

**EXPLORING MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE IN  
EU YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY:  
THE CASE OF  
THE UNITED KINGDOM (ENGLAND) AND FRANCE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Across the European Union (EU) persistently high levels of unemployment amongst young citizens risk the creation of a ‘lost generation’ of individuals. In response, the European Commission has launched a number of measures aimed at fostering strong levels of youth employment, including the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and the Young Employment Initiative (YEI). Their ultimate delivery however, depends heavily on the aspirations and capacity of the member states, both at the national-level, and crucially, at the local level. This thesis investigates the extent to which the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) can help us to understand policy-making and implementation in the field of EU youth employment policy. It focusses specifically on the distinct national and subnational experiences of two highly unitary EU member states, the UK (England) and France. Unitary states, often overlooked within the MLG scholarship in favour of decentralised and federal states, offer a valuable opportunity to identify the specific internal and external factors that serve to enable, support, hinder or block instances of multi-level governance—which may be missed in more conducive settings. Indeed, the thesis reveals important implications for the MLG literature.

At first glance, this thesis finds that national state-executives dominate the policy-making and implementation processes around EU youth employment policy. Critically, however, a deeper investigation discovers that they are unable to *monopolise* these processes. Instead, the picture painted in this thesis is one of contestation, rivalry, and conflicting interests between the supranational, national and subnational tiers. The making and delivery of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative has been characterised by strong rival centralising and centrifugal pressures—which have in turn produced a complex policy environment in which multi-level governance is simultaneously constrained and encouraged. Notably, the presence of subtle, yet significant, pressure from the supranational and the subnational levels is continuously challenging, and slowly eroding, central government authority. In particular, central governments have been unable to unilaterally impose and maintain strategic policy direction, policy content and centralised domestic institutional arrangements around EU youth employment policy. MLG thus provides a useful analytical tool through which to understand EU youth employment policy-making, offering a nuanced and detailed interpretation of the dynamics at play.

**KEYWORDS:** European Union; multi-level governance; EU youth employment policy; United Kingdom; France.

Promises can create hope, but unfulfilled promises can lead to disillusionment and frustration. By concentrating on the implementation of programs, as well as their initiation, we should be able to increase the probability that policy promises will be realized. Fewer promises may be made in view of a heightened awareness of the obstacles to their fulfilment, but more of them should be kept. That aspiration guides this study.

— Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky

*Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed In Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes.*

1984, p. 6

I'm not going to limit myself just because people won't accept the fact that I can do something else.

— Dolly Parton

*This thesis is dedicated to*

*My parents for their unwavering love and support; even when I became a member of the  
'boomerang' generation,*

*And to the memory of my grandfather, who believed strongly in, and was evidence of, the  
transformative power of education.*

*John Murray Gibney*

*1933 – 2014*

Education is freedom

*Paulo Freire*

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Any flaws in this study are, of course, my own responsibility.

**Exploring multi-level governance in EU youth employment policy:  
the case of the United Kingdom (England) and France**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACUF	Association des communautés urbaines de France
AGS	Annual Growth Survey
AMGVF	Association des Maires de Grandes Villes de France
ARF	L'Association des régions de France
BCC	Birmingham City Council
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
BRICS	The emerging national economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCI	Chambres de commerce et d'industrie
CCREFP	Comités de Coordination Régionaux de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CF	Cohesion Fund
Coreper	The Permanent Representatives Committee
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation

CPU	Cities Policy Unit, UK Cabinet Office
CSR	Country Specific Recommendations
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DG	Directorate-General
DG Employment	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Commission
DGEFP	Délégation générale à l'emploi et à la formation professionnelle
Direccte	Direction régionale des entreprises, de la concurrence, de la consommation, du travail et de l'emploi
DOM-TOM	Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer (also : France d'Outre-Mer)
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
EAA	European Alliance for Apprenticeships
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
EOC	British Equal Opportunities Commission
EMCO	Employment Committee
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council configuration

ERDF	European Regional and Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF / ESI-Fund	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESM	European Social Model
EP	European Parliament
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
GBSLEP	Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership
GPC	General Powers of Competence
HoL	UK House of Lords
HM Government	Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
INSEE	L'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
MA	Managing Authority
MAPTAM	Loi de modernisation de l'action publique territoriale et d'affirmation des métropoles



MEL	Métropole Européenne de Lille
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	UK Member of Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MLG	Multi-level governance
MP	UK Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEET	Not in employment, education or training (typically referring to a young person aged 15-24 years)
NOMIS	National Online Manpower Information System (UK Office for National Statistics)
NOTRe	Loi portant sur la Nouvelle Organisation Territoriale de la République
NPdC	Nord-Pas-de-Calais
NRP	National Reform Programmes
NUTS	Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
NYGC	National Youth Guarantee Coordinator
OLP	Ordinary Legislative Procedure
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OP	Operational Programme

PA	Partnership Agreement
QFT	Quality Framework for Traineeships
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
R&D	Research and development
SGAR	Secrétariat général pour les affaires régionales
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SMBC	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative
YEP	Youth Employment Package
YOI	Youth Opportunities Initiative
YG	Youth Guarantee
YGIP	Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan
UAPME	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
UK	United Kingdom
UKRep	United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the European Union

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Introduction

This thesis investigates the extent to which the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) can help us to understand policy-making and implementation in the field of European Union (EU) youth employment policy. Across the EU, persistently high levels of unemployment amongst its youngest citizens risk the creation of a ‘lost generation’ of individuals (Campanella 05/01/2016, Carcillo, Fernández et al. 2015, Thyssen 19/01/2015, Institute for Policy Research 2014, McQuaid 28/07/2014, Eichhorst, Hinte et al. 2013, McDonald-Gibson 27/06/2013, Lee, Sissons et al. 2012, Morsy 2012, The Economist 10/09/2011, Gregg, Tominey 2005). This state of affairs has distinct economic and social consequences. In terms of the economy, policy makers at all levels of government (EU, national and subnational) are struggling to make sense of, and respond to, the implications of the so-called (post-industrial) ‘knowledge era’ and are looking to exploit the new opportunities afforded for competitive advantage (see for example, Levy, Sissons et al. 2011)—and this at a time when the global competition for markets, resources and talent is increasing. Uneven capabilities and ‘capacity deficits’ across professions in management-, technical- and job-specific skills are currently hampering Europe’s sustainable growth objectives. As Europe can no longer readily compete with the emerging economies<sup>1</sup> in a range of labour intensive low-productivity sectors, it must instead now focus on maintaining and improving its competitive lead by developing new technologies, enhancing innovation performance and securing improvements in the overall

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<sup>1</sup> These include notably Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the so-called BRICS), as well as other rapidly developing economies, such as Singapore.

quality (and global market relevance) of its goods, services and ideas (Denis, Mc Morrow, & Röger, 2006; Havik & Mc Morrow, 2006).

However, observers, including the European Commission, believe that this will only be possible if the European Union can develop and maintain an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce<sup>2</sup> (European Commission 2010b, 2010c, 2013a, 2015a, 1993, Rooney, Mandeville 1998). High levels of youth unemployment endanger this economic ambition (Lee, Sissons et al. 2012). The UK ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment (2012), for example, estimated that youth unemployment in the UK would cost HM Treasury approximately £28 billion over 2012-2020. On a more fundamental note, high youth unemployment rates have potentially profound ramifications for national and European solidarity and social cohesion. As an illustration, in the days after the June 2016 UK Referendum on the member state's continued membership of the EU, the demographic breakdown of voting outcomes immediately underscored the presence of deep social and economic divides between individuals according to their age, educational attainment, skill level and employment status (Kirk, Dunford 2016, Guardian 2016). Jacky Brine (2006) has highlighted the growing economic and social divide between individuals who can connect to the changing needs of the labour market (*'those that know'*, typically high knowledge-skilled individuals,) and those individuals who cannot (*'those that do not know'*, typically the low knowledge skilled)—and who are consequently at risk of long-term unemployment. In addition, numerous studies have pointed to the long-term 'scarring effects' that periods of unemployment can have on young people's future life chances and experiences (McQuaid 28/07/2014, Gregg, Tominey 2005, House of Lords 2014b, Mroz, Savage 2006). More worryingly, Henrik Urdal (2006) suggests that societies with large numbers of young people, and especially those suffering from low levels of economic development, are more at risk of

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<sup>2</sup> Although see Phillip Brown et al. (2004) for a critique, and Paulo Freire (1996) for an alternative understanding of the role of education in society.

political violence. Consequently, research into the making and implementation of youth employment policy in the EU is highly relevant.

While employment policy across the European Union remains the responsibility of the member states, the EU-level (and specifically the European Commission) is increasingly playing an important role—both in terms of policy development and design, but also in terms of providing financial support through its programmes and in facilitating cross-national and pan-European dialogue. Nonetheless, the ultimate delivery of EU youth employment policy ‘on the ground’ depends heavily on the aspirations and capacity of the member states: both at the national-level, *and* crucially at the subnational level. EU youth employment policy thus calls for a mode of policy-making and implementation that involves multiple territorial tiers and a variety of state and non-state actors—but to what extent are instances of MLG occurring? And what factors are mediating its manifestation? These are the central questions that the thesis seeks to address.

This introductory chapter is organised as follows. The next section highlights the purpose of this research project. The third section then presents a chapter-by-chapter overview of the thesis, outlining its core argument.

## **2. The purpose of this research project**

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to MLG scholarship, in order to build a more complete and nuanced picture of contemporary multi-level governance dynamics in Europe. As part of this, the thesis draws on the separate, yet strongly interlinked literatures on multi-level governance and Europeanization to offer an empirically-rich and detailed account of the process through which the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment

Initiative, the core components of the EU's youth employment policy (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4), have been formulated and implemented across successive territorial tiers. In particular, it considers the distinct national and subnational experiences of two highly unitary EU member states, the UK (and specifically, England) and France. In this way, the thesis departs from the usual focus within much of the academic governance literature in two ways. First, youth employment policy has not, so far, been extensively researched by those interested in furthering the development of multi-level governance analysis. Over the next decade, however, youth employment will be an increasingly critical topic and a central delivery 'feature' of the EU 2020 vision; and all of this at a time when Europe is experiencing fundamental economic and social transformation at all geographical scales. Second, unitary states—and France in particular—have often been overlooked within the MLG scholarship in favour of decentralised and federal states, which are, naturally, more likely to provide a more fertile environment for the manifestation of multi-level governance. This has also been the case for England and the English 'regions', which have much less statutory power than the Devolved Administrations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and which have consequently received less attention in comparison. However, unitary states offer a valuable opportunity to identify the specific internal and external factors that serve to enable, support, hinder or block instances of multi-level governance—which may be missed in more conducive settings. This is where the originality of this thesis chiefly lies. Furthermore, both the policy and the geographic dimensions of this research project represent 'least likely' cases of multi-level governance. Employment policy remains an EU member state competence. As such, we would expect to see national governments monopolising the policy process (Smismans 2004). The case of EU youth employment policy in England and France therefore represents a 'true' test for multi-level governance as an academic concept.

### **3. The structure of this thesis**

This thesis has been organised into three parts. Part I sets out the theoretical and conceptual framework and the overarching research design.

Chapter two provides a focussed literature review of the two concepts that inform this research, namely multi-level governance and Europeanization. Here, the chapter engages in conceptual clarification and strips the two concepts back to their fundamental components. Multi-level governance, at its heart, posits that central governments are no longer able to fully monopolise and control policy-making. Instead, it argues that new (multi-level) policy arrangements and forms of political mobilisation are subtly altering the power dynamics along three boundaries. These are notably, the borders between the domestic and the international spheres, between the centre and the periphery and between the state and society (Piattoni 2010, p. 85). MLG thus essentially paints a picture of complex, multi-tier and multi-actor policy-making and implementation processes, where decision-making authority has shifted away from national central governments to encompass supranational, subnational and non-state actors (Piattoni 2010, Bache, Flinders 2004, Hooghe, Marks 2001, Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). In short, “the locus and practice of authoritative governance” (Marks 1996a, p. 22) has been indelibly altered. MLG provides the ‘scaffolding’ on which this research is built. The thesis then draws on the Europeanization literature, and specifically, on the “three-step approach’ to domestic change originally developed by Thomas Risse et al. (2001) and later adapted by Ian Bache (2008). The three-step approach provides the basis for a tailored analytical framework through which to analyse the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. It also identifies a series of specific factors that may mediate the occurrence of instances of multi-level governance.

The thesis' analytical framework is guided by a primary research question, which is in turn supported by a further three sub-questions:

1. To what extent has EU youth employment policy promoted instances of multi-level governance in the two highly unitary member states of the United Kingdom (England) and France?
  - 1.1. What are the relevant aspects of EU youth employment policy in regard to analysing its effects on multi-level governance and through what mechanisms and with what degree of force do these impact England and France?
  - 1.2. What is the degree of 'fit' between the EU's vision of youth employment policy and the domestic policy in England and France? To what extent do the domestic policy arrangements in place in England and France exhibit the features of multi-level governance? (*Degree of fit*)
  - 1.3. Which mediating factors (if any) are enabling or preventing the implementation of EU youth employment policy and instances of multi-level governance in England and France?

To answer these questions the thesis engages in two distinct investigative steps. First, it undertakes a detailed examination of the formulation and implementation of the YEP and YEI at the EU-level and in the two case countries in order to determine to what extent authority over and responsibility for EU youth employment policy (and funding) have been transferred away from central government to supranational, subnational and non-state actors.



Second, it pinpoints the specific factors that have served to facilitate or hinder the emergence of instances of multi-level governance in England and France with regard to EU youth employment policy. These steps are presented in the case study chapters in Part II.

Chapter three outlines the design of the research project and the specific methods used to collect data. Given the nature of the research puzzle, the research adopts a ‘paired comparison’ case study approach (Tarrow 2010) of two EU member states well known for their unitary character and centralising tendencies, the United Kingdom (England) and France. The decision to focus on *two* country cases allows for a highly-detailed investigation that would not be feasible with a greater number of cases. Similarly, it permits analytical comparisons to be drawn between the two countries, and to isolate factors that have influenced the development and application of instances of multi-level governance—which would not be possible with only one case study. Chapter three also introduces the two subnational case studies, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) in England and Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. These two subnational territories have been chosen because of their surface similarities: both are large urban conurbations outside of their national capitals, have roughly similar population sizes, share similar socio-economic characteristics and both are areas that have struggled to shake off the heritage of their industrial past in the face of a transition to a post-industrial economy. More critically for this research, both areas are eligible for EU funding under the Youth Employment Initiative due to their elevated rates of youth unemployment—rates considerably higher than their national averages.

With regard to the specific research methods used, the empirical evidence presented in this thesis has been primarily gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews, supported by detailed documentary analysis. A total of 35 semi-structured interviews were held with policy-makers and opinion formers in London, Paris, the Greater Birmingham and

Solihull area and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais area over December 2013 – September 2014<sup>3</sup>. Careful attention has been paid to selecting ‘key informants’ (Kawulich 2005) in order to overcome the limitations of research based on a relatively small sample of interviews. Interview participants were chosen for their specific first-hand knowledge of, and professional experience of working on, the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative at European, national and regional/local level. The majority of the interviews were held face-to-face, but a small number (4) were conducted over the telephone, in order to secure access to interviewees who were not able to meet in person. To support, and verify, the data gathered through the interviews a detailed analysis of key documents has also been undertaken. These have included policy strategy documents, policy papers and briefings, organisation charts, binding and non-binding intergovernmental agreements, formal codes of behaviour, and statutes and guidelines regulating and governing policy and coordination processes.

Part II comprises three case study chapters, each of which looks at the formulation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI at the different territorial levels and across the different countries. Each chapter is organised along similar lines to aid cross-national and cross-scale comparison.

Chapter four examines the formulation of EU youth employment policy at the European level. It concentrates on two specific measures that form the core of EU youth employment policy, the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The Youth Employment Package is a bundle of three policy measures, the most significant of which is the Youth Guarantee (YG). The Youth Guarantee is a commitment on the part of the EU member states to implement structural reforms, and new and innovative policies and programmes that will ensure that *all* young people under the age

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<sup>3</sup> See annex 1 for an anonymised list of interview participants.

of 25 have access to a good quality offer of employment, education or training within four months of becoming unemployed or of leaving formal education (Council of the European Union 2013a). In this it seeks to foster a new approach to tackling youth unemployment, most notably by recommending that member states instigate major domestic reforms in order to confront the underlying and deep-rooted structural weaknesses that impede young people's access to the labour market. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) for its part, is a EUR 6 billion (at 2011 current prices) funding instrument that runs in parallel to the YEP and that is specifically targeted at *regions* (NUTS level 2) experiencing substantial rates of youth unemployment. To be eligible for funding, a region has to have recorded a youth unemployment rate of above 25% at the time of the YEI's negotiation (2010-2011).

Critically, chapter four considers both the formal policy-making arrangements and the 'reality' of policy formulation: that is to say, how it actually takes place. The chapter reveals a highly politicised and institutionally complex policy area, one that is difficult to follow on paper and is even more complicated in reality. The empirical data presents a mixed and complicated picture with regard to the presence of multi-level governance. Member states retain a key controlling presence in the EU policy process around EU youth employment matters. The primacy of national state-executives is supported by the EU's institutional framework itself, which prioritises central government involvement to ensure 'national ownership' of EU policy, and abetted by capacity constraints within the European Commission, which makes systematic, sustained and comprehensive dialogue with subnational actors unattainable. However, national state-executives are not able to *monopolise* the EU policy-making process. Instead, the chapter points to three features that curtail member state control over policy content and strategic direction. First, collective decision-making and the presence of a distinct European Commission 'policy position', restricts the ability of individual state-executives to dictate the content and direction of EU

youth employment policy. Second, the explicit aspiration for multi-level governance-working contained within the YEP and the YEI, supports political contestation and bargaining within the domestic arena on the part of subnational and non-state actors. This is in turn supported by, third, the existence of explicit financial conditions attached to the YEI that require national activities to mirror EU priorities and practices. As demonstrated in the two country case chapters, this has opened up areas for political negotiation for regional and local actors within the member states to push for greater power (see also Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007).

Chapter five examines the domestic formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative in the United Kingdom, and in particular the subnational territory of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP). The chapter finds a relatively poor degree of ‘fit’ between EU policies, practices and preferences around youth employment and domestic policy and institutional arrangements. The ‘disconnect’ between the two arenas can be principally explained by three factors. First, as a reflection of two divergent and conflicting models of the welfare state—that is to say, between the ‘Social Europe’ model put forward by the European Union, and the ‘liberal’ welfare state model adhered to by the United Kingdom (Anderson 2015). Second, as a partial consequence of existing far-reaching, expensive and politically sensitive welfare reforms, which have diminished any appetite for further reform in line with EU preferences. Third, as a result of the strong centralising tendencies exhibited by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the body that controls the purse-strings over the YEI and the wider European Social Fund (ESF). This final feature can be further linked to central concerns over the management of financial risk and the potential fragmentation of national employment services and programmes, and to questions of institutional survival.

However, there are equally important signs that the capacity of central government to dictate and monopolise the policy process has been significantly diluted by a number of key internal and external factors. In particular, the availability of EU funding at a time of severely restricted public budgets, combined with an overt EU vision of multi-level governance and the importance attributed to youth employment policy at the subnational level, have served to create a legitimate political space for subnational actors from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP to challenge the Department of Work and Pension's centralised delivery arrangements. Subnational mobilisation and political contestation has been enabled by conflicting objectives displayed by central government actors (namely, DWP and the Cabinet Office) and the presence of key local policy entrepreneurs at the subnational level. In this way, EU youth employment policy, and more particularly its funding, have acted as a 'springboard' for subnational ambitions for the greater decentralisation of decision-making authority and policy competence.

Chapter six considers the case of France and in particular, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region. In stark contrast to its UK counterpart, the French government was one of the main driving forces behind, and a key supporter of, the Youth Employment Package, and particularly the Youth Guarantee at EU-level. These diametrically opposing national reactions can be associated with six interconnected features of the French domestic political environment: Youth unemployment is widely recognised by politicians, expert observers and the general public to be one of the most, if not *the* most important, challenges facing contemporary France. The domestic employment situation is key issue for the electorate and has a direct impact on electoral outcomes: elections at all territorial scales are won or lost on the public's perception of politicians' performances with regard to employment policy. Youth employment is viewed as a common *European* challenge, thereby legitimising, and indeed requiring, EU-level action. National political leaders wish to show the domestic population

that France is a *policy-shaper* and not a *policy-taker* (Börzel 2002). Accordingly, the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee align more closely with the French welfare model, which includes a stronger role for the state in supporting its citizens than is viewed as ‘desirable’ under the UK model (Anderson 2015, Béland, Hansen 2000, Bonoli, Palier 1996). As a result, the YEP, YG and YEI have been viewed positively by policy actors at all territorial levels in France. Nonetheless, despite a promising foundation for the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee, there has been little substantive policy or structural change ‘on the ground’. As with England, there are limited signs of the emergence of ‘maximalist’ (Perry 2007) instances of multi-level governance. Employment policy continues to remain largely under the control of central government, despite partial decentralisation to the regional councils and the application of wider, far-reaching, processes of territorial reform. Centralisation is driven principally by the disinclination of national political leaders to cede control over a policy area that is so tightly entwined with their performance in elections. The strong role of the ‘centre’ is reinforced by a complicated set of internal territorial reforms, which have created a significant degree of uncertainty over future working practices and institutional arrangements—in this situation, the attention of the ‘periphery’ is claimed by the actions of the ‘centre’.

