between these variables suggests that further research on Europeanisation should take into account this aspect. Accordingly, as was reviewed in the literature in Chapter Two, the results demonstrate that competitive EU funds tend to affect NGOs' participation in transnational cooperative networks (Lundberg, Brundin & Bozzini, 2011). Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the lack of financial resources to support long-term projects in the field of intercultural dialogue seems to



further complicate the picture: short-term financial support from the EU make the NGOs dependent and the international projects unsustainable. As a result, the findings show that the Polish NGOs prefer to engage in long-lasting partnerships rather than to invest the money received from the EU for vanishing initiatives without a long-term impact.

The results of semi-structured interviews with NGOs' leaders highlight the fact that international cooperation represents a strategic instrument to establish value-based partnerships inspired to shared values and objectives underlying the project of European integration, such as respect for cultural diversity, non-discrimination and democracy. According to the findings, the NGOs in the study use means of transnational cooperation to exchange practices of intercultural dialogue, models of peaceful coexistence between different minority groups and good practices of intercultural education with foreign artists, social activists and universities. In addition, they make use of EU funds for international programmes to inspire social change by recreating a culture of dialogue in troubled multicultural areas of the world. The NGOs also import practices and ideas from other countries facing similar problems and envisaging similar solutions in several fields related to interculturalism, including effective strategies for social cohesion implemented by local governments.

A potentially important finding of this study is that, the access to EU funds for transnational collaborations enables the NGOs to experience a process of social learning with respect to practices, ideas, expertise and experience imported from other countries. As a result, the NGOs internalise strategies for intercultural dialogue implemented by others in order to apply them to the local context in which they operate. In brief, after observing the effective implementation of similar solutions in different international contexts, the NGOs modify their own strategies accordingly.

In conclusion, there is considerable support in prior literature that the transfer of practices, ideas and experience among NGOs and institutions from different countries represents a phenomenon of cross-loading. Accordingly, through soft instruments like socialisation and social learning, the NGOs contribute to diffuse the EU system of values and principles beyond national borders (Wong, 2005; Howell, 2004).

This study contributes to the Europeanisation field by exploring the empirical effects of cross-loading mechanisms on a group of Polish NGOs, which remain largely unexplored in the existing literature. One possible avenue for further research would be to put a closer attention on cross-loading dynamics of Europeanisation in order to

recognise the role of subnational actors like NGOs as important agents for social change promoting EU values internationally.

## 5.6 The relationship between NGOs and the government – Hypothesis 5

The final hypothesis of this study concerned the role of EU principles of good governance in building the relationship between the Polish NGOs and the government. It argued that such principles as accountability and participation tend to inspire the relationship existing between the Polish government at the national and local level and the selected NGOs. The process of European integration was supposed to contribute to the emergence of forms of EU governance concerning civil society consultation and participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

The results partially meet the initial expectations and the existing literature on the topic and they open avenues for further research on the role of unexpected intervening variables in the process of Europeanisation. The findings suggest that such principles of good governance as accountability, participation and subsidiarity envisaged by the EU tend to be adopted by the Polish NGOs as model for shaping their relationship with the government. Particularly, the findings demonstrate that the organisations attribute a great value to civil dialogue meant as structured and continued dialogue with the government, and the idea of open and participatory consultations involving NGOs on the formulation and implementation of policies.

On the other hand, the nature and quality of collaboration between the government, from the national to the local level, and the NGOs vary according to the case study and the local context. In most of the cases, public consultations between NGOs' representatives and responsible government entities tend to be ineffective, as they do not satisfy the requirements of participation and accountability.

The overall data showed that the relationship is largely affected by the political culture of government members, which seems to determine the level of civic participation. However, the study argues that few clearly dominating forms of cooperation between the Polish NGOs for intercultural dialogue and the government exist.

The fifth hypothesis is not fully supported for the relevance of the EU principles of good governance in shaping the NGOs' relation with the Polish government.

