Patterns and Dynamics of European Sub-national Governance: Institutional Transformations in Hungarian Micro-regional Associations 1990-2006

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Abstract

This research represents a longitudinal study of changing patterns of governance in six micro-regions in Hungary. Its findings indicate that the dominant trend was a move from a non-hierarchical mode of governance, including integrated developmental policy making by diverse local state and non-state actors in the early 1990s, towards fragmented and hierarchical modes of governance by the 2000s. By the time Hungary had moved closer to EU accession, non-hierarchical and inclusive institutional solutions (heterarchies) had started to disappear from micro-regional governance in comparison to the early 1990s. Only a few micro-regional collaborations could survive the Europeanization of sub-national governance. These evolutionary trends were mainly shaped by domestic factors, the EU having only indirect influence on the process through providing the central state with prerogatives near the end of the decade to control regional and sub-regional development policy. This is only part of the story, however. Pre-accession support programs had also strengthened the governance capacities of sub-national state and non-state actors and enabled local political entrepreneurs to organize micro-regional territorial development through heterarchies even in the face of asymmetric power constellations between central governments and local state and non-state actors. The basic underlying assumption of this research, based on heterodox development theories, is that there is an interplay between heterarchic governance patterns and socio-economic development. The case studies confirm that in an unstable and swiftly changing political, economic and institutional environment, heterarchic institutional solutions are necessary to maintain at least an average developmental level or to change a development path.
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