However, as with the case of England and GBSLEP, a deeper investigation into the formation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region uncovers signs of a gradual shift towards multi-level governance. Notably, pressure from EU policy and funding is steadily weakening central government control over (youth) employment policy. In particular, not only is EU policy and funding exerting a downwards pressure on central government to alter its policies and practices in line with EU principles; but the YEP and the YEI have also fed into, and bolstered, central government’s domestic territorial reform agenda, which was in danger of stalling. Indeed, regional actors are using

the YEP and especially the YEI to foster strong regional partnerships in order to navigate the complex political environment that characterises employment policy in France. Perhaps most significantly, there is clear evidence that the NPdC regional council is using its partial Management Authority status over the YEI to give a strategic push to convince central government to devolve further decision-making authority and policy competences to the regional level in light of their successful management performance. In this sense, as Piattoni (2010) contends, central government is under pressure from *above* (supranational) and *below* (subnational).

Part III of the thesis consists of two final chapters. Chapter seven engages in a comparative discussion of the empirical evidence presented in the three previous case study chapters and considers the implications of the findings for the literature on multi-level governance. The chapter reinforces the fact that while central governments might continue to play a decisive role in EU youth employment policy, this thesis is not a straight-forward tale of national monopolisation. Instead, this research's detailed scrutiny of the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative reveals a series of internal and external features of the political environment that are inhibiting central government control over policy direction and exerting centrifugal pressures on centralised domestic institutional arrangements. At the supranational level, the presence of a visible and clearly identifiable EU youth employment policy 'vision' that includes a distinct role for multi-level governance and partnership, effectively sanctions, and indeed, strongly encourages, subnational involvement in the policy-making and implementation processes. This in turn helps to create a legitimate domestic political 'space' for subnational mobilisation against perceived 'suppressive' activities and arrangements on the part of the 'centre'. Subnational actors facing the stark realities of high youth unemployment rates and shrinking public budgets must look to, and access, alternative sources of financing to provide

public programmes. Here, a region's eligibility for (conditional) EU funding, combined with the absence of domestic funds and a policy's high political saliency, opens up important domestic spaces for political contestation and negotiation (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007), and encourages the mobilisation of subnational actors against centralising tendencies. Multi-level governance thus offers a useful and helpful analytical framework through which to view the complicated, 'messy', multi-actored and multi-level policy-making and policy-delivery processes around EU youth employment policy. Chapter eight brings the thesis to a close with a general conclusion. It summarises the thesis' central argument, notes the limits of this study, and accordingly identifies areas for further research.

This thesis now moves on to discuss the theoretical and analytical framework that underpins this research.



**PART I**  
**THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

#### **1. Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to analyse and explain the extent to which the concept of multi-level governance can help us to understand policy-making in the field of EU youth employment policy. Conceptual clarification and demarcation is consequently an important first step. This chapter provides an overview of the two main concepts that underpin this research project: namely, multi-level governance (MLG) and Europeanization. The chapter is structured as follows. Section two begins with a brief note of new institutionalism. Section three presents a focussed review of the literature on multi-level governance, concentrating on its core features and its implications for our understanding of policy-making in the EU. The fourth section then brings in the literature on Europeanization to provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that may influence the occurrence of multi-level governance. Here the section draws in particular on the “three-step approach” to domestic structural change advanced by Thomas Risse et al. (2001) and amended by Ian Bache (2008). The ‘three-step approach’ usefully identifies specific mediating factors that may influence the occurrence of multi-level governance. The fifth section sets out the research questions that guide this thesis, and outlines a tailored analytical framework based on the “three-step approach”. The chapter closes with a brief recap of the main themes covered.

## **2. A note on new institutionalism**

Before going any further, it is first necessary to recognise that both the literatures on multi-level governance and particularly that on Europeanization have been heavily influenced by broader ‘new institutionalist’ approaches (2001, Bache 2008, Bulmer 2007, Bulmer 1998, Hooghe, Marks 2003). A general understanding of the key concepts within new institutionalism is thus helpful in framing and understanding the empirical evidence uncovered in the forthcoming case study chapters.

Vivien Lowndes (1996, p. 182) has noted that, “new institutionalist approaches reflect a common commitment to the significance of institutional arrangements and a common criticism of atomistic accounts of social processes”. André Lecours (2005, p. 8) goes further to contend that “institutions shape actions” (see also Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, Peters 2005). This understanding has direct relevance for any study on multi-level governance or Europeanization. First, MLG and especially Europeanization are, to borrow from Ian Bache (2008, p. 12), “institutionalist in nature”. Here, ‘institutions’ must be conceptualised in their broadest sense: not just ‘formal’ institutions of codified structures of governance organised around common formal rules (Hall 1986); but also ‘informal’ institutions, often deeply-rooted and intangible, but which can have a powerful impact on the behaviour of individual actors and groups of actors (Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, for specific examples see also Farrell, Héritier 2003). As a result, new institutionalism can shed important light on the role and impact of ‘institutions’ on policy-making across multiple territorial levels; and significantly, can help to highlight the presence of specific institutional factors that may influence occurrences of multi-level governance. Second, in decrying “atomistic accounts of social processes” (Lowndes 1996, p. 182), new institutionalist approaches directly complement the

‘actor-centred approach’ (Marks 1996a) advocated by multi-level governance—more on which in section three below.

There are three contrasting, but inter-linked, approaches within new institutionalism that have relevance for this research, each with their own set of assumptions and rationales for why institutions behave the way that they do. These are rational-choice, sociological and historical institutionalism (Bache 2008, Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, Hall, Taylor 1996). *Rational choice institutionalism* (RCI) emphasises the role of formal rules and procedures (Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, p. 7), conceptualising power relations as a ‘zero-sum’ game, in which power is finite and any gains are at the expense of other players. Most importantly, actors are seen as rational decision-makers with fixed interests; they adapt their behaviour in anticipation of the actions of other relevant actors (ibid.). Cooperation is done only to achieve a specific end result: in this sense, it is a tool (see for example Thielemann 1999). For rational-choice institutionalists, Europeanization occurs as a consequence of the *reallocation of power resources* among domestic actors (Bache 2008, p. 13, Thielemann 1999).

In direct contrast, *sociological institutionalism* (SI) emphasises the influence of norms, rules and culture on the behaviour of actors, and conceptualises power as a ‘positive-sum’ game (Bache 2008, Aspinwall, Schneider 2000). Here, actors’ preferences change over time, and are heavily shaped by the institutions in which they find themselves (Powell, DiMaggio 1991): Institutions provide “a political environment or cultural context which alters the individual’s sense of what is in her best interests – in other words, actors are conditioned by the accumulation of procedures, rules and norms over time” (Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, p. 6). Most importantly, sociological institutionalists highlight the role of ‘socialisation’ and ‘learning’ in altering actors’ behaviours (Kohler-Koch 1996, Radaelli 2003); and it is processes of socialisation and learning that are, for them, the key mechanisms through which Europeanization occurs (Bache 2008, Börzel, Risse 2003).

The main difference between RCI and SI is best understood via the medium of March & Olsen's (1989, 1998, 2009, 2008) the 'logic of consequence' versus the 'logic of appropriateness'. Under RCI, actors follow the logic of consequence: that is to say, they peruse actions that will result in the accumulation of power and/or the most gains available. Under SI, actors follow the logic of appropriateness: that is, they follow the course of action that is in line with the 'rules' of a given situation. The idea of what constitutes 'legitimate' action is key here (March, Olsen 2008).

The third approach within the broader new institutionalist tradition that has particular relevance for this research is *historical institutionalism* (HI). Similar to sociological institutionalism, HI contends that institutions affect actors' preferences: interests are thus not fixed, but malleable. Indeed, HI shares many commonalities with SI. However, whereas sociological institutionalism stresses the importance of 'culture' in influencing actors' preferences and actions (Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, Peters 2005, Finnemore 1996, Schmidt 2014); historical institutionalism places a much greater emphasis on the influence of formal and informal institutional practices *over time* (Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, Pierson 1996, Hall, Taylor 1998, Peters, Pierre et al. 2005). In particular, HI points to the concepts of 'path dependency' and 'institutional stickiness' to explain how and why actors may become locked into certain courses of action. This can be as an unintended consequence of earlier decisions or as a result of institutional practices becoming so embedded within the institutional framework that they are very difficult to change (Lecours 2005, Aspinwall, Schneider 2000, Peters 2005, Hall, Taylor 1996, Hall, Taylor 1998, Peters, Pierre et al. 2005, Boettke, Coyne et al. 2008, Thelen 1999, Hay, Wincott 1998). Both of these notions are readily observable in the two case study country chapters (Chapters 5 and 6): for example, institutional stickiness played a role in exerting additional pressure on the Greater Birmingham and Social Local

Enterprise Partnership to buy-into centralised delivery mechanisms around the provision of youth unemployment programmes.

While these three approaches represent three distinct ways of understanding how institutions influence actors, and there is heated debate within the academic literature as to which has the most merit as an analytical device, the reality is that all three can commonly be found in every-day practice (March, Olsen 1998). Indeed, examples of the pursuit of power over resources (RCI), the idea of the ‘legitimate’ action to take and the impact of socialisation (SI), as well as examples of the consequences of institutional path dependency (HI) can all be readily identified in both the English and French case study chapters. An appreciation of new institutionalism is thus essential for any reading of the literatures on multi-level governance and Europeanization.

### **3. Multi-level governance: A focussed review of the literature**

At its heart, the concept of multi-level governance contains two core ideas. First, that decision-making authority in a number of policy areas in the European Union is no longer the sole purview of central governments; but is instead distributed across multiple territorial tiers, to include policy actors at the *supranational* and the *subnational* scale. And second, that the increasing inclusion of *non-state* actors in policy-making and implementation processes has engendered a shift from *government* to *governance*. However, despite—or perhaps, in spite of—these two simple central principles, multi-level governance has become an increasingly nebulous concept since its first reference in the literature in the early 1990s (and Marks,

Hooghe et al. 1996, see notably Marks 1992, 1993, 1996b, Hooghe 1995, 1996a, 1996b)<sup>4</sup>. In particular, observers point to incidences of conceptual over-stretching and over-extension that risk labelling MLG as a ‘catch-all-term’ with limited analytical worth (Alcantara, Broschek et al. 2016, Jordan 2001, see also Sartori 1970, 1984, 1991)—or, to borrow from Ernesto Laclau (1996), an ‘empty signifier’ (see also Offe 2009). Paul Stephenson (2013) for example, has noted that the literature on the concept has burgeoned over the past 20 years, encompassing many different definitions, usages and fields<sup>5</sup>. Conceptual delimitation is therefore an essential step in any multi-level governance research. Accordingly, this section sets out the conceptual boundaries that guide this research—namely, by stripping multi-level governance back to its fundamental characteristics, in order to assess its utility for analysing the governance of European youth employment policy.

Multi-level governance is theoretically relevant because it moves beyond the classical and restrictive ‘state-centric’ understandings of the European Union put forward by theories such as liberal intergovernmentalism (see Moravcsik 1993, 1995, 1998) and neofunctionalism (see Haas 1958, and Rosamond 2005)—to offer a more nuanced and actor-centred interpretation of European integration and EU policy-making (Piattoni 2010, Bache, Flinders 2004, Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, Marks 1996a). Put simply, MLG broadens our analytical horizons. As Gary Marks has argued, although neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism differ substantively, they both nonetheless conceive the EU as a ‘two-level’ setting in which the balance alternates between “national state domination at the one extreme to a supranational polity at the other” (Marks 1993, p. 407). This risks over-stating

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Marks’ and Hooghe’s work built on earlier scholarship on European regional policy and its impact on governance in the member states: see for example Croxford et al. (1987), Rui Martins and Mawson (1980, 1982), Mawson et al. (1985), Wallace (1977). See also Manzello et al. (2009) for an overview.

<sup>5</sup> For a contemporary review of the historical development of multi-level governance see Conzelmann and Smith (2008), Kohler-Koch and Larat (2009), Enderlein et al. (2010), Stephenson (2013), Piattoni (2010, 2009) and Levi-Faur (2012); for the concept itself see particularly, Marks et al. (1996), Marks (1996a), Hooghe and Marks (2001, 2003), Bache and Flinders (2004) and Piattoni (2010). Scholars have also increasingly turned to the international level to inform and develop their understanding of multi-level governance in a wider context: see for example Alcantara (2016), Rouillard and Nadeau (2013), Welch and Kennedy-Pipe (2004), as well as Piattoni (ibid) and Enderlin et al. (ibid).

the role of national governments or EU institutions in the EU policy-making process, as well as ignoring, or altogether missing, the increasing mobilisation of subnational actors who are seeking to take part in, and influence, the EU decision-making and policy-making process. Liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism thus only tell us part of the story. In contrast, multi-level governance draws our attention to the development of EU policy arrangements that are subtly altering the power dynamics along three traditional state ‘boundaries’. These are: 1) the boundaries between the domestic political arena and the European (and international) political arena (*domestic—international*); 2) the boundaries between the central state and subnational actors, and especially subnational authorities (*centre—periphery*); and 3) the boundaries between state and non-state actors (*state—society*) (Piattoni 2010). In this way, MLG asserts that central governments are under pressure from three distinct directions: from *above* (i.e. pressure emanating from the supranational/international level), from *below* (i.e. pressure emanating from the subnational level), and from *within* (i.e. pressure emanating from society) (ibid, see also Jensen, Koop et al. 2014). It thus offers a direct challenge to the main claims of liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) by questioning the capacity of national governments to control the direction of EU policy (*intergovernmental theory of interstate bargaining*) (the boundaries between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’) and their own domestic political arenas in the face of subnational mobilisation (*liberal theory of national preference formation*) (the boundaries between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’, and between the state and society) (Piattoni 2010, Marks 1996a, Moravcsik 1993).

The remainder of this section examines the two principles behind MLG in greater detail.



### **3.1. Core principle 1: Decision-making authority spread across multiple territorial scales**

As indicated above, the first core feature of multi-level governance is that national state executives do not monopolise decision-making competences; rather, authority is spread across actors located at different territorial scales. Nevertheless, it is important to understand here that, multi-level governance does not refute the importance of the member states: indeed, MLG acknowledges that national governments are still likely to be *the* most important actors. However, it asserts that they are no longer able to *fully* monopolise EU decision- and policy-making. The loss of central state control can be attributed to three distinct forces acting in tandem: 1) the result of conscious decisions on the part of national political leaders; 2) the result of pressure from the supranational level (blurring of the domestic—international boundaries); and 3) the result of pressure from the subnational level (blurring of the centre—periphery boundaries). Each of these forces will now be explained in turn.

#### ***Conscious decisions on the part of national political leaders***

An essential element within this first principle of decisional reallocation is MLG's actor-centred approach to understanding the EU (see Marks 1996a). Notably, multi-level governance—in contrast to state-centric theoretical approaches—argues that the concept of the 'state' needs to be further broken down into its constituent parts: *institutions*, understood as the set of formal and informal rules and norms that frame and constrain action (including political rules), and political *actors*, as individuals or groups of individuals who act within those institutions and participate in the decision- and policy-making process. Within this, MLG places particular emphasis on the role of the political leaders of states and governments. Indeed, Marks (1996a, p. 22) stressed that “a state is a set of rules that structure

authoritative relations in a polity. Government leaders occupy positions of authority in a state, and it is they, rather than the state itself, who are elected, have policy goals, interact with sub-national actors, and engage in international negotiations.” The distinction between the state as a set of institutional rules and the political actors who actually carry out political activities is an important one because it allowed scholars of multi-level governance to reconceptualise the original question posed by earlier theories of European integration, ‘why do states give up sovereignty in the process of European integration?’ into the more penetrating question of ‘why do particular *actors* (party leaders in national governments) change institutional rules (e.g. shift competencies to the EU)?’ (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, p. 348: emphasis added). States, in the narrow state-centric understanding, are unlikely to cede sovereignty and authority to the EU-level because it runs counter to their survival, their primary national interest (Morgenthau 1948). Political actors, however, are ruled by a myriad of different individual interests and preferences: “The fact that an individual is located in a particular institution does not allow one to infer that the individual wishes to defend that institution's autonomy.” (Marks 1996a, p. 34) Scholars point to two sets of reasons why state executives would transfer decision-making powers to the supranational level (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). First, the political benefits of transferring powers upwards may outweigh the costs of losing political control. This might come about for example, because more resources are available at the supranational level than at the national level, thereby reducing the transaction costs related to formulating, negotiating and implementing collective decisions and potentially improving effectiveness (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, p. 349)<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, even when decisional reallocation involves significant institutional or political costs, these can be outweighed by the benefits of increased policy effectiveness, for example in terms of its delivery ‘on the ground’ locally, as well as more widely across the EU; or the costs may be

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<sup>6</sup> Here Marks et al. (1996) have drawn on the work of several other scholars active in the field, namely Majone (1994, 1995), Moe (1987, 1990) and Williamson (1985, 1993).

sufficiently ‘futurised’ so as not to present an immediate political obstacle. As stated above, preserving the ‘sovereignty’ of the nation-state may not be the primary motivating factor of the political actors that lead state-executives; rather, their chief concerns are likely to be related to immediate and medium-term policy/political goals with an eye on securing substantive policy outcomes and/or their potential re-election. As will be seen further on in the French case study chapter (chapter 6), the electoral motivations of politicians has played a key role in employment policy in France, both in terms of the policy’s institutional set-up and its implementation; although in the case of France, national government leaders have sought to retain control over employment policy. Second, state-executives, understood as *individual political actors* may actually wish to ‘lose’ control of certain decision-making powers (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996); for example, because the policy area is deeply unpopular at home and so risks their future electoral success. Government leaders may also wish to insulate certain decisions from domestic political pressures; by in effect moving them beyond the reach of their national political opponents; decisions which would then be protected even in the case of a change in government. The UK especially can undergo a radical difference in its position towards the European Union depending on the political party in power (Bache 2008); as will be seen in chapter 5 different political leanings have a major bearing on the way that political actors in the UK view the Youth Employment Package.

***Pressure from above: blurring of the boundaries between the ‘domestic’ and the ‘international’***

Processes of globalisation and the rise of supranational institutions post-1945—whether they be specific international organisations (like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)) or international norms, values and agreements (such as the Kyoto protocol) or structured ‘regimes’ like the EU—have altered the international political environment in which

contemporary nation-states operate (Weiss, Wilkinson 2014, Hay 2010, Sørensen 2003, Pierre 2001). As Simona Piattoni (2010, p. 51) posits, nation-states, “far from being the autonomous entities conventionally theorized by international relations theory, [...] find themselves trapped in a cobweb of mutual interdependencies that powerfully limit their capacity to act autonomously.” From a broad perspective, the prevalence of international cooperation in contemporary political life places pressure on states “to join increasingly structured arrangements of international coordination and regulation” (Piattoni 2009, p. 173). As a result states, whether intentionally or not, are party to a process whereby sovereignty is shifted upwards to the supranational level; and thus, “cease to be sovereign as theorized by realism and intergovernmentalism” (ibid, p. 173). This transformation of the nation-state carries over into the European Union, where Piattoni underlines that, above and beyond the grand theoretical debates of the why’s and how’s of European integration, it is undeniable that “the EU has engendered a transfer of power and a pooling of sovereignty from the member-states to the Union” (Piattoni 2010, p. 9). With regard to the European Union more specifically, Marks, Hooghe and Blank (1996) identified a number of ways in which collective decision-making among states at EU-level has engendered a significant loss of control on the part of both *individual* state-executives, as well as for *collective* state-executives.

#### *Loss of individual state-executive control*

The most obvious constraint on individual member states’ control over decision-making at EU-level is the use of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in the Council of the European Union (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996), under which a qualified majority requires only the agreement of 55% of member states representing at least 65% of the EU population<sup>7</sup>. This

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<sup>7</sup> It is possible for member states to form a ‘blocking minority’, although this must be made up of a minimum of four Council members representing more than 35% of the EU population. For further details see the Council of

essentially means that certain decisions may be adopted without the full agreement of all member states. Since the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, QMV is now the default voting method in the Council for decisions subject to the ordinary legislative procedure<sup>8</sup> (OLP), which includes certain employment issues<sup>9</sup>.