According to the findings, EU best practices of governance, including the principles of subsidiarity and partnership, are envisaged only by NGOs as necessary rules regulating their collaboration with the government (Gašior-Niemec and Gliński, 2007). At the same time, some NGOs proved to be involved in regular public consultations with both the local and the national government, in line with the EU recommendations on civil dialogue contained in the White Paper on European governance (European Commission, 2001). The Polish NGOs in the study usually advance either a proposal for a normative act or improvement measures in the fields of national migration policy and intercultural education. However, openness and participation of public consultations are not respected in the majority of the cases. In particular, participatory democracy, which represents a foundational principle of the project of European integration, seems to be far from being realised.

In terms of the quality of governance, the NGOs argue for the violation of the principle of subsidiarity in the sense that the responsibility for implementing tasks related to the field of intercultural dialogue, including the social and cultural integration of foreigners and immigrants, are not equally distributed between them and the local government. The former, indeed, tend to perform all the tasks from organising educational workshops and intercultural competence trainings to implementing projects for the integration of minority groups in the host society. On the other hand, the interviewees made general observations on the centralised nature of the decision-making and the unaccountable character of the central (national) government in the field, which is symbolic of an unbalanced decision-making process and restrained freedom of access to information for NGOs.

A potentially important finding of this study is that the relationship between the organisations and the government is largely affected by the political culture of government members, including their affiliation to specific political parties. Particularly, evidence from the interviews supports the idea that a low level of public awareness with regard to issues related with intercultural dialogue, the conservative political culture and the limited openness to dialogue of certain government entities tend to inform the nature of the relationship. According to the findings and the literature explored in Chapter Two, a low level of public awareness and a strong focus on national culture and identity inherited from the communist era are associated with Poland's self-perception of an ethnically homogeneous society (Borragán, 2004; Szabó, 2004). All these elements, in

turn, seem to lead to a lack of confidence in public institutions from the part of analysed NGOs.

As was reviewed in the literature, this argument is supported by the theory of “cultural resonance”, according to which the effective implementation of EU principles of good governance in the Member States depends on the correspondence between EU recommendations on the one hand, and domestic political culture on the other (Sedelmeier, 2011). It should be noted that the overall results give the impression of a changing relationship between each NGO and the government together with the lack of a coherent national policy on civil society. What seems to be needed is a more coherent and open system of public consultations with solid government support, including at the national (central) and the local level.

On the other hand, the results of the research cannot be generalised to the whole population of Polish NGOs promoting intercultural dialogue given that the reported data do not concern all the case studies but only certain among them. Indeed, because certain organisations did not provide a response to this issue, making a single statement that is valid for all case studies would undermine the validity of the research. Despite these limitations, this study makes a contribution to the field by exploring the role of domestic intervening variables, such as the political culture of government members and the historical national legacies of a country. Even though small steps ahead are being made in terms of NGOs’ participation in public consultations in the area of intercultural practices, the existing measures of participatory democracy remain ineffective with respect to EU “good governance” recommendations. One possible avenue for further research on subnational systems of governance would be to explore the role of the above-mentioned domestic variables in shaping the NGOs’ relationship with the government.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The study was set out to explore the concept of Europeanisation and its empirical effects on a sample of four Polish non-governmental organisations that actively promote the respect for cultural diversity and practices of intercultural dialogue. The paper argues that Europeanisation affects organised civil society, namely NGOs, in a variety of meaningful ways. The focus on the field of intercultural dialogue is justified by the fact that the context of increased immigration to Poland raised new sensitive issues in terms of re-emerging cultural confrontations, cultural diversity and human rights protection, which are increasingly taken over by NGOs. In particular, the target groups involved in the projects of the Polish NGOs include foreigners, national and ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees. On the other hand, their mission aimed at rediscovering and preserving the richness of Poland's multicultural heritage through the promotion of a culture of dialogue among different social groups based on the democratic values endorsed by the EU.

