

- Chloé Senecat, PhD Student, CY Cergy Paris University – ***The European Union and urban development policies: a redefinition of the governance of cities? The examples of Paris, Berlin and Warsaw***
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Urban areas, places of challenges and positive opportunities, are at the forefront to deal with contemporary issues, especially the ecological crisis. The European Union (EU) is developing programs to promote sustainable urban development as part of its Cohesion Policy. The EU, through this urban dimension, show the ambition to become a new actor in urban policies, not limiting itself to a role of funder by financing projects but accompanying cities through networks for their cooperation. But the EU has no formal competence to do this: the principle of subsidiarity applies, urban development remaining a national competence. Theoretically, the EU cannot be involved in this field. It is from this paradox that the research questions presented arise.

Often studied through the lens of political science and its concepts such as multi-level governance, the use of political geography is necessary to analyze a territorialized policy that at first glance seems paradoxical. The aim of the presentation is to explain the contribution of a geographical approach to understand the functioning of the urban dimension of the European Cohesion Policy and its impacts, both on governance and the territory: how do the EU institutions take over that field, without having a formal competence? To what extent is the urban dimension of the EU policy leading to a redefinition of governance methods within European cities? Does the EU really manage to become a player in a multi-level urban governance and what are the impacts on the urban territories?

To answer the questions above, we will use documents made available by the European institutions - reports, regulations, studies, etc. - which we will cross-reference with academic research studies. Examples from Paris, Berlin and Warsaw, capital cities where all the levels of governance overlap, will lead to analyze the impact of these European policies on territories with peculiar needs and different political systems, and to obtain an overview of the European involvement in urban development. We will complete this research with fieldwork consisting of interviews with urban development actors in the three cities studied, at different levels of governance - local, regional, national, European, etc.

We will present the first results and some hypotheses of this PhD thesis: The EU and its institutions seem to influence the governance of cities by overcoming the paradox of the principle of subsidiarity. The European Commission, specifically, is creating “urban labs”, to develop a discourse on innovation and experimentation and to address needs arising from contemporary issues impacting cities. Studying the instruments used by the European Commission in a spatialized manner, it is possible to re-examine the notion of multi-level governance by analyzing the question of scales between the various actors, or to highlight the instrumentalization of a discourse by the stakeholders, which questions this process of redefinition of urban governance.

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