Proponents of liberal intergovernmentalism have sought to counter the MLG argument along two lines. First, LI seeks to downplay the implications of any relinquishment of sovereignty on the part of member states, arguing that that while state-executives may give up some control this is done specifically to access substantive (domestic) policy gains: “National governments have an incentive to co-operate where policy coordination increases their control over domestic policy outcomes, permitting them to achieve goals that would not otherwise be possible” (Moravcsik 1993, p. 485). Action is thus framed as a *gain* in policy outcomes, rather than a *loss* of authority. Andrew Moravcsik (ibid) further argues that collective decision-making, far from diminishing individual state-executive control, in fact strengthens it. However, this argument conflates two models of power: power as control over persons in the Weberian sense, understood as the “monopoly of legitimate coercion within a given territory”; and power “conceived as the ability to achieve desired outcomes [which] involves not only power over persons, but power over nature in the broadest” (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, p. 351). This in turn masks two separate phenomena: 1) “institutionally rooted relations of power among political actors”, and 2) “the ability of political actors to achieve substantive policy goals” (ibid, p. 351). In other words, a gain in *policy outcomes* by shifting authority cannot be viewed as an increase in control that can lead one to say that ‘the state gains control’; a shift in authority is different from a gain in policy performance<sup>10</sup>:

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the European Union website: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/> [Accessed 4 September 2015].

<sup>8</sup> The OLP was previously known as ‘co-decision’.

<sup>9</sup> Although it should be noted that a number of these are currently subject to ‘emergency brakes’; this is the case for example, where decisions on social security coordination are concerned.

<sup>10</sup> I am grateful to Professor Gary Marks for further clarification on this point.

“Decisions concerning rules to be enforced across the EU [...] have a zero-sum character, and necessarily involve gains or losses for individual states” (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, p. 346).

Second, liberal intergovernmentalists maintain that, despite the use of QMV in the Council of the European Union, state sovereignty is still very much in force. Specifically, they highlight that decisions on key areas, such as treaty revisions and certain highly sensitive policy areas are taken by unanimity and so are still subject to national veto; stress that the precedent set by the Luxembourg Compromise means that member states can veto issues, which they consider places their national interests at stake; and emphasise that members states could, as a last resort, withdraw from the EU (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, p. 351). While it is true that unanimity continues to govern the treaty process—as well as other highly sensitive policy areas<sup>11</sup>—the Treaty of Lisbon extended the remit of Qualified Majority Voting into a number of new policy areas, including the relatively sensitive areas of external border control, asylum, and the negotiation of international agreements on trade matters. This suggests that unanimity is slowly falling out of favour as an ‘effective’ means of agreeing decisions, especially in the light of progressive rounds of EU enlargement (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). Second, with regard to the Luxembourg Compromise it must be noted that this can only be used in a limited number of circumstances, when a decision poses a very serious threat to a member state’s national interest. Moreover, even in such circumstances it is a relatively “blunt” instrument, in that it must be considered as a *defensive* move, rather than an offensive challenge (ibid). One only has to consider, for example, the former UK Prime Minister David Cameron’s use of a veto at the December 2011 European Council to block an EU-wide treaty change to tackle the Eurozone crisis, where he argued that this would be contrary to the national interests of the United Kingdom (BBC News 9/12/2011). While this

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<sup>11</sup> These are namely: taxation, social security or social protection, the accession of new states to the European Union, foreign and common defence policy and operational police cooperation between the member states.

meant that the UK would not be bound by the agreement, it did not stop other member states from pushing forward with a new ‘Accord’—and instead meant that, at the time, the UK ran the risk of being left out of further and potentially more important negotiations which were likely to have long-term effects on its future economic (and political) competitiveness. There is also evidence to suggest that the UK’s ‘difficult’ behaviour has had an impact on its relationship with the other member states (Traynor, Watt et al. 9/12/2011, Chapman 10/12/2011), an important consideration given the negotiations that will be required as part of the UK’s forthcoming exit from the European Union. Finally, the withdrawal of a member state from the Union had until recently been an abstract possibility. It was generally thought that although the Treaty of Lisbon includes, for the first time, a clause that makes this technically possible—coupled with the fact that the EU does not possess the necessary physical force, legitimate or otherwise to coerce a member state into staying in the Union—the subsequent political, economic and social ‘fallout’ that such a move would likely engender, would make it very difficult for a member state to adopt such a course of action. The results of the June 2016 UK Referendum on EU membership mean that this line of thinking may need to be rethought. However, it is, as yet, too early to tell what the long-term implications of this decision will be. It is possible that other member states may follow in the UK’s footsteps; and it is equally possible that the experience of the UK will serve as a deterrent to other national populations against ‘going it alone’.

An example of the loss of control on the part an individual state-executive can be seen in chapter 4 (the EU case) with the United Kingdom Government’s reaction to the Youth Guarantee: Although fundamentally opposed to the Youth Guarantee, the UK Government was forced to alter its official position in the face of pressure from the European Commission and the other member states (see also chapter 5).

*Loss of collective state-executive control*

Multi-level governance also points to the limits that collective decision-making places on *collective* state-executive control. Constraints can be found at both the EU-level and at the national-domestic level. At the EU-level, Marks et al. (1996) noted five factors that potentially limit the ability of national governments to control supranational agents, even acting collectively. These are: 1) the multiplicity of principals (28 member states means 28 potentially conflicting views); 2) that any institutional change, whether promoting or, critically, reigning in further integration requires unanimity, which is made more difficult by the multiplicity of principals; 3) the presence of ‘informational asymmetries’ (the European Commission in particular is able due to nature of its work to draw on a vast store of information and knowledge, which may not be accessible to individual member states); 4) the existence of detailed regulation as a response to mutual mistrust between member states, which in turn limits individual member states’ room for manoeuvre; and finally, 5) the fact that any institutional change is likely to have unanticipated and unintended consequences, which can again block member states’ future options. Moreover, the authors stressed that while member states—and their political leaders—retain a firm grip on activities linked to EU *treaty*-making they are much less involved in ‘everyday’ policy-making, which could potentially lead to small incremental changes that slowly and progressively build up to change the policy environment. As will be seen from the case chapters, the complexity and intrinsic ‘messiness of the EU youth employment policy environment negates central governments’ complete control over the policy-making and implementation processes.

In addition, at the domestic-level, the process of treaty ratification has, since the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, gradually moved into the public sphere, becoming increasingly subject to “politicised realms of party-political competition, parliamentary debates and mass referendums” (ibid, p. 353), which has in turn served to erode government leaders’ monopoly and domination over the treaty process. Contemporary examples of this include the French,



Dutch and Irish public voting no in their 2005 national referendums on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe; the treaty was subsequently abandoned. Even the experience of the UK with regards to the recent referendum on whether to remain in the EU strongly suggests that the (Conservative) Government was unable to fully control or monopolise the national debate (as also evidenced by the split within the Conservative party over ‘Brexit’ (Johnston 19/04/2016, Stephens 21/04/2016, Macwhirter 28/05/2016)), nor the specifics of the referendum itself, such as the precise wording of the electoral ballot (UK Electoral Commission 01/09/2015, Watt, Syal 01/09/2015).

***Pressure from below: Blurring of the boundaries between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’***

In addition to pressure from above, the political authority of nation-states is also being challenged from below. Here, multi-level governance questions the internal hierarchy of nation-states: “regions and other sub-central articulations cannot be considered as minor or lesser levels of government relative to states, as they potentially fill all the functions and encompass all the capacities that would allow us to consider them as a viable level government in much the same way as we currently consider viable what we call ‘sovereign states.’” (Piattoni 2010, p. 49) In particular, MLG draws our attention to three contemporary factors that are testing—and in certain cases, eroding—central government dominance: namely, 1) the presence of internal top-down decentralisation trends across many EU member states, including the UK and France (Loughlin, Aja et al. 2001, Pasquier 2015, Cole 2012, 2006, 2005, Fenwick 2015, Willett 2015, Morgan 2002) (see also chapters 5 and 6 in this thesis); 2) bottom-up processes of regionalisation as a result of the direct mobilisation of subnational actors seeking greater decision-making authority and competences over their territories (Piattoni 2010, Keating 2013, 2000, Jeffery 1997); and 3) the notion that domestic political arenas are interconnected, rather than nested (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996).

Piattoni (2010) identifies three reasons why central governments have over the years devolved certain decision-making powers and other responsibilities downwards to the subnational level: first, to achieve *administrative efficiency*—this is particularly the case with larger member states where it may be difficult for central government to exert “efficient administrative and political control” over the whole territorial area from a single central base (ibid, p. 45); second, to achieve *economic efficiency*—for example by enabling subnational territories (whether nations, regions or local areas) to exploit their strengths, specialisms and resources to build up strong local economies which then feed into the national economy<sup>12</sup>; and third, to achieve *social efficiency*—notably by harnessing regions and localities as a legitimate base from which to represent the preferences of its local population, for example because of their capacity to tap into “distinct [regional] cultural traits” or because “interpersonal preference maximisation” can be achieved at a lower cost than would be possible at the central (or supranational) level (ibid, p. 48). These changes have in turn over time created a ‘bottom-up’ pressure on the central state which can now be found across the three analytical levels: politics, policy and polity. At the *political* level, increasing regional political mobilisation has led certain regions to challenge “the cultural and social homogeneity of contemporary nation-states [in order to] claim greater autonomy if not outright independence” (ibid, p. 32). Prime examples in the EU include the Spanish autonomous regions and Scotland. At the *policy* level, the design, implementation and monitoring/evaluation of public policy (both at the European and national level) increasingly requires the active participation and (sense of political ‘ownership’) of regional levels of government, as well as other civil society actors/organisations. Arguably, this is particularly important in the case of youth employment policy, where strong regional differences (political, economic and social) make it impossible and/or undesirable to design and

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<sup>12</sup> Here Piattoni draws on the earlier work of Bagnasco (1988, 1977), Bagnasco et al. (1978), Piore and Sabel (1984), Storper (1997), and (1986)Trigilia (1986).

implement ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions. Finally, at the *polity* level, states of all types (unitary, regionalised or federal) are increasingly delegating decision-making powers, responsibilities and resources to sub-central administrative tiers. As will be seen in the forthcoming case study chapters both the UK and France are experiencing strong regional and local demands for greater autonomy—France in particular has for the past 30 years been undergoing a highly politicised and operationally complex process of decentralisation (see further chapter 6).

The third feature of multi-level governance is that domestic political arenas are interconnected rather than nested—that is to say that, domestic actors, and particularly sub-national actors, are not solely restricted to their national domestic arena, but can access the European arena independently of national governments, as well as link with other (sub-national) actors across the Union. This is a key difference with state-centric models of European integration which view a state’s domestic arena as a discrete entity that provides the sole channel for domestic political interests at the European level (see in particular Moravcsik 1993, 1994). Instead, Marks et al. (1996, p. 347) argued that “[states] no longer provide the sole interface between supranational and subnational arenas, and they share, rather than monopolise, control over many activities that take place in their respective territories”. This claim was further supported by Stephen George (2004) who asserted that empirical evidence indicated that subnational authorities had engaged in a process of mobilisation which had enabled them to access the European level directly without going through the central state; in particular he argued that subnational authorities had “actively claim[ed] a role in EU policy making [...] by exploiting factors such as the problems posed for central governments by economic globalization and the adoption of new strategies of public management, including decentralization” (ibid, p. 121). As will be seen in the subsequent case study chapters, regional and local actors from both the Greater Birmingham

and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region are actively involved with the work of large cross-national European associations, such as EUROCITIES, in an effort to shape EU policy to reflect their local needs.

Nonetheless, it is important here to make a distinction between *participation* in the European policy process and *influence* over policy and political decisions (Bache 2008, Perry 2007). Indeed, a number of scholars, among them Charlie Jeffery (1997, 2000) and Andrew Jordan (2001), have questioned whether multi-level governance 1) overstates the autonomy of sub-national authorities, and 2) mistakes evidence of sub-national mobilisation at European level as evidence of influence. Jeffery (2000) for example, whilst not denying that there has been increasing mobilisation on the part of subnational authorities (and the ‘regions’), stresses that this does not necessarily correspond equally to an increased level of influence on the EU policy process. In particular, he takes issue with the idea proposed by much of the subnational literature at the time that “[subnational authorities are] moving *beyond* the central state, that [subnational authorities] have become internationalized, gaining autonomous channels of access to the extra-state arena European policy-making” (ibid, p. 2: emphasis in original). In a contemporary reading of multi-level governance, Beth Perry (2007) usefully makes a distinction between *participation*, *influence* and *power*. Participation refers to subnational mobilisation and activity with limited impact on policy direction or content. Influence denotes “indirect impact [...] in shaping the actions of others” (ibid, p. 1054)—however, influence cannot always be fully controlled and as such, may have unintended consequences. Power in contrast is the overt capacity of an actor to *ensure a particular outcome*: it involves “both constraining (power over) and enabling (power to) components in terms of the imposition of will, as well as the possibilities for action” (ibid, p. 1054) (see further Jensen, Koop et al. 2014, Ritzer 1996, Dahl 1957). It is this conception of power that the thesis adopts.

Nonetheless, the question still remains as to *how* autonomous the regions are in reality in terms of being able to develop and influence EU policy, and specifically European (youth) employment policy, the focus of this research and traditionally firmly in the domain of national governments. Piattoni (2010) stresses that, the degree and type of pressure from below depends heavily on the individual country, and notably on its internal state structure, and traditions of political participation. Most importantly, “what counts most is not the sheer number of competences that have been devolved to lower governmental units, but rather the degree of autonomy that these have in setting their own goals.” (ibid, p. 50) Indeed, this point has particular relevance for this thesis given that both the UK and France have traditionally been highly unitary states, characterised by strong steering tendencies on the part of the central government at the expense of regional and local autonomy.

### **3.2. Core principle 2: Blurring of the boundary between the state and society<sup>13</sup>**

The second core principle underpinning multi-level governance is the growing inclusion of non-state actors in policy-making and implementation processes, and the shift away from state-dominated *government* to more open and pluralistic modes of *governance* (Pierre 2001, Bevir, Rhodes et al. 2003, Pierre, Peters 2000). As a result, state sovereignty as traditionally conceived is under threat from *within* the nation-state. The (gradual) incursion of non-state actors in previously centralised and state-held public functions can be attributed to two issues in particular. First, the adoption of new management strategies (such as New Public Management), as well as the shrinking of public budgets at a time of economic crisis, has served to draw central government’s attention to the financial benefits of using (external) non-state actors to deliver public functions (Knill, Lehmkuhl 2002, Kjaer 2004, Mörth 2009).

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<sup>13</sup> Other scholars refer to the blurring between “the public and the private” (see for example, Murray 1975, Perry, Rainey 1988, Rainey, Backoff et al. 1976, Rhodes 1988, 1997).

Social actors<sup>14</sup> are now more active in delivering public services that were previously under the jurisdiction of the central state, resulting in “a retrenchment of public administrations into the role of facilitators and regulators rather than producers and deliverers” (Piattoni 2010, p. 10, see further Ruzza 2004). Second, the inclusion of non-state actors—and especially those from civil society and the third sector—comes as a result of strengthening calls on the part of the public for greater democratic legitimacy (Loughlin, Aja et al. 2001, Griggs, Norval et al. 2016, Bevir 2010, European Commission 2001). In short, the blurring of the boundaries between the state and society describes the move away from a political/policy/polity process controlled solely by central government, to one in which various public-private actors participate; albeit, with often very varying degrees of influence. Piattoni for example, asserts “policy-making no longer separates neatly policy-makers from policy-takers, nor does it distinguish between public and private actors, but rather enlists all types of actors in all types of roles throughout the policy process.” (2010, p. 249)

On this point, a distinction needs to be made between sub-national *authorities* (i.e. government) and sub-national *actors* when talking about the subnational level—the latter may include the former, but also encompasses actors from the wider regional-local society, such as non-governmental organisations, civil society and the third sector, and the private sector. It should be noted that for the purposes of this research, the term ‘subnational actors’ is principally used throughout the thesis to reflect the broad range of participants involved in formulating and delivering (youth) employment policy (both European and national) and EU funds at regional-local level; where required a distinction is made between actors from regional-local government (i.e. sub-national authorities) and other participants.

### **3.3. Summary**

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<sup>14</sup> According to Piattoni (2010), ‘social actors’ may be nationally- and/or locally-based and include civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other issues-based groups.

To summarise, multi-level governance conceptualises “the structure of authoritative decision making [...] concerning the locus and practice of authoritative governance in a polity” (Marks 1996a, p. 22: emphasis added). Specifically, MLG posits that national member state governments are no longer able to monopolise decision- and policy-making in the European Union. Instead, parallel processes of institutional creation, subnational mobilisation and decisional reallocation have served to disperse authority and responsibility upwards, downwards, and outwards from central governments in a complex configuration of interdependencies that encompasses supranational institutions, subnational authorities and non-state actors. In a useful exercise, Perry (2007) differentiates between minimalist and maximalist manifestations of multi-level governance (see table 2.1 below). In a maximalist MLG environment, policy-making is characterised by “meaningful partnerships between national and sub-national tiers of governance, interconnectedness, strategic planning, top-down and bottom-up co-evolution (Sotarauta, Kautonen 2007) and negotiation and bargaining between actors with a tangible effect on outcomes.” (Perry 2007, p. 1055) At the other end of the spectrum, minimalist instances of MLG “can be seen as a resistance to genuine devolution on the part of national executives, characterized by ad hoc reactions to bottom-up demands, parallel policy processes, uneven patterns of interaction and sub-national mobilization and influence, rather than empowerment.” (ibid, pp. 1054-1055)

**Table 2.1: Perry’s two interpretations of multi-level governance**

Minimalist MLG	Maximalist MLG
Resistance to change	Embracing change
Controlling subnational developments	Facilitating subnational developments
Parallel policy processes	Joined-up policy processes
Ad hoc reactions	Strategic frameworks
Uneven patterns of interaction	Widespread regional engagement
Subnational mobilization	Subnational empowerment
Bottom-up lobbying	Negotiation and bargaining
National influence dominates	A mutual reshaping of agendas

*Source: Perry (2007), p. 1055*

Multi-level governance has sometimes been criticised for being a ‘description’ of policy-making, rather than a ‘theory’ of European integration and/or change in the conventional sense (Jordan 2001). However, it is precisely *because* it offers this multi-scale, multi-actor account of the EU policy process that multi-level governance provides a useful framework of reference. European youth employment policy (and its related EU funds) does not play out solely at EU or national level; both its ‘conceptualisation’ and its implementation at ground level also depend heavily on the aspirations and capacities of subnational actors. The three territorial levels highlighted by multi-level governance—supranational, national and



subnational—mirror the policy levels through which European youth employment policy (and the related EU funds) is formulated and implemented. Multi-level governance, by highlighting the multiplicity of governance in the EU, provides an appropriate ‘lens’ and heuristic device through which to identify, situate, and analyse the governance of European youth employment policy. Nonetheless, while the MLG literature provides a broad series of explanations for why central governments (and national political leaders) might (willingly or unwillingly) transfer decision-making authority to alternative actors and territorial scales, it does not identify precise *mediating factors* that may support or hinder the occurrence of multi-level governance, as a distinct mode of policy-making. For this, the thesis now draws on the literature on Europeanization.

#### **4. Bringing in mediating factors: A focussed review of the Europeanization literature**

Over the past two decades, studies on ‘Europeanization’ have carved out a distinct place in academic research on the European Union, its polity, policies and politics. However, a review of the literature reveals it to be a contested and multifaceted concept, difficult to define and one whose meaning varies (sometimes significantly) depending on the theoretical and conceptual approach adopted, and the policy or subject area selected (Bulmer 2007, Radaelli 2003, Börzel, Risse 2003, see for instance Zartaloudis 2014, Graziano, Vink 2007, Bache, Jordan 2006, Börzel 2003, 2001b, Featherstone, Radaelli 2003, Olsen 2002, Cowles, Caporaso et al. 2001). As Johan Olsen (2002, p. 1) notes, Europeanization has many “faces”. It is useful then to clarify from the outset, that this thesis adheres to the usage within the literature, of Europeanization as a conceptual framework through which to observe the *impact* of the European Union on member states’ domestic structures, policies and politics, and the “adjustment processes” that this subsequently engenders (or not, as the case may be) (Bulmer 2007, p. 47).