The world of NGOs is a fascinating dimension in which social activism and genuine civic engagement have a huge potential to bring about important social change. While exploring these issues from the perspectives of Polish NGOs, the study sought to answer these generic questions:

1. In which ways does the EU influence the mission and action of Polish NGOs for intercultural dialogue?
2. Do the selected NGOs contribute to the process of European integration? How?

The research contributes to collect new information about the phenomenon of Europeanisation, which reflects the status of European integration, and the involvement of the selected NGOs in mechanisms of downloading, uploading and cross-loading. While demonstrating the value of the analytical approach adopted in this paper, the study

has identified possible actions and reactions of the Polish organisations to European integration in different respects. These corresponded to the influence of EU cognitive and normative framework, the participation and representation of NGOs at the EU level, their involvement in forms of transnational cooperation, and the relationship between the NGOs and the Polish government.

According to the main findings of the research, non-governmental organisations do not play the role of passive actors with respect to developments at the EU level, but they make use of the material and immaterial resources provided by the EU in a proactive way. The system of values, principles and norms (the latter limited to the field of non-discrimination) endorsed by the EU exerts a significant influence on the selected NGOs in the areas of respect for cultural diversity, human rights protection and social cohesion. However, while the terms of socialisation are the same for all NGOs, the interpretation of EU-related values and principles is largely subjective, which means that the outcomes of Europeanisation are highly uncertain. Similarly, the research points out how it is difficult to test the occurrence of socialisation processes empirically only by taking into account the data from content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

The existing studies in this field have focused exclusively on NGOs that are mostly active at the EU level while largely neglecting the dynamics of Europeanisation involving smaller and more locally oriented organisations. Moreover, previous research tended to investigate mainly the top-down mechanisms of Europeanisation and did not put enough attention on the bottom-up dimension. Similarly, the contribution of subnational actors to the process of European integration through their involvement in socialisation and social learning processes remained unexplored in the Europeanisation literature. This study represents a response to the need for introducing a sociological perspective taking into account both rational factors and cognitive and relational terms of Europeanisation processes. As a result, social constructivist theories were adopted in the study in order to look at the impact of the European integration process on the system of values and norms endorsed by NGOs, the uploading of their interests at the EU level, their contribution to cross-loading mechanisms and the adaptation of subnational systems of governance to EU recommendations.

This study demonstrates that that the selected NGOs react in different ways to the project of European integration and are involved in different mechanisms of Europeanisation. They are expected to interpret developments at the EU level according to the combination of different endogenous and exogenous variables. As a result,

exploring both top-down and bottom-up mechanisms of Europeanisation allows to introduce a new insight in Europeanisation studies and to investigate the role of subnational actors, namely NGOs, in the process of European integration. Particularly, the study looked at the possible “usages” of the European integration process by the Polish NGOs, i.e. the use of the EU financial (EU funding), cognitive (values and principles), normative (recommendations, directives, regulations etc.) and political resources (access to the EU system of multilevel governance).

In conclusion, the research supports the idea that not all the selected NGOs for intercultural dialogue are equally “Europeanised” with regard to the five analysed dimensions. Notably, they articulate the values and principles underlying the European integration project in different ways, they maintain different understandings of what a good practice is, only a small number participates in policy debates at the EU level, and they experience different socialisation and social learning processes according to the long-term availability of EU funds.

In conclusion, what can be drawn from the research on the field is that NGOs are both drivers and partners in processes of intercultural dialogue as well as they both affect and are affected by the process of European integration. Moreover, the research demonstrates that the EU may affect domestic national and subnational actors even in policy fields remaining under the control of Member States through forms of indirect or “soft” influence, such as socialisation, social learning and cross-loading processes.

