

Transnational Networks between European Governance and Local Changes in the Cultural and Creative Sector

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# **Transnational Networks between European Governance and Local Changes in the Cultural and Creative Sector**

*If not for harmonizing policies, then what?*

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## **Summary**

This thesis examines how European Transnational Networks operate in the Cultural and Creative sector. The emergence of European Transnational Networks (TNs) in different policy sectors reflects a paradigmatic shift in the governance landscape that has been more inclined to tackle complex global issues and wicked problems since 2000s. In the context of the increasingly interconnected character of European governance, transnational networks are one variable in the governing process as well as part of the wider Europeanization process. The academic and grey literature outlines the benefits and challenges of TNs: on the one hand how these enhance participation in policy-making processes by involving new actors such as civil society organizations, municipalities, and regions, and on the other, how the risk of endangering democratic legitimation has imposed the reinforcement of a closed elite cycle in the decision processes.

When examining European Cultural Policy and its soft mechanisms, transnational networks (TNs) play a fundamental, hybrid role within the governance arrangement. These networks are on the one hand a top-down coordinative tool, and on the other, a bottom-up civil society initiative. This dynamic hinders the scientific interpretation of these instruments. In fact, despite the empirical diffusion of the phenomena, both a systematic body of academic work and an analytical framework for examining how TNs operate and their impacts are still lacking. Even if multilevel governance architecture has increasingly dominated the cultural sector since the 90s – both on the global (UNESCO) and European scales (Council of Europe, European Commission, European Parliament) – EU heritage policy, politics, and the implementation of these initiatives remain

unexplored in the academic and grey literature. Furthermore, European TNs in the cultural sector also remain under-examined research objects.

This void suggests that there are methodological and operational deficiencies. The underlying purpose for undertaking this research is to tackle these knowledge gaps, in order to provide theoretical clarification as well as operational tools for better understanding European Cultural Governance mechanisms. The central aims here are to shed light on network functions as an outgrowth of the EU governance arrangement thus placing the emphasis on how civil society organizations operate at the supranational level as a driver of participative governance in the EU system.

Based on these premises, by adopting the most current debate on ‘Europeanization’ as the theoretical backbone, referring to literature on policy networks and by taking a theoretical constructivist approach, the primary contribution achieved by this thesis consists in the outlining of an analytical framework for examining TN processes and their impacts at the sector and member levels. Based on the available grey literature and policy documents, fieldwork, and interviews, a set of dimensions and indicators is proposed for analysing the 28 networks funded by Creative Europe. This kind of typological understanding has informed the selection of the five case studies, which will allow us to examine the influence of transnational networks at the member level in five different local contexts.

Secondly, due to the fundamental characteristics of cultural policies – non-binding and ideational at the EU level, and very fragmented and informal structured at the national, sub-national, and lower levels – identifying how these tools operate in the cultural sector is thought to be a challenge, since neither harmonization nor policy convergence, as they occur in other policy areas, can be expected to function in this field. An overarching research question thus arises: what are cultural networks for, if not for harmonizing policies? Our analysis reveals that they pursue the creation of a European cultural space both in structural and cognitive terms through *discourse and ideational interaction*.

In conclusion, this knowledge will surely help us to gain a clearer insight into the regulative and discursive scope of European Cultural Governance and its mechanisms, and more broadly, will contribute to the study of soft policy tools and their effectiveness.