The thesis draws specifically on the three-step model of Europeanization initially developed by Thomas Risse, Maria Green Cowles, and James Caporaso (2001), and subsequently revised by Bache (2008). The model not only sets out a process by which member states’ domestic structures and policies change as a result of pressure from the EU-level, but also identifies a number of mediating factors that can affect the process. Here then, by drawing on the concept of Europeanization the thesis addresses one of the weaknesses of the MLG literature; namely, its lack of precision regarding the specific features of the domestic and international policy environment that influence the manifestation of multi-level governance. With regard to this research project, the “three-step” model consequently offers a framework through which to analyse the extent to which (and the way in which) EU youth

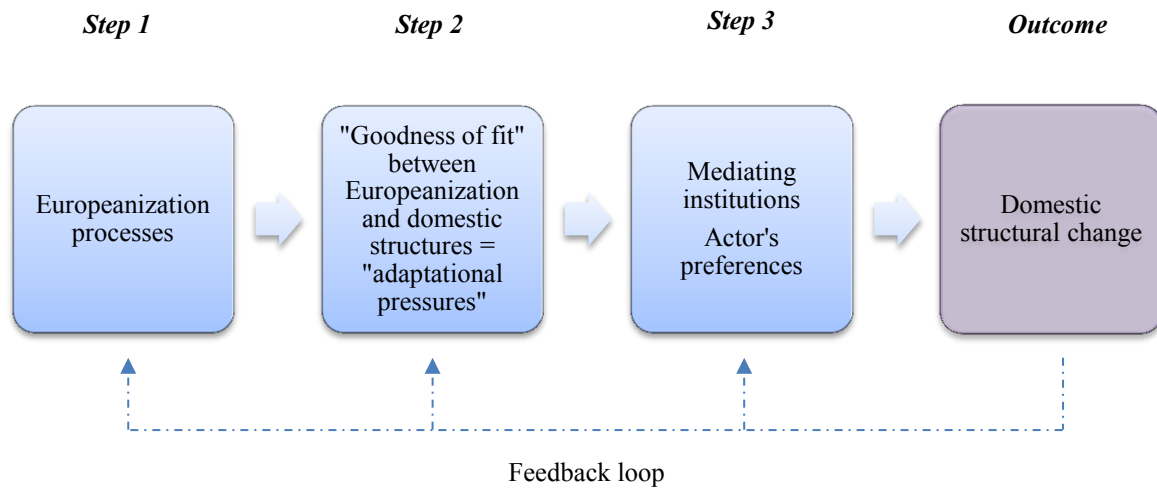
employment policy has engendered multi-level governance in England and France (see further chapter 4, the EU case)—as well as, highlighting features within the domestic system that might support or hinder its development.

#### **4.1. A “three-step” framework of domestic adaptational change**

As its name suggests, the framework follows three distinct ‘steps’ or stages of analysis to explain change among domestic structures as a result of actions at the EU-level. In the original design conceived by Risse et al. (2001) the three stages are as follows: in step one the researcher identifies relevant processes of Europeanization; in step two, the researcher assesses the “goodness of fit” between ‘European structures’ and ‘domestic structures’; and finally, in step three the researcher identifies the “mediating factors” that influence the extent to which domestic structures will adapt to European structures (see figure 2.1). It should also be noted that Europeanization encompasses both top-down and bottom-up dimensions: not only does the EU affect member states (through formal (i.e. EU institutions) and informal mechanisms (i.e. norms and values) as a result top-down pressure, so too do the member states (including both the national and subnational levels) seek to ‘upload’ their policy preferences to the EU-level through a parallel bottom-up process. In this way, Europeanization is a continuous and cyclic process in which the EU “both affects and is affected by domestic processes” (Bache, George et al. 2011, p. 60).

In this sense, the concept of Europeanization helps to bring in an explicit notion of fluidity, movement and change, which is perhaps missing from the MLG literature—and is vital for a study into the extent, and manner in which EU youth employment policy has affected domestic structures and policy arrangements.

**Figure 2.1: The original “three-step” framework of domestic adaptational change**

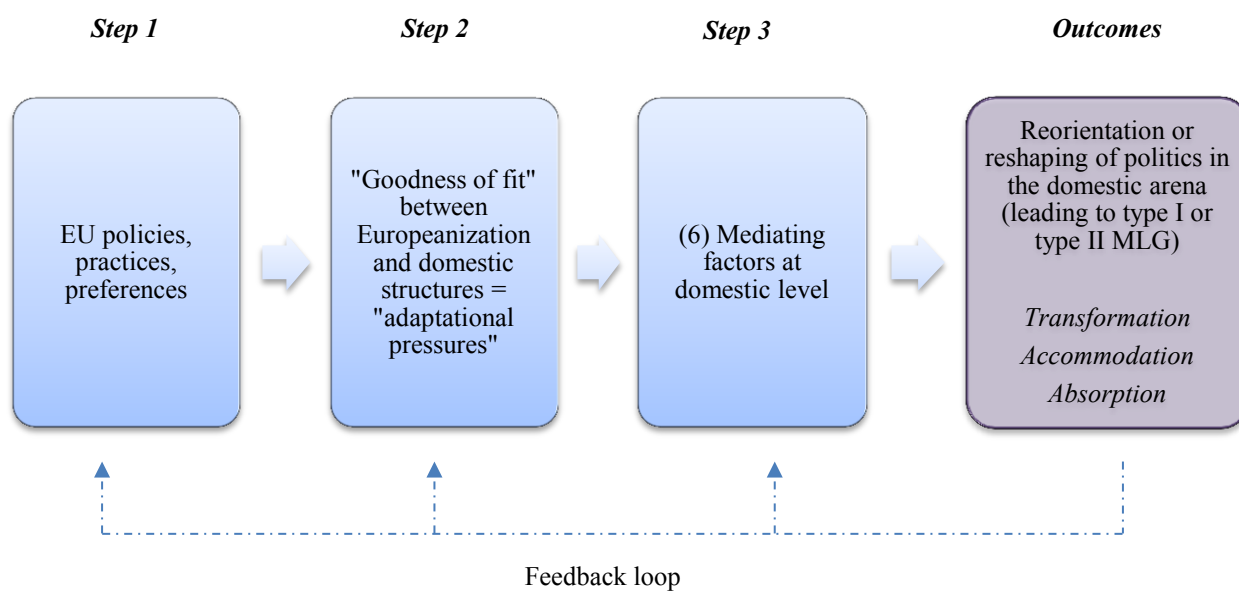


*Source: Risse, Cowles and Caporaso, 2001, p. 6 (captions added)*

The model’s comparatively clear and easily distinguishable three-stage approach has influenced many subsequent authors. In his revised version, Bache (2008) maintains the framework’s essential features, but makes some alterations in accordance with his specific research focus; namely his exploration of the relationship between Europeanization and multi-level governance (see figure 2.2 below). Most notably, Bache adopts a different definition of Europeanization [revised step 1], introduces an additional variable to the list of mediating factors [revised step 3] and specifies three categories of domestic change [revised outcome] in line with his focus on multi-level governance. In addition, Bache incorporates a model of simultaneous complex and non-complex causality in an attempt to distinguish between changes resulting from domestic pressures and those resulting from Europeanization; as part of this, the author proposes the inclusion of an additional test variable to indicate the presence of “deep” Europeanization—that is, a fundamental shift in domestic actors’ preferences as a result of their interaction with the EU (ibid, p. 5). The remainder of this sub-section sets out the framework’s analytical stages in further detail;

while the focus is on Bache's revised interpretation, elements of Risse et al.'s original contribution are also included where relevant.

**Figure 2.2: Bache's revised "three-step" framework of domestic adaptational change**



Source: Bache 2008, p. 17 (feedback loop and captions added)

**Step 1: Identifying EU policies, practices and preferences**

In the original framework, this first step involves identifying 'relevant' Europeanization processes, which, Risse et al. (2001, p. 3) defined as "the emergence and development of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social institutions" that might subsequently require (although may not result in) adjustment at member state level in order to achieve compliance. However, this definition has been criticised for its emphasis on the *creation* of structures (especially those at the EU-level), rather than their *impact* on member states (see notably Radaelli 2003). Motivated by this critique in particular, and drawing on his

earlier work with Andrew Jordan (Bache, Jordan 2006, p. 30), Bache proposed an alternative definition of Europeanization, which conceives the phenomenon as the *effect* of the EU on domestic politics: “Europeanization is understood as ‘the reorientation and reshaping of politics in the domestic arena in ways that reflect policies, practices or preferences advanced through the EU-system of governance’.” (Bache 2008, p. 9) In this way, the definition explicitly views Europeanization as a process of *change*—and clearly distinguishes it from the larger theoretical concept of European integration, an issue with the earlier literature (see Olsen 2002 for a discussion). It is important to highlight here that Bache employs the term ‘*politics*’ in its broadest sense, encompassing all “concerns with polity, politics and policy dimensions. [...] Thus ‘politics’ incorporates notions of governance change, which is the concern here.” (Bache 2008, p. 20) In addition, he further clarifies ‘*preferences*’ to “mean an ‘expressed desire’, whether driven by instrumental or value-laden motives.” (ibid, p. 20)—this is a particularly important modification for this research, where political ‘messages’ and ‘visions’, and other value-based statements form a key feature of European (youth) employment policy. In line with this re-conceptualisation, Risse et al.’s first step of ‘identifying relevant processes of Europeanization’ is amended to ‘*identifying EU policies, practices and preferences*’. As part of this process, Bache also highlights the need to take into account the “legal status and precision” of these policies, practices and preferences in order to reflect appropriately on the adaptational pressures “coming down” from the EU (ibid, p. 16). It is worth noting that although Bache’s definition does not make any reference to the subnational level within the domestic arena, his subsequent empirical research contained a strong regional dimension. Clearly, the ‘domestic arena’ referenced in Bache’s definition necessarily includes all domestic structures, including those located at the subnational level; however, there is a potential risk that the lack of explicit reference to the subnational level could lead scholars to ‘gloss’ over the impact of EU policies, practices and preferences on

subnational actors, as well as their role in operationalising these policies, practices and preferences. Indeed, a significant proportion of the previous research on Europeanization has often tended to focus on the phenomenon from either a predominantly EU or a national/central perspective, ignoring the impact on, and role of, the subnational level (Radaelli 2003, see for example Graziano, Vink 2007, Featherstone, Radaelli 2003). As will be seen in the forthcoming country case chapters (chapters 5 and 6) however, the experiences of regional/local actors do not necessarily match the experiences of national or central government actors—and as such, offer valuable insight into internal and supranational territorial dynamics (see also Bukowski, Piattoni et al. 2002).

### ***Step 2: Assessing the ‘goodness of fit’***

Once the relevant EU policies, practices and preferences have been identified, the next step to consider how well (or not) these match domestic politics and preferences; that is, the ‘goodness of fit’. For this research, this means assessing the extent to which the domestic structural and policy arrangements in place in England and France ‘match’ the MLG principles contained in the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative.

It is important to note here that EU policies, practices and preferences, while a necessary condition for change, are not sufficient by themselves to *induce* change; rather, it is the goodness of fit between the EU and domestic arenas that determines the degree of pressure on domestic structures to adapt, the so-called ‘adaptational pressure’ (Risse, Cowles et al. 2001, also Knill, Lehmkuhl 2002). Member states with a significant mismatch (‘poor fit’) between EU and domestic policies, practices and preferences will experience a strong adaptational pressure to change, in order to counteract tensions and inconsistencies between the two; while, member states with a good match (‘good fit’) will experience weaker

adaptational pressures, and will likely evidence little to no change in their domestic structures. Risse et al. (2001, p. 7) differentiate between two types of adaptational pressure: policy misfit and direct adaptational pressure. As its name suggests, policy misfit results from a misfit between the rules and regulations of European policies and those of domestic policies; this mismatch then places pressure on the domestic level, and particularly on the political and administrative structures, to adjust. In parallel, Europeanization can also apply direct adaptational pressure on embedded domestic institutional structures; for example, on domestic subnational territorial institutions (Börzel 2001a), national administrative styles (Knill, Lenschow 2001) or collective understandings of national identity (Risse 2001). Bache, in his revised framework, highlights the continuing usefulness of the concept of “goodness of fit”, whilst recognising however, that it has been subject to a number of criticisms; including, most importantly, “the argument that EU frameworks and policies have no “absolute” existence, but are subject to interpretation” (2008, p. 16). In addition, he stresses that, as with the presence of EU policies, practices and preferences, a poor fit between EU and domestic structures—although a necessary prerequisite for change—does not on its own automatically result in domestic adaptation. This will instead depend on a number of mediating factors within the domestic arena.

### ***Step 3: Detecting and examining mediating factors***

The presence of adaptational pressure does not necessarily translate into significant change at the domestic level: it needs to be supported by “facilitating factors [that enable] actors to induce or push through institutional change” (Risse, Cowles et al. 2001, p. 12). Risse et al. contend that the extent to which a member state will adjust its domestic structure to European changes (or not) depends on five “mediating factors”: 1) multiple veto points in the domestic



structure; 2) the presence of facilitating formal institutions; 3) the country's organisational and policy-making cultures; 4) the differential empowerment of domestic actors; and 5) learning. The first three factors relate to *structural* features, that is to say “the institutional and cultural conditions that facilitate or prohibit flexible responses to adaptational pressures” (ibid, p. 9), while the last two concern *agency*:

- *Multiple veto points in the domestic structure*: put simply, the less centralised/the more diffuse power is in a political system and the more actors able to shape/direct the policy-making process, the harder it will be to attain the ‘domestic consensus’ needed to implement domestic structural change in response to adaptational pressures (see also Scharpf's 'joint-decision trap':1988, 2006)—i.e. the more actors with the power to ‘veto’ proposed changes, the more likelihood there is of this happening and the more difficult it is to push through change.
- *Mediating formal institutions*: these “provide actors with the material and ideational resources to induce structural change” (Risse, Cowles et al. 2001, p. 9). The authors give the example of the British Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) which proved crucial in enabling women's organisations to fully utilise the recently introduced EU Equal Pay and Equal Treatment Directive to further gender equality in the UK.
- *Political and organisational culture*: unlike the two former factors (which affect the *capacity* of actors to resist or instigate change), political and organisational cultures *influence* the actors themselves—for example by defining collective understandings of appropriate behaviour, specifically the ‘logic of appropriateness’ (March, Olsen

1998). This can be either positive or negative depending on the context; for example, a culture of cooperative decision-making (i.e. Germany) may counteract the issue of multiple veto points; equally, in those member states where a confrontational decision-making culture prevails (i.e. Spain), the problem of multiple veto points may be exacerbated.

- *Differential empowerment of domestic actors*: in short, it depends on where power rests in the domestic setting as to which actors are most able to promote or resist change. Here the authors expect “domestic actors [to] use Europeanization as an opportunity to further their goals” (Risse, Cowles et al. 2001, p. 11).
- *Learning*: here Risse et al. draw particular attention to the process of “complex” or “double-loop” learning (as opposed to “thin” or “single-loop” learning), which results in a *fundamental* shift in actors’ interests and identities (ibid. p. 12).

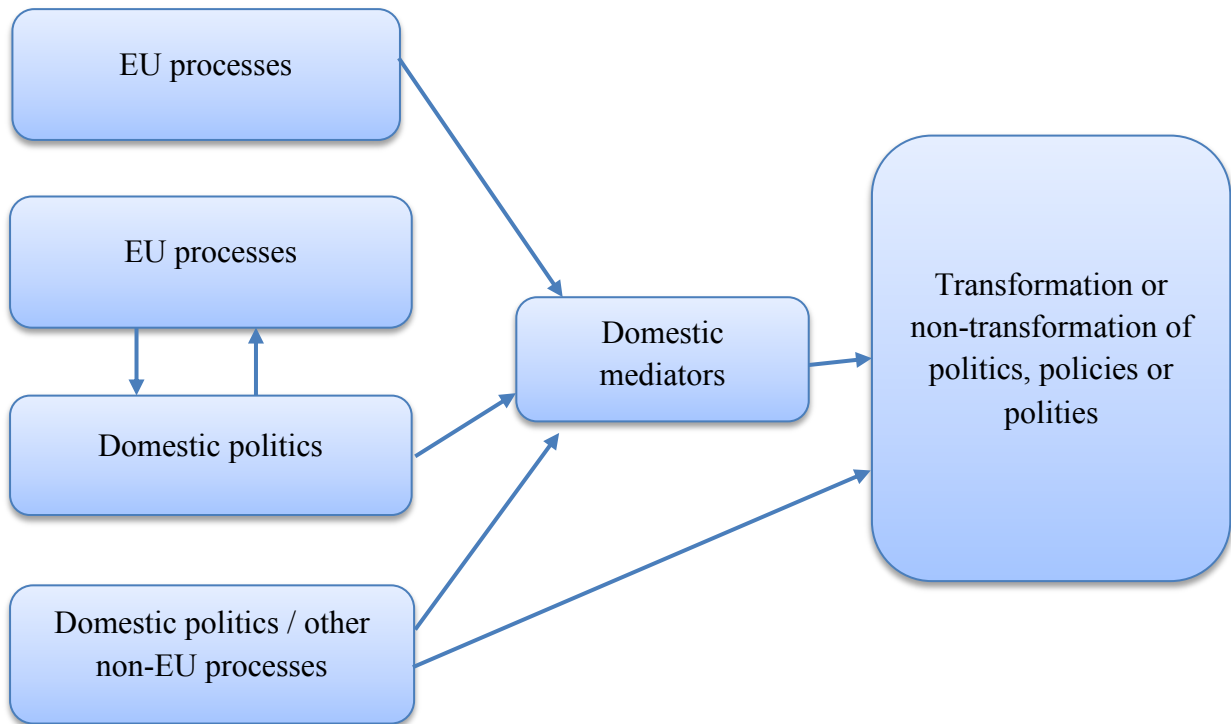
The authors stress that both adaptational pressures and mediating factors present are likely to vary significantly between policy areas and between member states. Each of the 28 EU member states is characterised by its own distinct set of political, legal, economic and societal structures; although some countries might share similar features and histories, no member state is the same. As such, each will face its own set of adaptational pressures, and, crucially, national characteristics and particularities (often deeply-rooted) will affect the way that member states react to (and adjust to) adaptational pressure. Indeed, Risse et al. note that even with the presence of facilitating factors, national governments may simply decide to ignore these demands; this is known as an ‘implementation deficit’.

Bache (2008) adds a sixth mediating factor to this list: that of *political or partisan contestation* underlining that domestic political and/or partisan conflicts affect the way in which Europeanization impacts on the domestic institutional, policy and political structure. In this way, he addresses Peter Mair's (2004) criticism that much of the existing research on Europeanization had (at the time of his writing) not paid sufficient attention to the political dynamics at play within the system. In particular, Bache pointed to the example of the British majoritarian political system, where "the outcome of national elections can transform the prospects for Europeanization depending on the value structure of the party in government" (Bache 2008, p. 17).

In short, the three-step model points to six distinct areas where the impact of EU policies, practices and preferences on the domestic sphere may be enabled or hindered. However, these, by necessity, represent relatively broad categories to guide researchers in their scholarly work. As indicated in Chapter 1, this thesis is interested in pinpointing the *specific* factors that have served to shape the degree to which instances of multi-level governance are observable around the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. As a result, the six mediating factors outlined above will be used as a starting point for identifying the precise institutional conditions, actors and activities that are supporting, or inhibiting occurrences of multi-level governance. There are two reasons for this. First, from a theoretical perspective, a narrowed approach to mediating factors will provide further empirical evidence to support the three-step model approach. It will also add further detail and nuance to our existing understanding of the mechanisms through which EU policies, practices and preferences are shaped at the domestic level. Second, it has implications for practice: a better understanding of the policy process provides policy-makers with the evidence needed to make changes (if appropriate).

In addition, a narrowed-focus on the mediating factors will also allow for the research to better take into account the model of complex and non-complex causality that Bache (2008) proposed in his revisions to the original three-step approach. Specifically, drawing on the methodological work of Sabine Saurugger (2005) (see figure 2.3 below), the model aims to address Bache's criticism that the original three-step framework does not adequately take into account change that is driven by purely domestic politics and processes in isolation from the EU (Bache 2008, p. 18, see also Saurugger 2005, p. 292). Essentially, the model counsels the researcher to be aware that domestic politics and other non-EU processes may have a greater influence on domestic mediators and domestic politics than EU processes. However, as will be seen in the empirical case chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6) and the comparative discussion chapter (chapter 7), identifying complex and non-complex causality is not as easy to achieve as it looks on paper.

**Figure 2.3: Modelling for simultaneous complex and non-complex causality**



*Source: Bache 2008, p. 19*

The literature on Europeanization thus offers a series of mechanisms that will allow this thesis to understand, and subsequently explain, the degree of MLG in existence around the formulation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI in England and France. In particular, by using a focussed approach to Europeanization in combination with the MLG approach, the thesis is able to clarify the processes and pressures that create more/less multi-level governance in the two country cases.