In order to open new avenues for further research, the following lessons can be drawn from this study:

- Europeanisation is a complex process leading to uncertain outcomes;
- Future studies should examine the role of subnational actors, like NGOs, in the project of European integration by looking both at top-down and bottom-up mechanisms of Europeanisation;
- When in a policy field EU-related pressures are vague or inexistent, constructivist theories help to explain how NGOs shape the process of Europeanisation through the horizontal transfer of ideas, experiences and practices (“cross-loading”) encouraged by the EU funding programmes;
- Qualitative researches in the field of Europeanisation should focus on personal accounts of individuals in order to explore the subjective realm of feelings,

perceptions, beliefs and experiences associated with the reaction of NGOs to developments at the EU level;

- It is misleading to isolate the “EU” factor as the only source of domestic change since the process of Europeanisation largely results from the combination of multiple intervening variables;
- Complex EU decision-making procedures, the competitive nature of EU funding and different political cultures tend to influence different dimensions of Europeanisation, including the participation and representation of NGOs at the EU level, the development of transnational cooperative networks and the “cultural resonance” between EU values and norms on the one hand, and domestic culture on the other.

In general, through the case of Polish NGOs, the findings demonstrate that Europeanisation allows to observe the mutual interaction between supranational, national and subnational actors. For instance, the EU makes use of its funding programmes to promote value-based networks between NGOs from different countries, which initiate processes of cross-loading. Accordingly, different non-governmental organisations internalise and implement the values, practices and experiences of intercultural dialogue imported from abroad. Moreover, dynamics of cross-loading tend to be encouraged by the fact that the EU often makes the provision of its funding to NGOs conditional to the formation of international partnerships. Interestingly, transnational cooperative networks involving the Polish NGOs also contribute to the transfer of good practices in the field, while providing a “soft power” alternative to the absence of a common normative framework of intercultural dialogue set out by the EU.

In exploring mechanisms of Europeanisation through the NGOs’ participation and representation at the EU level, the findings reveal that certain variables affect the outcome of the process. Such variables include the lack of understanding or information about EU policy-processes, the perception of complex bureaucratic procedures characterising the EU decision-making and the absence of close contacts with EU institutions, which all undermine the projection of NGOs’ interests at the EU level, otherwise known as uploading. However, other factors may play a role, such as the NGOs’ mistrust of EU institutions and the lack of interest to participate in policy debates at the EU level. The research demonstrates that the level of distrust towards the project of European integration is relatively significant among Polish NGOs. The representation of societal



interests within the EU policy debates proves to be limited in the case of Polish NGOs for intercultural dialogue, for which the granted access to EU funds is neither sufficient nor necessary to make their voice be heard.

From the perspective of the NGOs' relationship with the government, their claims for the respect of EU principles of good governance such as participation, accountability and subsidiarity remains unheard in most of the cases. The nature and quality of their collaboration reveals a changing relationship and undefined patterns of cooperation. Similarly, the political discourse of the Polish government on civil society remains largely incoherent. On the other hand, all NGOs recall, more implicitly than explicitly, the principles of participation, accountability and subsidiarity proclaimed by the EU as models to be applied in public consultations by the local and the national government.

This research has used empirical findings to test the theories arguing that the adoption of both top-down and bottom-up perspectives for the study of Europeanisation processes allows to assess a variety of important changes occurring at the level of Member States' subnational actors (Börzel, 2002). The existing theoretical literature on Europeanisation is incomplete on several points, including an exaggerated focus on top-down mechanisms of Europeanisation, the lack of studies on interest intermediation at the EU level as well as limited research on cross-loading as a mechanism of indirect Europeanisation.

The argument supported by this paper draws out the implications for theories on Europeanisation as a process of diffusion of shared beliefs, norms and principles defined at the EU level, which are incorporated in subnational discourses and behaviours (Radaelli, 2004, p.3). In line with the previous research focusing on social constructivist theories, the findings make a valuable contribution to the theory of "soft" Europeanisation occurring through socialisation and social learning processes (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004; Sedelmeier, 2011). Similarly, this paper explored in depth the concept of cross-loading meant as the diffusion of EU-related values, good practices and experience by means of transnational cooperation (Wong, 2005; Howell, 2004). The study has also attempted to know whether processes of Europeanisation affecting NGOs and other civil society organisations, both from the top-down and bottom-up perspective, are likely to occur in policy fields where the EU does not play a major role with respect to national governments. Finally, in investigating the role played by such variables as the lack of understanding of EU policy processes and NGOs' distrust of EU institutions, the

research validates the theory arguing for the imperfect representation of societal interests at the EU level (Salgado, 2014).

In general, evidence from several studies seems to support the belief that research on Europeanisation is still in a developmental stage, especially with regard to its impact on organised civil society (Bulmer, 2007; Radaelli, 2004; Olsen, 2002). Therefore, the scale of this debate is multifaceted and does not lead to universal and easily generalizable conclusions.

Moving on from the discussion of what new knowledge or insight has been gained from these case studies, the next section will consider the issue of limitations to the approach used in this research.

This study presents certain limitations that deserve attention:

- The research looked exclusively at Polish NGOs that are recipients of EU funds to finance their projects and activities in the field of intercultural dialogue, therefore the generalisability of the findings is limited to this section of the NGO population;
- It was not possible to check the veracity of interviewees' declarations against their actual understanding of the themes explored in this research based on the reported data. Interviews constitute a self-report instrument and, as a result, reliance on them can be problematic and may undermine the validity of the findings. It is possible that the respondents were partly biased in their replies;
- It may be difficult to generalise the results of the study to the wider population of interest and replicate the research given that different categories of respondents may react to the same questions in different ways;
- Semi-structured interviews were not carried out with all potential respondents given that some among the leaders of selected NGOs did not take part in the study. Their personal accounts may have contributed to determine a different outcome of the research;

Complete objectivity and neutrality are impossible to achieve in qualitative research, given that studies in social science cannot be "value-free" because a researcher's values necessarily impact on basic decisions, such as the nature of research methods to be used or which research hypotheses to test.

Because of these peculiarities, further research on the Europeanisation of civil society organisations must take close attention in generalising the findings to a larger population and in adopting the same research methods used in this paper.

Based on thus, a number of recommendations for future research can be suggested:

- there is a need for more case studies on the topic of Europeanisation and its effects on civil society actors to allow further assessment of the dimension of societal changes resulting from European integration;
- further research should address more clearly the relevance of the concepts of socialisation, social learning and cross-loading in order to allow researchers to capture a larger set of changes that risk to not be included in the research on European integration;
- Few studies on Europeanisation have employed qualitative methods of analysis. However, as some authors pointed out, the use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative research approaches allows to address further changes in the field of Europeanisation studies, especially with regard to the experience of subnational actors (Graziano & Vink, 2006);
- There is need for more case studies on non-governmental organisations, especially in the case of new EU Member States, that are not actively engaged at the EU level but rather small and locally oriented;
- Future studies should take into account the role played by domestic variables, in particular national historical legacies and the domestic political culture of Member States in order to explore the concrete implications of “cultural resonance” for the process of Europeanisation.

In conclusion, by taking into consideration these recommendations, further research on the topic of Europeanisation of civil society could help to assess a variety of important changes and address current empirical research gaps.

A universally accepted definition of Europeanisation is not conceivable. However, it is possible to see the multidimensional effects of deepening European integration in the processes of cultural exchange initiated by many NGOs not only in Poland but all over in Europe. The role of NGOs in building a cohesive, open and democratic European society is not only crucial but may also reveal the relevance of soft mechanisms of

Europeanisation in fields where the EU does not play a substantial role. Furthermore, the case of Poland represents an illustrative example of the role played by intercultural dialogue after years of war, totalitarianisms and ethnic divisions.

Fostering continued cultural exchange between NGOs, institutions and individuals may help to increase the interaction between EU countries in the area of intercultural dialogue and contribute to unexpected outcomes of Europeanisation as the diffusion of democratic ideals linked to a culturally diversified Europe. All depends on how these actors will chose to make use of the project of European integration and which role they will turn to play on the EU agenda.

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