### ***Final box: Outcomes***

The final box in the schematic relates to the outcome of the Europeanization process. In the original framework, Risse et al. (2001) simply make reference to “domestic structural change” (see figure 2.1 above); Bache (2008, pp. 17-18) revises this to the more specific “reorientation or reshaping of politics in the domestic arena (leading to type I or type II multi-level governance<sup>15</sup>)” (see figure 2.2 above), in line with his revised definition of Europeanization (step 1), and with the particular focus of his research on the relationship between Europeanization and multi-level governance. Here, Bache applies a three-fold categorisation of domestic change developed by Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse (2003), thereby providing a graduated spectrum of outcomes. Börzel and Risse, drawing heavily on rationalist and sociological institutionalism, identify three degrees of domestic change; these move from *absorption* at the lowest end of the scale, through to *accommodation*, and *transformation* at the other end of the scale:

- *Absorption* occurs when member states subsume European policies or ideas into domestic structures or programmes, but do not substantially adjust existing institutions, policies or processes. Here, the degree of domestic change is *low*.
- *Accommodation* occurs when member states accommodate Europeanization pressures by adapting existing process, policies and institutions without changing their essential

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<sup>15</sup> In an important later body of work, Hooghe and Marks (2003) distinguished between two ‘types’ of multi-level governance: Type I and Type II. Type I follows a predominantly federalist trajectory and is characterised by general-purpose jurisdictions; non-intersecting memberships; a limited number of jurisdictional levels; and system wide durable architecture. In contrast, Type II MLG is characterised by task-specific jurisdictions; intersecting memberships; many jurisdictional levels; and a flexible design (ibid). Put simply, the two types contrast a structured view of governance, organised around specific jurisdictional areas (Type I) with a more flexible and wide-reaching governance, which operates across territorial levels and in many different jurisdictions (Type II). However, in practice many scholars have found this typology (and in particular Type II MLG) difficult to translate into an analysis of ‘real-world’ political structures (Piattoni 2010, Alcantara, Broschek et al. 2016, p. 37, Ongaro, Massey et al. 2010, Skelcher 2005).

features and the underlying collective understandings attached to them. This is often used to explain the ‘patchwork’ image of EU regulation. Here the degree of domestic change is *modest*.

- *Transformation* occurs when member states fundamentally change their policies, processes and institutions, either by replacing them with new and substantially different ones, or by altering them so significantly that their essential features and/or collective understandings are profoundly changed. Here, the degree of change is *high*.

The authors underline that the choice of category to describe an incidence of change depends on whether the observer adopts a rational or a sociological institutionalist approach. Under rational institutionalism, transformation will take place in the presence of high and medium adaptational pressure with the necessary facilitating factors, namely the presence (or otherwise) and activities of multiple veto points and facilitating formal institutions: “the more Europeanization provides new opportunities and constraints (high adaptational pressure), the more likely a redistribution of resources is, which may alter the domestic balance of power and which may empower domestic actors to effectively mobilize for policy change by overriding domestic veto points” (Börzel, Risse 2003, p. 70). In contrast, sociological institutionalism contends that *gradual* transformation will only occur when there is medium adaptational pressure combined with the necessary facilitating factors; namely the presence (or otherwise) and activities of ‘change agents’ or norm entrepreneurs (and specifically, epistemic communities and advocacy/principled issue networks) and informal institutions and political culture. Indeed, under sociological institutionalism, high adaptational pressure is likely to engender high levels of domestic resistance to change, thus preventing adjustment (ibid, p. 70).

In addition, Bache incorporates a test variable to isolate evidence of profound change in order to highlight the presence of “deep” Europeanization: specifically, evidence of EU policies, practices, and preferences being voluntarily used to shape domestic policies and practices as a result of actor preferences changing through engagement with the EU (2008, pp. 18-19). Here, his revised definition of Europeanization as the reorientation or reshaping of politics in the domestic arena provides an important template through which to analyse change: “in this definition, reorientation equates to the more strategic response characteristic of thin learning [more related to ‘absorption’], while reshaping relates more to thick learning [more related to ‘transformation’]” (Bache 2008, p. 18). It is worth noting here that Cowles et al. (2001) stressed that even where member states are subject to adaptational pressure (due to poor fit), this will not necessarily translate into significant change at the domestic level—national governments may simply decide to ignore these demands, known as an ‘implementation deficit’. This will be seen in the case of England in chapter 5.

The next sub-section presents the adapted analytical framework tailored to this research project, and sets out the thesis’ guiding research questions.

## **5. Operationalising MLG: Research questions and analytical framework**

This research project seeks to shed light on the extent to which the concept of multi-level governance explains policy-making in the field of EU youth employment policy—with a particular focus on the national and local experiences of two highly unitary member states, the United Kingdom (England) and France. In a contemporary reconceptualization of MLG, Christopher Alcantara et al. (2016) posit that it is more helpful to think in terms of *instances* of multi-level governance, rather than a multi-level *system* of governance: MLG is thus “a



distinct ‘*instance*’ or *occurrence of actor configuration* within the broader category of multilevel politics.” (ibid, pp. 37-38: emphasis added) Instances are further defined as “episodes or moments of interaction, rather than formal rules or large-scale mechanisms that are at the core of a polity’s overarching political and legal architecture” (ibid, p. 38). In this way, a polity can exhibit a variety of policy-making modes depending on the policy area under observation: for example, certain policy areas might be characterised by multi-level governance, whilst others by intergovernmental relations. Consequently, examples of multi-level governance might easily co-exist within a broader federal or unitary ‘over-structure’. With this recalibration in mind, the thesis asks whether the formulation and implementation of EU youth employment policy in these two member states has led to a shift in (domestic) patterns of governance away from centralised control (*government*) towards a *mode* of policy-making characterised by decision-making authority and responsibilities (a) spread across multiple territorial levels (*multi-level*) and (b) encompassing non-state actors (*governance*)? Accordingly, the primary question that guides this study is as follows:

1. To what extent has EU youth employment policy promoted instances of multi-level governance in the two highly unitary member states of the United Kingdom (England) and France?

Drawing on Bache (2008), a set of three further secondary research questions have been developed to help guide the research:

- 1.1 What are the relevant aspects of EU youth employment policy in regard to analysing its effects on multi-level governance and through what mechanisms and with what degree of force do these impact England and France?
- 1.2 What is the degree of ‘fit’ between the EU’s vision of youth employment policy and the domestic policy in England and France? To what extent do the domestic policy arrangements in place in England and France exhibit the features of multi-level governance? (*Degree of fit*)
- 1.3 Which mediating factors (if any) are enabling or preventing the implementation of EU youth employment policy and instances of multi-level governance in England and France?

To answer these questions, this thesis undertakes three analytical tasks in an adapted version of the “three-step” approach to domestic structural change, outlined above.

- **Step 1:** It identifies the elements within EU youth employment policy that promote multi-level governance. This requires a comprehensive review of EU youth employment policy, and in particular its core components, the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). This step is contained within chapter 4, the EU case.
- **Step 2:** It discerns the extent to which multi-level governance characterises the way in which EU youth employment policy is formulated and implemented—that is the ‘goodness of fit’ between EU ‘aspiration’ (illustrated in step 1) and the reality of the

EU policy process. This step necessitates a detailed investigation into each territorial level (EU, national and subnational) and national setting (England and France) to discern the extent to which certain decision-making authority and responsibilities in this policy area have been transferred away from central government to supranational, subnational and non-state actors. Here, this research draws on Crespy et al. (2007, p. 1071) who identify three criteria for operationalising MLG in policy studies:

1. The relative roles and responsibilities of territorial actors, with a diluted (albeit) dominant role for the central state;
2. The existence and operation of areas of negotiation and bargaining between national and regional actors in the definition of priorities and allocation of resources; and
3. The capacities of different subnational actors to exploit nationally-created opportunities and /or develop policy from the bottom-up.

The results of this exercise are presented in the empirical chapters, chapters 4, 5, and 6.

- **Step 3:** It identifies the factors that are facilitating or hindering the emergence of multi-level governance in England and France, with regard to EU youth employment policy. As outline above, here the thesis employs a narrower focus to the six broad mediating factors set out in the original three-step model in order to pinpoint the precise aspects within the policy process that support or inhibit MLG.

- **Final step:** It classifies the outcome. Here, the thesis adopts Perry's (2007) two-fold categorisation of instances multi-level governance: namely, maximalist versus minimalist interpretations of MLG (see table 2.1 above).

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has set out the theoretical concepts that underpin this research. Multi-level governance, and its portrait of a complex, multi-layered and multi-‘actored’ process of policy-making and implementation, forms the ‘backbone’ of this project. The literature on Europeanization and in particular the “three-step” approach to domestic structural change further supports the thesis’ analytical capacity by highlighting a series of mediating factors that may impact (positively or negatively) on the practice of multi-level governance. The chapter built on the two literatures to outline its own tailored analytical approach to the research puzzle, identifying three analytical tasks to be undertaken. The findings are presented in the forthcoming empirical chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6). The next chapter presents the thesis’ research design, and the research methods employed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN & RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **1. Introduction**

A first necessary step in any empirical research is to clarify the research design and research methods to be used. As outlined in the previous chapters, this thesis considers the extent to which EU youth employment policy has promoted multi-level governance in England and France. As part of this, the research investigates how EU, national and regional-local policy actors in the two countries are interacting around the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative—key components of the EU's youth employment policy. Given the inherent complexity of policy processes and the important role that is often played by hidden or informal processes, as well as the significant influence of human agency on decision-making, quantitative research methods provide very limited scope for an in-depth understanding of the dynamics at play. Instead, the thesis employs qualitative research methods to build up a thorough picture of the policy activities that are taking place across the different territorial levels involved in the creation and delivery of EU youth employment policy—and to identify the impact that these dynamics are having on domestic governance arrangements. In this way, the research delves beneath the smooth outward-facing surface of EU youth employment policy, to shine a light on the messy, 'behind-the-scenes' reality of policy-making and implementation.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section two outlines the research design in greater detail; and notably, the case study method adopted and the cases selected. Section three sets out the research methods employed. Section four describes the way in which the

data was then analysed. The chapter then closes with some concluding remarks and introduces Part II of the thesis, the empirical case chapters.

## **2. Research design: A ‘paired comparison’ case study approach**

The research is designed around a comparative case study, based on the ‘paired comparison’ (Tarrow 2010) of two cases, England and France—and within these two member states, on the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, at the subnational level. Figure 3.1 provides an illustration of the case study.

**Figure 3.1: The case study**

Policy area	Territorial level		← Multi-level governance →
EU youth employment policy	<b>European</b>		
	↓		
	<b>National</b>		
↓ Youth Employment Package	England	France	
& Youth Employment Initiative	↓		
	<b>Subnational</b>		
	Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)	Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC)	

The case study approach has been chosen because it enables an intensive and extensive enquiry into the phenomenon under observation (Feagin, Orum et al. 1991, Meyer 2001, Larsson 1993, Gerring 2007, 2004)—and one which, critically, takes into account the “real-life” context, in which said phenomenon takes place (Yin 2008, p. 18). As Kathleen Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534: emphasis added) has stated, “a case study is a research strategy which focuses on *understanding the dynamics* present within single settings”. Indeed, Wilbur Schramm (1971, p. 6) has argued that, “the essence of a case study [...] is that it tries to

illuminate a decision or a set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result.” In this way, the case study method is inherently suited to the needs of this research project. A *comparative* approach has been chosen in order to be able to contrast the experiences of the two case countries, and to consequently identify and analyse the presence of “empirical relationships among variables” (Lijphart 1971, p. 683, see also Lijphart 1975). This will in turn allow the thesis to draw broader conclusions about policy-making in the EU’s multi-level system of governance. Thus, the comparative method reinforces the case study method. The strategy of a ‘paired comparison’—that is to say, the presence of *two* cases—has been selected because it enables a thorough analysis of the implementation of EU youth employment policy in each member state setting that would not be feasible with a larger number of cases, whilst still allowing important comparisons to be drawn between the two cases, which similarly would not be possible with a single-case design (Tarrow 2010).

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the case study method has a number of well-documented weaknesses. Robert Yin (2008, pp. 14-16) notes that critiques of case studies as a research method predominantly centre on four issues. First, a perceived lack of methodological rigour in their design, implementation and the subsequent analyses of the data uncovered (Meyer 2001, see also Eisenhardt 1989). Second, detractors point to the issue of generalisability of the conclusions drawn from case studies—and in particular, in those studies that only involve a small number of cases. This criticism has also been levelled at comparative research (Burnham, Gilland Lutz et al. 2008, pp. 66-68). Third, conducting a ‘good-quality’ case study requires a great deal of time, effort and a particular skill set: as Schramm (1971, p. 11) notes, case study research “places an enormous responsibility on the researcher”. Part of this challenge is how to turn what is likely to be a huge amount of data into an accessible and readable end-product that offers pertinent and appropriate conclusions



and learning. Finally, Yin (2008, p. 15) points to a supposed decline in the use of case studies in the face of growing interest in randomized field trials (also known as ‘field experiments’) (see also George, Bennett 2005). Given that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to conduct an experiment that accurately replicates the ‘real-world’ formulation and implementation of EU youth employment policy, this final criticism can be discounted for the purposes of this research on the grounds of practicality. The first three criticisms however, need to be addressed.

Two steps have been taken to ensure methodological rigour. Firstly, the case study does not take place in a conceptual vacuum. It is guided by a distinct set of theoretical propositions drawn from the literatures of multi-level governance and Europeanization (outlined in the previous chapter) (Hartley 1994, Gummesson 1999). It is therefore a *theoretically-informed* case study. Secondly, in line with the literature on case studies (Meyer 2001, Larsson 1993, Yin 2008, Eisenhardt 1989), the author has clarified the investigative purpose of the case study, developed a clear research design, selected appropriate data collection methods, and pursued a clearly-defined analytic strategy through which to analyse the data collected (more on which below). The evidence of this methodological process is contained within this chapter.

The concern surrounding the generalisability of case studies is both valid and complex. However, it should be noted that the primary objective of this research is to examine the *utility* of a multi-level governance analytical framework. In this sense, it can be understood as a *test* case, in that it provides a workable method through which to assess the applicability of the theoretical arguments put forward by MLG. Moreover, Yin (2008, p. 15: emphasis added) contends that “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to *theoretical propositions* and not to populations or universes”. A key element with

comparative research design is the choice of cases, to allow for a degree of generalisability (Burnham, Gilland Lutz et al. 2008). This is discussed in further detail below.

With regard to the third critique: While it is certainly true that case studies require a great deal of commitment on the part of the researcher, the benefits of case study research far outweigh the ‘costs’ (time and effort). Namely, the capacity of case studies to build a rich empirical account of the formulation and implementation of EU youth employment policy—and one that is able to take into account the ‘real-life’ experiences of the policy actors involved at multiple territorial levels. Careful attention has been paid to the presentation of the data in the case chapters; and especially to the chapter organisation (so as to aid cross-case comparison) and to the accessibility of the writing style.

## **2.1. Case selection**

An essential stage within both case study and comparative research design is the selection of appropriate cases (Lijphart 1971, 1975, Burnham, Gilland Lutz et al. 2008). This thesis contains both a policy and a geographical dimension: it is in essence a geographically-delimited policy sector study. Here then, there are two questions to answer from a methodological point of view: 1) why EU youth employment policy?; and 2) why England and France, and, more specifically, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region?

First, as regards the choice of policy, with the exception of a few notable examples (Zartaloudis 2014, Zeitlin, Pochet et al. 2005, Heidenreich, Zeitlin 2009, Büchs 2007, Zeitlin, Trubek 2002, 2013, 2015), EU employment policy—and EU *youth* employment policy more specifically—has, to date, been largely under-researched by those interested in furthering EU

governance and policy coordination analysis. Over the next decade, however, the issue of youth employment/unemployment will be an increasingly critical topic and a central delivery 'feature' of the Europe 2020 vision (the EU's new strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth); and all of this at a time when Europe is experiencing fundamental economic and social transformation at all geographical scales. It is therefore, an extremely salient policy area, in need of greater investigation.

Second, the geographical boundaries of the research have been driven by three inter-related considerations. The first consideration was that both the member state and subnational cases had to be eligible for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative. The YEI is a central component of EU youth employment policy. Thus, its inclusion within the research is vital to be able to investigate the full EU policy-making and implementation process. It also allows distinctions to be drawn between adaptation due to *policy* and adaptation due to *funding*. The subnational dimension is essential because, as will be seen in the next chapter on the EU case (chapter 4), the YEI is only available to particular *regions* in need and not to member states as a whole. The second consideration concerned the focus of the research project on *centralised* EU member states. Previous scholarship has frequently prioritised decentralised or federal member states (Jeffery 1997, Benz 2000, 2007, Jeffery 2007, Mayntz 1999, Conzelmann 1998, Sutcliffe 2000), or on the differences between decentralised and centralised states (Jeffery 1997, Jordan, Schout 2006, 1996). Further, academic research has often concentrated on EU regional policy (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, Bache 2008, 1992, 1993, Marks 1996b, Hooghe 1996a, 1998, De Lassalle 2010, Bailey, De Propris 2002, Benz, Eberlein 1999), EU environmental policy (Knill, Lenschow 2001, Heinelt 2008, Knill, Tosun 2008, Fairbrass, Jordan 2004, Lenschow 2002, Weale, Pridham et al. 2000), comparisons of multiple policy sectors (Piattoni 2010, Benson 2015, Heinelt, Knodt 2011, Enderlein, Walti et al. 2010), or on a specific territorial level (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007, Perry 2007, De

Lassalle 2010, Marks, Hooghe 1996, Elcock 2014, Bache, Andreou et al. 2011). There is subsequently a lack of 1) detailed comparison of two-like systems—and notably, between two highly centralised national systems, with strong steering tendencies—and 2) intensive policy sector studies that chart the negotiation and implementation of one policy area, as it simultaneously plays out across three (or more) territorial levels. This is where the contribution of this research project lies. Centralised states have often been treated within the literature as ‘black boxes’, with little investigation as to how they differ substantively from one another—and, thus, risks ignoring the implications that these divergent cases may have for our understanding of multi-level governance. France has often been overlooked as the object of detailed study despite its intrinsic structural challenges to multi-level coordination. Moreover, much of the existing literature and empirical investigation on the United Kingdom has emphasised the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with less attention paid to the English regions.

The third consideration was that both cases should be ‘least likely’ environments for the manifestation of multi-level governance in order to represent a deeper ‘test’. As indicated earlier in the thesis, both the UK and France have a strongly unitary system of government, and have well established and active EU coordination systems that are predominantly centrally steered (Cole, Pasquier 2012, Cole, John 2001). Accordingly, one would expect to see the formulation and implementation of EU employment policy monopolised by central government. It was also important however, that the geographic cases be sufficiently similar to allow for meaningful cross-national comparison. It should be noted here that the thesis recognises that the cross-national dimension of the research renders a ‘perfect fit’ between cases virtually impossible: their individual histories, cultures and politico-administrative styles invariably engender highly differentiated political, economic and social environments. Nonetheless, as will be seen below, the UK and France share enough socio-economic

characteristics to permit valid comparison. Where comparison between France and the UK becomes slightly more complicated is the selection of the appropriate subnational territorial level to be used as the unit for analysis. This is because the member states' internal territorial structures are organised very differently.

The United Kingdom is formed from four main subnational administrative units: the four nations of England (and Gibraltar), Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As will be further explained in Chapter 5, the UK European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI-Funds) have been divided into four separate packages, allocated to each of the four nations, who are then responsible for their management and implementation. As indicated above, this research looks at the case of *England*<sup>16</sup>. Following reforms in 2010, England has no formal regional tier (Jones, Norton 2010); instead, as John Fenwick (2015, p. 7) asserts, 'English subnational governance is fragmented' (see also Pearce, Ayres 2012, Harrison 2012, Wilson, Game 2011). Recent policy discourse on the part of the UK Conservative Government (2015 – present; and previously, the Liberal Democrat—Conservative Coalition Government, 2010–2015) has pushed a 'localist' agenda, which prioritises the local level as the appropriate subnational governance tier in England (Willett 2015, Department for Communities and Local Government 2011, HM Government 2011a, Clark 2010, HM Government 2010a, HM Government 2010b, HM Government 2010d, Ludwig, Ludwig 2014, Clarke, Cochrane 2013, Bentley, Pugalis 2013, Hickson 2013, Lowndes, Pratchett 2012). A key part of this strategy has been the establishment of 39 functional 'local' economic units, named Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) (see further Chapter 5). LEPs are ostensibly in charge of providing overall strategic leadership within their local areas and for setting local economic priorities. However, as they remain undefined in UK law, they have no formal statutory power or decision-making authority (Pugalis, Shutt et al. 2012). Nonetheless, LEPs play a central role

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<sup>16</sup> Here, the thesis recognises that the experience of England may differ from the Devolved Administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

in regional economic development, local employment policy and local European strategies. Critically, they are (notionally) responsible for the development and delivery of the European Structural and Investment Funds in their local territory. For these reasons, the Local Enterprise Partnerships have been selected as the relevant subnational unit to analyse in England.

France, in contrast, is made up of four subnational territorial layers, namely: regions, departments, inter-communalities (*intercommunalités*) and communes (roughly equivalent to English local councils) (Pasquier 2015, Legifrance 2003, see also Cole, Meunier et al. 2013, 2012). Each unit covers a defined geographic territory and is responsible for the management and delivery of a fixed sub-set of policy areas and public services, codified in law. However, their relationship is not, as the order might suggest, a hierarchical one: French law explicitly stipulates that no tier is subservient to any other (Article 72, Legifrance 2003). This creates a complex and, frequently, highly politicised tapestry of actors (Cole 2012, Cole, Meunier et al. 2013, 2011). Employment policy and EU policy are both partially devolved competences in France (see further Chapter 6). Employment policy is delivered primarily through the central state (both central government services and the state's regional representatives) and the regional councils. At the time of writing, neither the departments nor the inter-communalities had any competences with regard to employment policy or the European Structural and Investment Funds. This however, may change with future rounds of decentralisation, especially in the case of inter-communalities, which are generally structured around major city-regions. Similarly, the management of the ESI-Funds is a partially devolved competence that involves central government services, regional state representatives and the regional councils. Accordingly, the regional tier has been selected as the relevant subnational unit to analyse in France within the confines of this research. It must be acknowledged here that the French regional tier does not precisely match the English Local Enterprise Partnerships: there

are some differences in regard to their statutory character and political power, in terms of their decision-making competences and authority. Nonetheless, they represent the most relevant subnational tiers with regard to EU employment and structural policy within the framework of their national territorial organisation—and therefore offer comparable case examples of EU youth employment policy in action at the subnational scale.

The subnational cases of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region are also similar enough to permit relevant cross-comparison. Both areas are eligible for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) due to pronounced problems with youth unemployment. What is more, both share similar socio-economic characteristics and have historically struggled to adapt to the emergence of a post-industrial economic landscape. The two areas are dominated by large urban ‘centres’, namely Birmingham in GBSLEP and Lille in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. As a result, a strong urban dimension can be found in their local employment and EU strategies. This is a particularly distinctive characteristic in French policy, where the urban agenda is often overlooked in domestic policy in favour of the rural or semi-rural majority<sup>17</sup>. The remainder of this sub-section describes the two subnational cases in further detail, before moving on to address the data collection methods used.

### ***The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)***

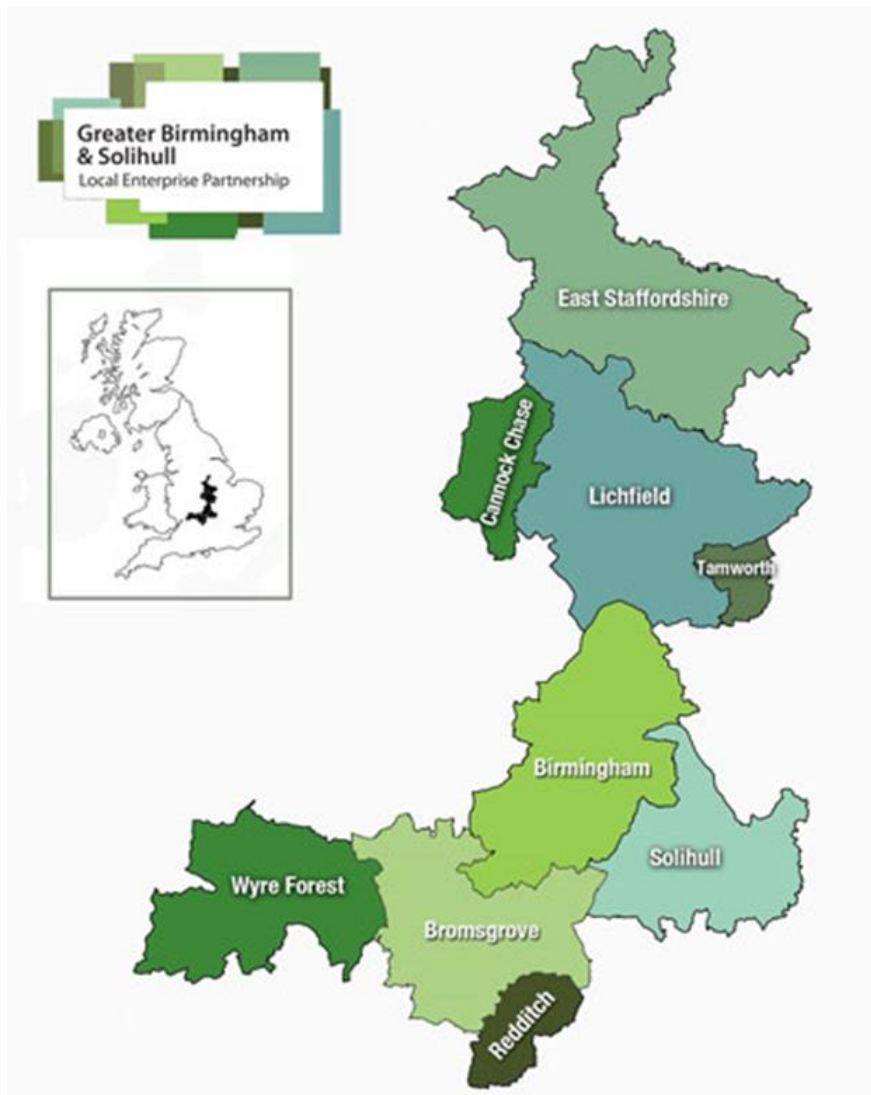
Formed over 2010-2011, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership covers nine local council areas spread across three geographical zones: the Birmingham and Solihull Metropolitan Core, Southern Staffordshire (Cannock Chase, Lichfield, Tamworth and East Staffordshire), and Northern Worcestershire (Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre

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<sup>17</sup> IV 32, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas de Calais. [Personal interview, Lille, 26 June 2014]

Forest). Map 3.1 provides a map of the LEP area. It is led by a Board of 18 Directors drawn from the area's business community, local authorities, universities, and colleges.

**Map 3.1: Map of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership**



Source: GBSLEP website, <http://centrefenterprise.com/our-area/> [Accessed 24 February 2014]

The LEP has a population of almost 2 million, with over half of residents located in Birmingham (55%) and Solihull (10%). It contains around 918,000 jobs, and in 2011, employment was concentrated in four main sectors, albeit with variation across geographical zones: public services (28.7%); retail and leisure (26.2%), financial and professional services



(21.6%); and manufacturing, mining and utilities (10.9%) (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership 2014). Significantly for this research, GBSLEP faces overt employment challenges, especially amongst its young population. Over the period October 2013 to September 2014, the GBSLEP unemployment rate fell to below the UK average, 5.6% compared with 6.5% (Office for National Statistics 2015); however, this masks significant variation between areas: Birmingham regularly records a much higher unemployment rate than the rest: 11.6% in comparison with 5.6% in Redditch, Solihull and Wyre Forest, the next highest levels, and 7.8 percentage points higher than the figure for Bromsgrove (3.8%), which had the lowest rate. Youth unemployment is a key concern at national and local level. According to official labour market statistics, the UK recorded an unemployment rate of 17.4% among young people aged 16-24 or the period October 2013 – September 2014; this figure rose to 24.7% for GBSLEP (NOMIS 2015a). This figure again hides large-scale variation between local authority areas: Birmingham faces a serious youth unemployment challenge (34.6%), followed by Solihull (14.7%) and Wyre Forest (14.6%). In addition to a high level of youth unemployment, GBSLEP is characterised by a low proportion of highly qualified individuals (27.7%) and a high proportion of its population holding no formal qualifications (14%), performing below the UK average (35% and 9.5% respectively) (NOMIS 2015b). Indeed, only Northern Ireland performs worse than the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP on the number of individuals having no qualifications (17.2%) (NOMIS 2015b). As with the unemployment figures, qualifications levels vary substantially between localities: Bromsgrove (40.7%) and Solihull (39.3%) had the highest number of highly-qualified individuals, compared with the lowest in Tamworth (11.2%) and Cannock Chase (23.4%). This represents in excess of a 29 percentage point difference between the best and worst performing areas. At the other end of the scale, Tamworth and

Birmingham had the highest proportion of individuals without formal qualifications (17.6% and 17.4% respectively), over 8 percentage points higher than the UK average.

### ***The Nord-Pas-de-Calais region (NPdC)***

Before going any further it is necessary to explain that, at the time of writing the thesis, France was undergoing a major and complicated territorial transformation. Notably, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016, after the entry into force of the law on the new territorial organisation of the Republic<sup>18</sup>, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region merged with the neighbouring Picardie region to become a new region, subsequently named the *Hauts-de-France* region. The regional reorganisation can be seen in map 3.2. It must be made clear from the outset that this research project deals with the *Nord-Pas-de-Calais* region, and *not* the newly created Hauts-de-France region. This is because the Youth Employment Initiative was developed at the time when Nord-Pas-de-Calais still existed as its own region. As such, funding was explicitly allocated to the NPdC territory (Picardie was also eligible for financial support, but under its own regional envelope), and the YEI financial conditions stipulated that YEI money had to be spent over 2014-2015 (see further chapter 4). In other words, before the creation of the new region. Moreover, both France's national Operational Programmes and regional Operational Programmes were agreed with the European Commission before the entry into force of the new territorial organisation. Hence, they will continue to play out across the 2014-2020 EU programming period.

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<sup>18</sup> Loi portant sur la Nouvelle Organisation Territoriale de la République (NOTRe) (Legifrance 2015c) Most notably, the NOTRe has clarified the lines of responsibility between the subnational administrative tiers (region, departments, inter-communalities, and communes), conferred greater powers to the regions, and engendered a major reorganisation of the French regions. As part of this, the number of French metropolitan regions was reduced from 22 to 13 through a series of 8 regional mergers.

**Map 3.2: New regional map of France, effective as of 1 January 2016**



Source: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/action/la-reforme-territoriale> [Accessed 1 March 2016]

The Nord-Pas-de-Calais region was formed of two departments—‘Nord’ and ‘Pas-de-Calais’—, 3 Urban Communities (including the *Metropole Européenne de Lille (MEL)*) and 1,545 communes. It covered 12,414 km<sup>2</sup> and was the third largest region in France in terms of population, with, according to latest official data available 4,050,756 habitants as at 1 January 2012 (INSEE 2015a)<sup>19</sup>. It was one of the most densely populated regions with 325 habitants

<sup>19</sup> The new Hauts-de-France region is also the third most populous region in France.

per square kilometre, with most of the inhabitants located in the *département du NORD* (CCI Région Nord de France 2015). Residents and jobs are concentrated around the larger urban conurbations, and especially in and around Lille, the regional capital. Nord-Pas-de-Calais had one of the youngest populations in France: in 2012, 20.2% of the population were aged 0-14 years, compared to a national average of 18.6%. A further 19.9% were aged 15-24 years, compared to 18.3% for the national average (CCI Région Nord de France 2015). As such, well over a third of the population (40.1%) was below the age of 25. For all other age ranges NPdC either matched (25-44 years, 19.7%) or was below the national average (45+ years) (ibid.). According to the most recent official figures, the region contained 1,003,983 jobs in 2013 (ibid.). A significant number of jobs were located in five sectors: industry (18.6%, compared with a national average of 16.5%); commercial services [*services aux entreprises*] (17.2%; versus 18.5%); retail [*commerce de détail*] (14.7%; versus 13.3%); individual services/hospitality/tourism [*services aux particuliers*] (14.6%; versus 13.7%) and construction (7.9%; versus 8%) (ibid.). Like GBSLEP, Nord-Pas-de-Calais faces significant employment challenges (INSEE 2015b, France 3 15/04/2015, La Voix du Nord 03/11/2015); indeed, its unemployment rate has historically been well above the national average. In 2014 (third trimester), the unemployment rate for the region stood at 12.4%, as compared with the national average of 9.9% (CCI Région Nord de France 2015). Youth unemployment represents a major regional issue: in 2014, the youth unemployment rate for the region was 29.2%, the lowest annual figure recorded since 2010 (which were all above 30%, including 34.9% in 2013) (Eurostat 2016c). This rate is only surpassed by Languedoc-Roussillon (31.1% in 2014) in metropolitan France, and the French overseas departments and territories (DOM-TOM), which have a long-standing struggle with youth unemployment (ibid.). In addition, Nord-Pas-de-Calais has one of the highest levels of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs; a key EU indicator and the target audience for

the Youth Employment Initiative): 14.2% in 2014, in comparison with the national average of 11.4% (Eurostat 2016b). Only three other metropolitan regions had higher rates: Champagne-Ardenne (16.4%), Picardie (16.1%), and Poitou-Charentes (14.8%)—as well as the DOM-TOMs (ibid.). Similar to GBSLEP, NPdC performs relatively poorly in terms of its population's level of qualifications: in 2014, 26.2% of the population aged 25-64 years had less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED<sup>20</sup> levels 0-2) (Eurostat 2016a)—that is to say that over a quarter of the region's population had, at the most, attained lower secondary education. The region has one of the lowest proportions 25-64 year olds with tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8) at 29%—outdone by 18 other metropolitan regions, in some cases significantly so (Ile-de-France (43.8%) and Midi-Pyrenees (41.9%)) (ibid.). In addition, NPdC residents had one of the lowest levels of living standards [*niveau de vie*] in France: approximately 18.1% of the region's population lives below the national poverty threshold (INSEE 2015c). The creation of the new *Hauts-de-France* region does not signal any marked change to many of the indicators outlined above: Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie remains one the weaker French regions in terms of economic output, employment levels and educational attainment (France 3 15/04/2015, La Voix du Nord 03/11/2015).

The chief difference between England and France lies in the statutory power bestowed on their respective subnational tiers of governance (Cole, John 2001): England has traditionally been classified as having a weak subnational level in comparison with France (Bache 2008, Hooghe, Marks et al. 2016).

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<sup>20</sup> International Standard Classification of Education.

### 3. Data collection methods

The empirical evidence presented in this thesis has been gathered through two methods of data collection. Namely, elite interviews and documentary analysis. Given the territorial dimension of the research, it was vital that data was collected from each of the territorial levels and each of the national settings under observation. Figure 3.2 provides an illustration of the evidence-gathering process.

**Figure 3.2: Breakdown of research methods by territorial level**

<i>Territorial level</i>		<i>Data collection methods</i>
<b>European</b>		Documentary analysis Semi-structured interviews
↓		
<b>National</b>		Documentary analysis Semi-structured interviews
England	France	
↓		
<b>Subnational</b>		Documentary analysis Semi-structured interviews
Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)	Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC)	

A major component of the empirical research has been a series of 35 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with key policy-makers in Brussels, London, Paris, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull area, and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, which have provided a

significant proportion of the empirical data presented in this thesis. Interviews were selected as the most appropriate method of data collection because they facilitate a richer understanding of the experiences and capacity of policy actors at the various territorial levels as they seek to engage in and influence the multi-level policy process than it would be possible to obtain solely by analysing official ‘paper’ documents (Rubin, Rubin 2011, Seidman 2013, 2007, see further Kvale 1983, Richards 1996). Indeed, much of the data gathered through the interviews was only revealed by speaking with those policy actors involved in the policy-making and policy-implementation process. It could not be found elsewhere. This is particularly the case with ‘behind-the-scenes’, informal negotiations, which are not recorded in an official documentation—but are instead the sole knowledge of the actors involved. Furthermore, the interviews provided a valuable contemporary record of the experience of key policy-makers, which can be usefully held-up against earlier comparable scholarly research in order to identify enduring themes that characterise governance and policy-interaction in the EU, as well as highlighting potentially fundamental shifts in the way that multi-level governance is experienced and enacted by policy-makers in the current policy climate.

The interviews adhered to a semi-structured approach with an established set of open-ended questions (see annexes 2-6 for the questionnaires). This provided a core structure to the conversations, both to ensure that the core topics were covered in the limited time available given the heavy work-loads of the interviewees, as well as to aid the subsequent analysis and comparison of the information obtained. However, whilst all interviews followed a similar outline and covered the same topics, the precise questions posed were tailored to the individual interviewee’s role, function and territorial level (i.e. EU-level, national-level or regional-local level). In the European Commission for example, some interviewees were more heavily involved in shaping the strategic and political direction of the policy process,

whilst others were technical experts in the policy area and thus more concerned with the day-to-day functioning of the policy. Both provided valuable insights into the policy-making process but in different ways, and this difference needed to be captured by the questions asked. Importantly, the semi-structured approach meant that there was sufficient flexibility to be able to pursue new and interesting themes that arose through the course of the interviews. This led for example to information on a project aimed at tackling youth unemployment in UK cities led by the UK Cabinet Office, which was seen by local interviewees in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area as a best practice example of how to engage proactively with the English regions. As will be seen in chapter 5 (the UK case), this exposure subsequently exacerbated tensions between local LEP actors and the Department of Work and Pensions. The flexibility of the semi-structured approach meant that although the Cabinet Office's project was not explicitly mentioned in the interview questions, I was nonetheless able to raise it in following interviews. This in turn allowed me to build up a more nuanced picture of competing central government 'visions'. This interview technique was replicated at all territorial levels and in both country cases.

In order to overcome the limitations of research based on a relatively small sample of interviews, careful attention was paid to selecting 'key informants' (Kawulich 2005, see also Tansey 2007). Interview participants were chosen due to their professional involvement in and/or substantial familiarity of dealing first-hand with the process of coordination across multiple levels of governance around the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative—the two key EU initiatives in this area—and were drawn from across the territorial levels under observation. While the majority of interviewees were civil servants from the European institutions and national and regional-local government, effort was also made to include a wider spectrum of interviewees including Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and those from the non-



governmental sector in order to provide greater detail and improve the reliability of the data. Table 3.1 details the institutional affiliation of the individuals interviewed, organised by territorial level.

**Table 3.1: Institutional affiliation of interviewees by territorial level and geographic location, with the number of individuals interviewed in brackets**

<b>European-level</b>	
<p>European Commission, Cabinet responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [1]</p> <p>European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs &amp; Inclusion [6]</p> <p>Members of the European Parliament [2]</p> <p>Committee of the Regions [2]</p> <p>European Trade Union Congress (ETUC) [1]</p> <p>BUSINESSEUROPE [1]</p> <p>European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) [1]</p>	
<b>National-level</b>	
<i>England</i>	<i>France</i>
<p>Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) [3]</p> <p>Cabinet Office [1]</p> <p>Confederation of British Industry (CBI) [1]</p>	<p>La Délégation Générale à l'Emploi et à la Formation Professionnelle (DGEFP) [1]</p>
<b>Subnational-level</b>	
<i>Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)</i>	<i>Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC)</i>
<p>Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, Board of Directors [1]</p> <p>Birmingham City Council [3]</p> <p>Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council [1]</p> <p>Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Birmingham &amp; Solihull District Office [1]</p>	<p>Secrétariat Général pour les Affaires Régionales du Nord-Pas de Calais (SGAR) [2]</p> <p>Direccte Nord-Pas-de-Calais<sup>21</sup> [1]</p> <p>Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais [2]</p> <p>Conseil général du NORD [3]</p> <p>Métropole Européenne de Lille<sup>22</sup> [1]</p>

<sup>21</sup> Direccte: Direction régionale des entreprises, de la concurrence, de la consommation, du travail et de l'emploi.

<sup>22</sup> At the time the interview was held, MEL was known as Lille Métropole.

All data gathered as part of this research has been treated in strictest confidence and has only been used for the purposes of this research: this includes all data and documentation that is not in the public domain, as well as any informal discussions that took place with interviewees across the research process. While the nature of the research method—face-to-face interviews—has meant that interviewees were never anonymous to the researcher, individual respondents’ names and identifying details have been removed to aid anonymity to external observers, and any reference made to individual participants in this thesis is via reference to the interview number, general occupation, institutional affiliation, and interview date (i.e. IV3, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion). For the sake of simplicity, the date on which the interview was held is provided only for the first mention of the individual. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity sought to maximise the number of interviewees who agreed to participate in the research, as well as to encourage respondents to speak more freely about their experience of and perspectives on the governance and implementation of EU youth employment policy across multiple territorial levels. The interviews were conducted between December 2013 and September 2014. As part of the field-work, two initial pilot interviews were undertaken in December 2013 to test the suitability and accessibility of the interview questions developed, as well as the initial structure of the interview-session. Interviews were then held in English and French—speaking French with French officials was seen to help build trust and rapport, so as to be able to access as much information as possible (see Welch, Piekkari 2006 for an interesting discussion on cross-cultural interviews). All French interviews were later translated into English, and all interviews were subsequently transcribed *in verbatim*. Almost all of the interviews were recorded with the express permission of the interviewee. It was made clear during initial correspondence with the individual and at the beginning of the interview itself that the recording would *only* be used by myself for this PhD project (and, possibly, by my

supervisors and PhD examiners in the case that proof was needed that I had indeed undertaken the field-work). Recording the interviews allowed me to completely immerse myself in the conversation without being distracted by manual note-taking—although I took written notes as a back-up precaution. Paradoxically, I found that taking some notes appeared to set the interviewees at their ease. Recording interviews also meant that there was less risk of accidentally missing vital information—and enabled the production of verbatim transcripts which massively supported the analytical process. Almost all interviewees were happy to be recorded; only one participant refused (a district DWP official), and I had the impression that this was principally because there had been an incident with the media earlier that week.

The use of elite interviews as a primary source of information was complemented by a documentary analysis of secondary sources of material. Documents included policy strategy documents, policy papers and briefings, organisation charts, binding and non-binding intergovernmental agreements, formal codes of behaviour, and statutes and guidelines regulating and governing policy and coordination processes. Triangulation with these secondary sources not only provided valuable additional relevant information to inform the wider case study analysis, but also helped to situate interviewees' interpretations of the multi-level policy-making and implementation process and to cross-check the information provided, thereby improving the reliability and validity of the data collected.

#### 4. A note on data analysis

Three distinct, yet supporting, data analysis methods were used: thematic analysis, ‘within case’ analysis, and ‘cross-case’ analysis. Thematic analysis refers to the way in which the data has been organised: that is to say, by themes (or recurring ideas). As Jodi Aronson (1995, p. 3) has described, thematic analysis “focusses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour”. The author sets out a four step procedure: 1) drawing on the relevant literature, select appropriate themes under which to categorise the data; 2) collect the data; 3) identify the data that matches the themes (or patterns/processes) selected; and finally 4) “combine and catalogue” the data identified into further sub-themes (ibid: pp. 3-4) (see also Meyer 2001, Jones, Coviello et al. 2011, Burnard 1991). Accordingly, before starting the analysis, a number of broad initial themes were identified in line with the theoretical chapter and the interview questions:

- Relevant background information
- Development and negotiation of YEP/YEI at the European-level
  - Activities
  - Actors
  - Challenges
  - Enabling factors
- Awareness of YEP/YEI at the national-level (UK and France)
- Awareness of YEP/YEI at the subnational-level (UK and France)
- Development and negotiation of YEP/YEI at the national-level (UK and France)
  - Activities
  - Actors

- Challenges
- Enabling factors
- Development and negotiation of YEP/YEI at the subnational-level (UK and France)
  - Activities
  - Actors
  - Challenges
  - Enabling factors
- Relationship between the European-level and the national-level (UK and France)
  - General characteristics
  - Supportive factors
  - Challenges
- Relationship between the European-level and the subnational-level (UK and France)
  - General characteristics
  - Supportive factors
  - Challenges
- Relationship between the national-level and the subnational-level (UK and France)
  - General characteristics
  - Supportive factors
  - Challenges

The analysis of the data collected via the interviews was done manually, rather than through electronic qualitative data analysis software. An initial attempt was made to use NVivo, but the software, instead of aiding the identification of themes, in fact created a disconnect between the researcher and the ‘raw data’—which, in turn impeded deeper analysis and reflection. Notably, the semi-structured nature of interviews meant that relevant and

noteworthy information was often scattered throughout the interview (which generally lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour). As a result, it was impossible to neatly separate and categorise sections of the interview; instead, it was necessary to read through the whole transcript to get a real sense of the content, and then assign themes and sub-themes. Often, participants would refer back to something they had previously mentioned, or would suddenly mention something which shone a whole new light on an earlier comment. Thus ‘throw-away’ comments sometimes proved the most enlightening. Furthermore, electronic ‘coding’ frequently involves searches using exact words or phrases. The majority of the participants interviewed at the European-level were not English (or indeed French) native-speakers. As such, they did not always use the ‘correct’ English terminology, or they would explain things differently to an English native-speaker. Consequently, coding for precise words would have missed a great deal of significant detail (see also Buetow 2010). Tehmina Basit (2003, p. 143) contends that “the choice [to categorise data manually or electronically] will be dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available, and the inclination and expertise of the researcher”. Given the nature of the research project and the disposition of the researcher, a decision was taken to catalogue (and analyse) the data manually in order to capitalize on the rich empirical information gathered—and to support a more nuanced and reflective discussion of the findings.

As part of the analytical process, a Word document was created for each of the cases (European-level, England and France) and each containing the initial themes listed above as separate headings. Each interview transcript was then reread to re-familiarise the author with the content. The author then highlighted the information matching the themes (in bold text and yellow highlighter), which was then transferred to the relevant Word document, under the appropriate heading. Additional categories and sub-categories were created as they surfaced. A ‘within case’ approach was adopted in the first instance. That is to say, each

document (and therefore case) was analysed individually to identify the dynamics at play in the negotiation and implementation of EU youth employment policy within that setting. Here, as Kathleen Eisenhardt (1989, p. 540) underlines, “[...] the overall idea is to become intimately familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity. This process allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before the investigators push to generalize patterns across cases. In addition, it gives investigators a rich familiarity with each case which, in turn, accelerates cross-case comparison.” The ‘within-case’ analysis is located in each of the three empirical case chapters: namely, chapters, 4, 5 and 6. This was then followed by a ‘cross-case’ analysis (Tarrow 2010, Eisenhardt 1989, Lijphart 1975) of the key differences and similarities between the two national and subnational cases, which can be found in chapter 7, the discussion chapter.

## **5. Conclusion**

This chapter has illustrated the thesis’ research design. In essence, the research project is built around a comparative case study of two highly unitary member states, the United Kingdom (England) and France, and two subnational areas, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region. The empirical data was collected via a series of 35 semi-structured interviews with key policy-makers and opinion-formers in Brussels and the two national settings, and across territorial levels. The interviews were supported by documentary analysis. Three interlocking data analysis strategies have been employed to guide reflection: thematic analysis, within-case analysis and cross-case analysis.

The second part of this thesis comprises the three empirical chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on the formulation and negotiation of EU youth employment policy at the European-



level, and notably, the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. The chapter considers both the formal governance arrangements through which EU youth employment policy is negotiated and formulated (what might be viewed as the sanitised ‘official portrait’) and the ‘behind-the-scenes’ reality of a highly complex and highly politicised policy-making process. This distinction between the outward-facing ‘formal’ arrangements and the ‘messy reality’ of policy construction and implementation is maintained in the two country case chapters. Chapter 5 explores the case of England and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP. Chapter 6 then examines the case of France and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region.

**PART II**  
**THE CASE STUDIES**

**CHAPTER 4**  
**EU YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY:**  
**THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PACKAGE AND THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**  
**INITIATIVE**

**1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the European Union's policy response to the challenge of youth unemployment, and focuses in particular on the two measures that form the core of EU youth employment policy: the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). Employment policy in the EU has traditionally been the purview of the member states: existing literature suggests that we would expect to see the member states monopolising the policy process (Smismans 2004). The chapter begins with a brief historical overview of the development of EU youth employment policy, highlighting the complexity of the policy area and its institutional interplay. The chapter is then structured in line with the analytical framework presented in chapter 2. Section 3 identifies the EU policies, practices and preferences that promote multi-level governance (step 1 in the analytical framework). Namely, it considers in detail the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative, providing a description of their content, development and the official processes by which they are governed and implemented. Section 4 examines how EU youth unemployment policy is formulated in practice at the EU-level, seeking to determine the extent to which the 'real world' EU policy-making process 'matches' multi-level governance ('*goodness of fit*', step 2). Here, the chapter draws on key policy documents, as well as on in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 12 key policy-makers and opinion-

formers in Brussels<sup>23</sup>. From this empirical data, the section identifies three main findings: namely, that 1) member states dominate the EU policy process around youth employment, but that individual state-executive control over policy direction is tempered by 2) the ‘soft power’ of EU recommendations, which, whilst non-binding, nonetheless carry important political weight, and 3) an overt political aspiration for multi-level governance as the desired mode through which to design and implement the YEP and the YEI in the member states. The fifth section identifies six mediating factors that influence the occurrence of multi-level governance. The chapter concludes that EU youth employment policy is a highly complex and politicised environment, incorporating a multi-layered, multi-part institutional framework. Empirical data illustrates a mixed picture with regard to the presence of multi-level governance.

## **2. EU youth employment policy: A brief historical overview**

The social and employment dimension of the European Union is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although there were provisions for social policy as early as the 1957 Treaty of Rome, these remained ambiguous and poorly defined, with social policy remaining firmly under the remit of the member states (Anderson 2015). The concept of a distinct European Social Model (ESM) first emerged formally under the European Commission Presidency of the French Socialist Jacques Delors in 1985. The ESM sought to balance the European Community’s (as it was then known) preoccupation with economic integration, which had until then dominated the European project (Anderson 2015, Barbier, Rogowski et al. 2015,

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<sup>23</sup> The fieldwork was conducted over the course of the final two weeks of January 2014. Interviewees were located in the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG Employment) [7], the European Parliament [2], the Committee of the Regions [2], BusinessEurope [1], European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises [UEAPME] [1], and the European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC] [1]. An anonymised list of the interviewees can be found in annex 1.

Scharpf 2002). Over the following years, employment and social affairs were increasingly seen as a vital part of boosting economic growth and competitiveness (European Commission 1993, 1994). In December 1994, the Essen European Council elevated employment issues to be *the* main priority of the European Union and its member states (European Council 1994). In particular, heads of state and government agreed on five core employment objectives, which became known as the ‘Essen strategy’. These were: 1) promoting investment in vocational training; 2) increasing the employment-intensiveness of growth; 3) reducing non-wage labour costs; 4) improving the effectiveness of labour-market policy; and 5) improving measures to help those groups particularly hard hit by unemployment (namely, young people, older workers, women, people with disabilities, and minority groups). These five objectives in turn became the framework for a European Employment Strategy (EES), enshrined under the newly created employment chapter in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam. The EES represented a major turning point for EU employment policy (Goetschy 1999, 2003): not only did it set out for the first time a commonly agreed set of EU employment guidelines, objectives and targets for member states, but it also marked the introduction of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Often described as a new mode of governance, the Open Method of Coordination eschews ‘hard’ legislation in favour of softer “intergovernmental cooperation” (Schäfer 2004, p. 1) (Zeitlin, Pochet et al. 2005, see further Büchs 2007, Trubek, Trubek 2005, Mosher, Trubek 2003), providing a platform for dialogue, the exchange of good practice and policy ‘learning’ between member states. In the run-up to the Treaty negotiations, EU heads of state and government had met in November 1997 in Luxembourg at an extraordinary employment summit (known as the Luxembourg Jobs Summit) to agree on 19 employment guidelines to guide member state action in the field (Goetschy 1999)—these are renewed annually as part of the ‘newly’ created ‘European

Semester'<sup>24</sup>. A key step forward in the EU's employment strategy was the introduction of the Lisbon Strategy.

Initially launched in 2000 and relaunched in 2005, the Lisbon Strategy sought to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world by 2010 (European Council 2000). It contained a strong employment dimension, pushing for the modernization of the European Social Model and, in particular, for the re-activation of those groups most disconnected from the labour market—this included, women, older workers, individuals from minority groups and young people (European Council 2000, Annesley 2007). As Karen Anderson (2015, p. 70) notes, “the launch of the Lisbon Strategy marks the first time that the EU formulated an integrated, long-term policy for social and economic [...] modernization”. However, the results of the Lisbon Strategy were mixed (Kok 2004, Copeland, Papadimitriou 2012). Key weaknesses included overly-ambitious goals and an over-reliance on the soft, non-binding mechanisms under the Open Method of Coordination, which greatly limited the Commission's ability to enforce the strategy and sanction poor performance (Anderson 2015, Borrás, Radaelli 2011, Borrás 2009, Begg 2008, Zeitlin 2008, Goetschy 2005). More damagingly, observers have argued that the Lisbon Process has failed to deliver on the more 'social' elements it promised, concentrating instead on ‘market-building’ processes (Bailey Forthcoming). Following the poor performance of the Lisbon strategy, the new Europe 2020 strategy marked a new beginning and a veritable explosion of employment-related measures.

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<sup>24</sup> The Europe 2020 strategy reorganised the policy process around a ‘European Semester’, established as a result of lessons learnt from the economic crisis. A new institutional process, the European Semester is built around an annual cycle of macro-economic, budgetary and structural policy coordination in which member states' economic and budgetary policies are brought into alignment with the objectives and rules agreed at EU-level and progress towards national and EU targets is monitored. The aim is to foster a coordinated and focused approach towards the Europe 2020 vision, supported by systematic policy guidance and surveillance activities.

### *Europe 2020: A strategic reset?*

In 2010, three years after the 2008 financial crisis unleashed an unprecedented and devastating global recession, the European Commission put forward its vision for a new ten-year growth strategy for the European Union known as ‘Europe 2020’. Endorsed by Heads of State and Government at the European Council of 26-27 March 2010 and adopted one month later at the European Council of 17 June, Europe 2020 establishes a framework for creating ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ with a strong emphasis on delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion (European Commission 2010b). The rapid turnaround between the strategy’s proposal and adoption underlines the broad consensus that existed between the EU institutions and the member states on the need for a comprehensive approach to navigate the Union out of the crisis and onto the path of sustainable long-term economic and social prosperity; a plan threatened not only by the effects of the recession itself, but also by deep-seated existing structural weaknesses.

Learning from the Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020 incorporates a more concentrated thematic focus. To help guide action to this end, Europe 2020 includes five mutually reinforcing ‘headline targets’ to be met by 2020, covering employment, research and development (R&D), climate change and energy sustainability, education, and fighting poverty and social exclusion. Table 4.1 sets out the headline targets for employment, education and poverty and social exclusion, as these are most closely linked to the issue of youth employment/unemployment<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Clearly the employment target is of particular importance for this thesis; nonetheless, it needs to be borne in mind that all of the targets and the actions that they engender will have an impact (both direct and indirect) on both employment rates and the wider labour market: increased investment in R&D and the ‘green’ economy will potentially influence the type of jobs on offer within the labour market; action to reduce levels of poverty and social exclusion will also necessarily involve an employment dimension; and improving the quality of education and the skill levels attained by learners will alter the nature of the supply of labour within the market.

**Table 4.1: Europe 2020 headline targets**

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<b>Employment</b>	<b>75% of men and women aged 20-64 to be in employment</b>
<b>Education</b>	Reducing the rate of early school leaving <sup>26</sup> to below 10% Increasing the share of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%
<b>Fighting poverty and social exclusion</b>	Lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion

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Source: Conclusions of the European Council of 17 June 2010

These headline targets were then converted in 2010 by the member states into individualised national targets to help guide domestic action and measure progress. Table 4.2 outlines the national targets for the two case study countries, France and the United Kingdom.

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<sup>26</sup> Eurostat defines early school leavers (now known as ‘early leavers from education and training’) as young people aged 18 to 24 who have left education or training having completed only lower secondary education or less and who are not involved in further education or training. (Eurostat 2013)



**Table 4.2: National Europe 2020 targets\***

	France	UK	EU target
<b>Employment rate (%)</b>	75%	No target in NRP	75%
<b>Early school leaving (%)</b>	9.5%	No target in NRP	10%
<b>Tertiary education (%)</b>	50%	No target in NRP	40%
<b>Reduction in the number of people living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion (expressed as the number of individuals)</b>	1,600,000 [for the period 2007-2012]	Existing numerical targets of the 2010 Child Poverty Act**	20,000,000

*Source: adapted from Commission's own table 'Europe 2020 targets'*

\* *National targets as set by member states in their 2011 National Reform Programmes.*

\*\* *The 2010 Child Poverty Act commits the UK government to eradicating child poverty by 2020<sup>27</sup>.*

The United Kingdom is the only member state not to have set any targets for employment, research and development, early school leaving or tertiary education. Instead, the 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 National Reform Programmes all make reference to the 2010 Public Services Transparency Framework, a transparency agenda established by the Coalition government led by the Conservatives under which accountability is measured not through targets or top-down performance management systems, but by releasing more information and data on public

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted here that the 2010 Child Poverty Act was replaced in 2016 by the Welfare Reform and Work Act, which received Royal Assent on 16 March 2016 and is now an Act of Parliament (HM Government 2016). The WRWA Act repeals the targets set under the 2010 Child Poverty Act; instead, the UK Government must make an annual report on 'life chances' (see further Department of Work and Pensions 2016).

sector performance and spending so as to “let people hold government to account” (Cabinet Office 2014)<sup>28</sup>. In keeping with this new set-up, as of November 2010, each of the main Government departments publishes their own individual business plan, in which they set out the actions to be undertaken to implement the reforms outlined in the overarching Programme for Government (HM Government 2010a), together with appropriate deadlines. The plans also include key indicators and data outlining the cost and impact of public service, and are updated annually to reflect Government’s Mid Term Review<sup>29</sup>. What this means in practice for Europe 2020 is that:

“The government supports the aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy, of encouraging a return to strong and sustainable economic and employment growth across the EU. However, in line with the Public Services Transparency Framework, the government has moved away from setting top-down targets as a performance management tool. The government has therefore not set any new targets under the Europe 2020 Strategy.”

(UK National Reform Programme, 2014)

This can be interpreted as a move away from New Labour’s culture of target-setting and rankings (Painter 2013). The refusal to endorse EU targets could also be an indictment of the relatively low regard in which the Coalition government, led by the Conservative Party under the leadership of David Cameron, holds the European Union project—and especially its Social Chapter (Tempest 06/03/2007, Holehouse 10/07/2015).

Europe 2020 is further underpinned by a set of broad integrated economic and employment policy guidelines. These contribute to a stronger thematic focus and are in line

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<sup>28</sup> For further details see the Prime Minister’s letter to Cabinet Ministers on transparency and open data, July 2011, available at [www.number10.gov.uk/news/letter-to-cabinet-ministers-on-transparency-and-open-data/](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/letter-to-cabinet-ministers-on-transparency-and-open-data/) [Accessed 9 January 2015].

<sup>29</sup> The business plans are published on the prime minister’s web-site: <http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/#>

with Article 145 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU (TFEU, European Union 2012)<sup>30</sup>. The guidelines set out the areas around which EU and national policies and structural reforms should focus in order to “achieve the positive spill-over effects of coordinated structural reforms and a more consistent contribution from European policies to the strategy’s objectives” (European Council 2010d, paragraph 14). To this end, the guidelines are used by the member states when designing their annual National Reform Programmes (NRPs), which are submitted each year as part of the European Semester. The current guidelines were set for the 2010 – 2014 period with potential amendments to be made in 2015, dependent on progress made. The employment guidelines are presented in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: 2010 – 2014 guidelines for the employment policies of member states**

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**Guideline 7:** Increasing labour market participation of women and men, reducing structural unemployment and promoting job quality

**Guideline 8:** Developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs and promoting lifelong learning

**Guideline 9:** Improving the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education

**Guideline 10:** Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty

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*Source: European Council decision of 21 October 2010 on guidelines for the employment policies of the member states (2010/707/EU).*

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<sup>30</sup> Article 145 of the TFEU states that “Member states and the Union shall [...] work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce and labour markets responsive to economic change with a view to achieving the objectives defined in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union.” (European Union 2012)

In comparison with previous guidelines, and learning in particular from the over-breadth of the Lisbon Agenda, the Europe 2020 guidelines have purposely been restricted to four areas. The aim was to concentrate policy activities and reforms in an effort to maximise impact. Importantly, all four guidelines make reference to the need to improve the labour market participation of young people; and guideline 8 makes a specific reference to supporting young people not in employment, education or training (so called NEETs). Europe 2020's thematic focus is perhaps best illustrated by the seven 'flagship initiatives' launched by the European Commission to spur progress towards so-called 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'. Each initiative addresses a distinct theme. They are: a 'digital agenda for Europe'; 'innovation union'; 'youth on the move'; 'resource-efficient Europe'; 'an industrial policy for the globalisation era'; 'an agenda for new skills and jobs'; and a 'European platform against poverty'. Focussing specifically on young people, the flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move' puts forward a comprehensive package of policy initiatives focussed on improving the quality of education offered across the Union and the employability of young people. In this way, it aims to increase the youth employment rate and reduce youth unemployment—thereby supporting the overarching headline target of a 75% employment rate among the working age population (individuals aged 20 – 64 years). Activities under Youth on the Move centre around three key areas: 1) developing modern education and training systems to achieve high quality provision that better matches the needs of learners and the labour market<sup>31</sup>; 2) enabling and encouraging more young people to study or train in another country, in particular through the use of dedicated EU funds; and 3) improving the employment situation of young people, via a 'framework for employment' (European Commission 2010a). Within this employment dimension, Youth on the Move draws attention to four main areas where action is needed: 1) helping young people to get their first job and progress on the career

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<sup>31</sup> This includes activities targeting higher education (linked to the education headline target), the provision of lifelong learning, and the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

ladder by promoting effective education-to-work transitions and combatting labour market segmentation, including by ensuring that young people do not get trapped into a cycle of temporary work contracts; 2) supporting young people at particular risk of labour market exclusion, such as those not in employment, education or training (so-called NEETs), young people with disabilities or health problems, and young people with a migrant background or from particular ethnic backgrounds; 3) ensuring adequate social safety nets for young people; and 4) supporting young entrepreneurs and promoting self-employment as a viable career option for young people. In keeping with the drive towards greater coordination and policy concentration, these priority areas tie in with the broader employment guidelines.

In 2011, amidst rising levels of youth unemployment, the Commission launched the Youth Opportunities Initiative (YOI) within the framework of Youth on the Move. Building on Youth on the Move and the flagship initiative an ‘Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’, as well as on the June 2011 Council Conclusions on youth employment and the Council Recommendations on early school leavers, the Youth Opportunities Initiative called on member states to speed up the implementation of policy measures to improve the labour market situation of young people, and in particular activities focused on early-school-leaving<sup>32</sup>, skills development, school-to-work transitions, and ensuring that young people are able to access their first job. Although the YOI underlined the primacy of the member states in tackling youth unemployment, it nonetheless emphasised the need for a strong partnership between the European Commission and national governments, especially with those experiencing the highest levels of youth unemployment. It highlighted in particular the role of the EU in reviewing national policies and performances to monitor progress, disseminate best practice and reinforce common EU priorities—thus aligning with the European Semester

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<sup>32</sup> Eurostat defines early school leavers (now known as early leavers from education and training) as young people aged 18 to 24 who have left education or training having completed only lower secondary education or less and who are not involved in further education or training. (Eurostat 2013)

cycle of coordination—and maximise the use of EU funds to support national and cross-border youth employment measures and mobility programmes, with a special emphasis on the role of the European Social Fund (ESF), as well as the Erasmus programme. In April 2012, building on the strong employment dimension of the 2012 Annual Growth Survey, which was further reinforced in the conclusions of the March 2012 European Council, the Commission published the policy communication ‘Towards a job-rich recovery’, supported by a series of thematically-focussed Staff Working Documents. Taken together, these policy documents represented an ‘Employment Package’ outlining key policy measures and reforms needed at EU and national level to create jobs and increase employment rates. More specifically, the package focused measures on three areas: 1) supporting job creation, in particular by focussing on key sectors, tackling demand-side obstacles, and mobilising EU funds to finance investments and programmes; 2) restoring the dynamics of the labour market, notably through labour market reforms, investment in skills and action to develop a genuine European labour market (centring principally around questions of labour mobility); and 3) strengthening EU employment governance and coordination, notably through systematic national reporting and multilateral surveillance activities, by increasing the involvement of social partners, and by strengthening the link between policy and funding (European Commission 2012a). This latter point also reflects a growing recognition on the part of both the Commission and the member states that the EU’s increasing focus on fiscal and economic issues needs to be balanced with a stronger employment and social dimension in order to ensure sustainable economic stability and growth (Barbier, Rogowski et al. 2015).

From this previous policy work, emerged the EU’s most recent and comprehensive contribution to youth employment policy, the Youth Employment Package (YEP), a policy measure, and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), a financial instrument—the focus of this research. The remainder of this chapter examines the formulation and implementation of

the YEP and YEI through the lens of the analytical framework presented in chapter two on the thesis' theoretical underpinnings.

### **3. Step 1: Identifying the relevant EU policies, practices and preferences that promote multi-level governance**

As outlined in chapter two, this first step focuses on identifying those “EU policies, practices and preferences” (Bache 2008, p. 9) that promote multi-level governance as the desired mode of policy-making in EU youth employment policy. To this end, the section provides a comprehensive review of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative, beginning with a brief description of each measure, before outlining the process through which each was negotiated and formulated at the EU-level.

#### **3.1. The Youth Employment Package**

In December 2012, the Employment Package put forward by the Commission (see above) was followed by a dedicated *Youth* Employment Package (YEP), in recognition of the major employment challenges faced by young people across the EU and the long-term damaging impact that high levels of youth unemployment will potentially have on economic and social stability. Initially set out in the Commission Communication ‘Moving Youth into Employment’ (2012b), the Youth Employment Package is built around three main elements: the Youth Guarantee (YG), the Quality Framework for Traineeships (QFT), and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAA). Although the three initiatives are identified separately within the YEP, in reality the Youth Guarantee forms what can be understood as an overarching umbrella structure, which is supported by the Quality Framework for Traineeships and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Specifically, the Youth

Guarantee represents a new approach to tackling youth unemployment, under which member states have formally pledged to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 have access to a good-quality offer of employment, further education, training or an apprenticeship within four months of leaving formal education or of becoming unemployed (Council of the European Union 2013a). In this way, activities under the QFT and EAA form an integral component in delivering the Youth Guarantee<sup>33</sup>. The Youth Guarantee builds on the Employment Guidelines 7 and 8, which called on member states to better integrate young people into the labour market, and in particular those not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) (European Commission 2010c). It also contributes to three EU headline targets, namely helping to increase employment rates, to reduce the number of young people leaving education without upper secondary education or above, and to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Critically, the Youth Guarantee does not just envisage the development of new innovative tools and programmes to help young people access education, training or employment opportunities; it also aims to foster large-scale *structural transformation and reform* within the member states. Indeed, the initiative starts from the premise that existing policies and programmes in many members States are struggling to deal effectively with high levels of unemployment among young people; and as such, radical change is needed. It is therefore a highly ambitious policy at a time of economic crisis. Given its prominence within the Youth Employment Package, the following section focuses specifically on the EU policy process behind the Youth Guarantee.

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<sup>33</sup> The Quality Framework for Traineeships is essentially structured around a series of guidelines aimed at improving the quality of the learning content and working conditions of traineeships across the EU (European Commission 2013f). This reflects a growing concern that the quality of traineeships varies significantly from employer to employer, and worries that in some cases they can be seen by employers as a source of ‘cheap’ labour, rather than as a way of improving the employability of young people in preparation for subsequent employment. Similarly, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships brings together stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors to improve the quality and increase the supply of apprenticeships, as well as to improve their public image as a high-value and respected training pathway.

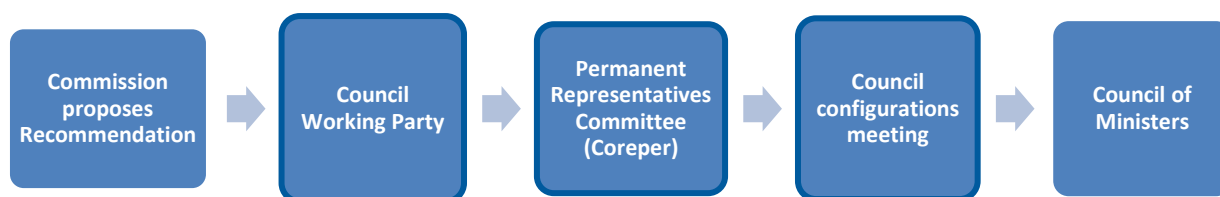


### ***The 'formal' policy formulation and implementation process***

EU employment policy is characterised by several distinct types of decision-making and governance. The Youth Guarantee takes the form of an EU *Recommendation*. Recommendations have *no* binding force on the member states: rather, they recommend, or strongly advocate, particular policies and activities. As a result, EU member states are not legally obligated to implement the Youth Guarantee or any of its associated measures. Nonetheless, recommendations do carry considerable *political weight*. The tension between these two characteristics can be particularly seen in the case of the UK: as will be shown below, the UK has consistently been against the concept of a Youth Guarantee, and yet it is a signatory to the Recommendation.

Decisions regarding recommendations are taken by the Council of Ministers acting by a qualified majority. As part of this process, once proposed by the Commission policy dossiers must pass through three different levels within the Council before they can be agreed politically: 1) the relevant Council Working Party; 2) the Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the member states to the European Union (known as Coreper); and 3) the relevant Council configuration, in this case the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO). This three-stage process, illustrated in figure 4.1, ensures highly-specialised technical scrutiny, the examination of political considerations, and political ownership at ministerial level (Fouilleux, Maillard et al. 2005, 2006, Hayes- Renshaw, Wallace 1995, Häge 2014, 2013, Lewis 2000, Sherrington 2000).

**Figure 4.1: The three levels of scrutiny in the Council of the European Union**



In line with its ‘right of initiative’, the European Commission moved for the creation of a Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee as part of its Communication outlining the Youth Employment Package (European Commission 2012b). In keeping with official EU procedure, the proposal was accordingly followed by a meeting with Ministers in the Council Working Group responsible for social questions, where, according to a senior level Commission official interviewed by the author, the recommendation was negotiated “in record time”. The official emphasised the presence of high levels of political will and support towards the scheme on the part of both the European Commission and the majority of member state representatives; in particular: “the Commission really pushed it through”<sup>34</sup>. It should be noted here, that the United Kingdom (UK) was, and remains, a voluble opponent to the concept of the Youth Guarantee; in particular, disagreement centres on the use and definition of the terms ‘guarantee’ and ‘offer’—and their subsequent implications for national governments—as well as the choice of the four-month period: the UK Government, under Prime Minister David Cameron, believes that a six month timescale would be more appropriate given the particularities of its labour market. Chapter 5 investigates the UK’s position on youth employment in more detail.

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<sup>34</sup> IV 3, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 23 January 2014].

The high level of political interest was further illustrated by the informal meeting of Ministers for employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs in Dublin held over 7-8 February 2013 as part of the Irish Presidency, where Ministers were again given the opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns about the Youth Guarantee in a bid to agree on the content and wording of the Recommendation: “there was right from the beginning interest from the highest political level, so already at the informal council at Dublin, in February, Ministers intervened”<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, the draft conclusions of the informal meeting explicitly stated that “reaching an agreement at the [forthcoming] EPSCO Council of 28 February on a Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee is a major priority for the Irish Presidency” (Irish Presidency of the Council of European Union 2013). Ministers also agreed at the meeting on the need to specifically target young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee was subsequently agreed by Ministers at the EPSCO Council meeting of 28 February 2013 and by the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) on 17 April 2013. It was then formally adopted at the April 2013 European Council: “so [the whole process] was very very fast”<sup>36</sup>. In this way the proposal swiftly passed through three levels within the Council of the European Union before being agreed at the Council of Ministers, the highest political level: first discussions took place in the relevant Council working party, this was then followed by deliberation in Coreper and in EPSCO, the Council configuration for employment matters. The fact that debate and agreement appears to have taken place first in EPSCO (and so at Ministerial level), rather than in Coreper as one would expect if following a strictly hierarchical process indicates the high importance attached to the initiative.

Once the concept of a Youth Guarantee had been politically agreed by the Council of ministers, the Commission was able to move forward on the question of implementation. In

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<sup>35</sup> IV 3, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

<sup>36</sup> IV 3, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

June 2013, the Commission launched the Communication ‘A call to action on youth unemployment’, which set out a number of priority areas for member state action in tackling youth unemployment, including the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (European Commission 2013a). In particular, the Communication called on the 19 member states that had received specific guidance on youth employment as part of their 2013 Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) to implement the relevant reforms and measures. As illustrated in table 4.4, both the UK and France were subject to recommendations related to youth unemployment, which included explicit reference to the Youth Guarantee.

**Table 4.4: 2013 Country-Specific Recommendations related to youth unemployment for the UK and France**

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<b>2013 Country-specific recommendations related to youth unemployment</b>	
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<p>Building on the Youth Contract, step up measures to address youth unemployment, for example through a Youth Guarantee. Increase the quality and duration of apprenticeships, simplify the system of qualifications and strengthen the engagement of employers, particularly in the provision of advanced and intermediate technical skills.</p> <p>Reduce the number of young people aged 18-24 who have very poor basic skills, including through effectively implementing the Traineeships programme.</p>
<b>France</b>	<p>Take further measures to improve the transition from school to work through, for example, a Youth Guarantee and promotion of apprenticeship.</p>

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*Source: European Commission Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the United Kingdom's 2013 national reform programme and delivering a Council opinion on the United Kingdom's convergence programme for 2012-2017; European Commission Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on France's 2013 national reform programme and delivering a Council opinion on France's stability programme for 2012-2017.*

By linking the Youth Guarantee to the CSRs and to the country-surveillance mechanisms under the European Semester, the Commission, although lacking formal powers of coercion, is nonetheless able to place political pressure on member states to conform to a common EU vision—in particular, by opening up member states' progress to scrutiny by its peers in the Council (what might be understood as a form of 'peer pressure') and the wider public (both at

home in the domestic arena and abroad). Furthermore, it can be argued that simply by participating in the European Semester’s cycle of policy coordination, member states are forced to engage with and react to European policy.

Given the ambitious nature of the Youth Guarantee—in that it encourages not just new policy tools, but also major structural reforms—the Commission felt it advisable to create national Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans (YGIPs) to guide progress. These plans required member states to set out how they intend to implement the Youth Guarantee in their territories; this includes details about the role of public authorities—including at regional and local level—and other stakeholders, how activities will be financed and progress monitored, and the timetable for implementation. In line with the guidance issued in the Council Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee, the implementation plans were structured around six ‘axes’, and included a specific section on actions to build up partnership approaches:

“[20] The Youth Guarantee should be implemented by a scheme consisting of supportive measures, and should be geared to national, regional and local circumstances. Those measures should be based on six axes: building up partnership-based approaches, early intervention and activation, supportive measures enabling labour market integration, use of Union funds, assessment and continuous improvement of the scheme, and its swift implementation.”

(Council of the European Union 2013a)

In conjunction with the YGIPs, the Commission also asked member states to nominate a dedicated National Youth Guarantee Coordinator (NYGC) to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Given the multi-faceted nature of youth employment policy, and the subsequent need for a more coordinated, horizontal policy approach, having one person who is responsible for liaising with and coordinating activity across the multiple actors (vertical and horizontal) involved is seen as vitally important by the Commission:

“These coordinators are our entry points when we speak to the Member states. It’s quite important to have that because [...] the YG is very much about partnerships, breaking silos, [...] bringing together people [from] [...] employment, [...] education [...] and [...] finance. So to have one contact point who coordinates [all the different interactions] is very important.”

[IV3, senior Commission official, DG Employment]

To assist member states in the drawing up of their YGIPs, the Commission organised a targeted working and learning seminar on ‘Practical support for the design and implementation of Youth Guarantee schemes’ held at La Hulpe, Belgium over 17-18 October 2013. Each member state was allocated four representatives, which included their appointed National Youth Guarantee Coordinator. A senior official from the Commission’s DG Employment remembers: “The French had a big delegation [...] The Brits if I remember correctly took only one of the four places<sup>37</sup>, which was another [...] indication of their level of enthusiasm.” [IV3, senior Commission official, DG Employment] At the seminar, special attention was paid to the 20 member states<sup>38</sup> with regions experiencing youth unemployment rates of above 25%—and which are thus eligible for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative—which were requested to submit their implementation plans by October 2013. The remaining 8 member states<sup>39</sup> were given a deadline of spring 2014. Once submitted, the YGIPs were then reviewed by the Commission, which issued feedback and guidance, before being agreed. As part of this, the Commission held a number of bilateral meetings with many member states to discuss the plans and the Commission’s feedback. Progress on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is subsequently monitored on a systematic basis

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<sup>37</sup> This information was corroborated by another interviewee who had been present at the seminar [IV14, policy advisor, UEAPME].

<sup>38</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

<sup>39</sup> Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands.

through the surveillance mechanisms of the European Semester: most notably through the peer-review activities of the Employment Committee (EMCO) in its capacity as advisory committee to EPSCO, as well as through the annual Country-Specific Recommendations.

In short, with regard to step one of the analytical framework, the Youth Employment Package promotes multi-level governance in two ways: first, it represents a *supranational* initiative that seeks to alter member states' domestic policies and working practices around youth unemployment; and second, it specifically calls for a 'partnership' approach that involves subnational and non-state actors.

### **3.2. The Youth Employment Initiative**

In 2013, the Youth Employment Initiative was established by the European Council of 7-8 February to encourage and support member states to implement activities under the Youth Employment Package (European Commission 2013b, European Council 2013c). Consisting of a EUR 6 billion<sup>40</sup> funding pot, the YEI is specifically targeted at *regions* (NUTS level 2) with a youth unemployment rate of above 25%, and is principally addressed at supporting young people aged 15-24<sup>41</sup> not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Moreover, measures funded under the YEI should target *individuals*, rather than *structures* or *systems*—the latter are instead funded under the European Social Fund (ESF).

Set up under the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2014–2020, and financed under its Cohesion Policy strand<sup>42</sup>, the YEI is made up from EUR 3 billion from a dedicated Youth Employment budget line and a further EUR 3 billion

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<sup>40</sup> 2011 current prices.

<sup>41</sup> Where appropriate, member states can also extend support actions to those aged up to 30 years.

<sup>42</sup> Otherwise known as 'sub-heading 1b: economic, social and territorial cohesion'.



ring-fenced from national ESF allocations<sup>43</sup>. In practice, this means that each member state with qualifying regions is allocated a certain proportion of the YEI budget, which must then be supplemented by an equivalent amount from its national ESF allocation: “for every intervention of the ESF in the eligible region [to tackle youth unemployment], an equivalent amount will be added from the dedicated [YEI] budget line” (European Council 2013c). Table 4.5 details the national allocations under the YEI budget stream for France and the United Kingdom.

**Table 4.5: National allocations under the Youth Employment Initiative**

	Number of regions eligible	National YEI allocation (€ million in 2011 current prices)
<b>France</b>	13 <sup>^</sup>	289.76
<b>United Kingdom</b>	5 <sup>^^</sup>	192.54
<b>Total EU</b>	115 <sup>+</sup>	6000

<sup>^</sup> *Aquitaine, Auvergne, Centre, Champagne-Ardenne, Haute-Normandie, Languedoc-Roussillon, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Picardie, Mayotte, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique, and Réunion.*

<sup>^^</sup> *Inner London, Merseyside, South Western Scotland, Tees Valley and Durham, and the West Midlands.*

<sup>+</sup> *Spread across 20 member states.*

<sup>43</sup> 2011 current prices.

In addition, member states must ‘match’ their ESF allocation with an equivalent amount from national sources in compliance with the Structural Funds’ principle of additionality (a practice known as co-financing). The Commission has, however, ruled that, in light of the significant budgetary constraints facing many member states, only the funding under the ESF needs to be co-financed: member states do not need to provide co-financing for the YEI contribution (European Commission 2013b). In this way, the total amount available to a member state under the YEI is calculated as: YEI allocation + corresponding ESF allocation + national ESF co-financing share<sup>44</sup>. The Commission envisages that member states will also boost this with “substantial additional ESF and national investment” (European Commission 2014f). Table 4.6 shows the total YEI funding available in the two local case studies broken down by source.

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<sup>44</sup> The precise co-financing amount will depend on the status of the region as defined under the European Structural and Investment Funds eligibility criteria: ‘less developed’ regions must ‘match’ 15% of their ESF allocation, ‘in transition’ regions must ‘match’ 40%, and ‘more developed’ regions must provide 50% ‘match-funding’ (for further details see European Council 2013c).

**Table 4.6: Total funding available for the Youth Employment Initiative, by source and case study area**

Funding allocation by source (€ million in 2011 current prices)				
	Specific YEI	ESF	Match	Total
<b>GBSLEP*</b>	22.8	22.8	22.8	68.4
<b>Nord-Pas-de-Calais</b>	22.3	22.3	22.3	66.9

Source: (Department of Work and Pensions 2014); (Région Nord-Pas de Calais 2014)

\* *Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership*

Significantly, funding under the YEI is to be ‘front-loaded’; in other words, it must be spent in the first two years of the programming period, that is to say 2014 and 2015<sup>45</sup>. To aid this, funding has been allocated separately for 2014 and 2015, with the level of funding higher in 2014 (56% of funds) than in 2015 (44% of funds). The requirement to front-load expenditure was pushed through by the Commission and the European Parliament to expedite the delivery of measures, given the urgent situation of youth unemployment across many member states, before being adopted by Heads of State and Government at the June 2013 European Council. In this way, the focus is very much on the “here and now”, with the expectation that “when the EU will exit the crisis, [...] ESF and national Funds should be sufficient to tackle the problem of youth unemployment” (European Commission 2013i, p. 3). As part of this, the

<sup>45</sup> In practice however, under the EU ‘N+3’ financing rule member states have until the end of 2017 to spend the YEI funding allocated for 2014 and until the end of 2018 for funding allocated for 2015.

Commission has decreed that the YEI is not subject to the performance reserve mechanism<sup>46</sup> (European Commission 2013b): in other words, no funding will be kept in reserve. Critically, however, the front-loading of funding is having difficult practical implications ‘on the ground’ in the member states: interviewees in both the UK and France highlighted problems linked to getting programmes ‘up-and-running’ within the short timeframe. Furthermore, rather than fostering innovative solutions, the short timeframe has hindered creativity with policy actors citing not having the time to design and develop new and inventive measures. The problem of implementation will be discussed in further detail in chapters five and six, which deal with the two country case studies.

### *The ‘formal’ policy formulation and implementation process*

In order to simplify the administration of the funds, the YEI has been fully integrated into the existing ESF programming framework for the 2014-2020 period (European Commission 2013g, European Commission 2013h). At this point it is perhaps helpful to explain that in December 2013 the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament adopted a new framework for the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy, which brings together the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) under the new umbrella heading of the EU Structural and Investment Funds (also known as the ESI Funds or ESIF) (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2013). As part of this, there is now an overarching regulation—known as the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)—which, for the first time, sets out common rules and legislation that govern all of the funds. The funds have also been aligned with the

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<sup>46</sup> Under the Performance Reserve Mechanism the Commission keeps back a portion of the Structural Funds' budget to be awarded to projects that have performed particularly well; in this way, the Mechanism seeks to incentivise “outstanding [project] performance” (European Commission 2013e, p. 4).

Europe 2020 priorities of ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ in order to ensure coherency with the overarching EU vision and to maximise the impact of funding. Under the new regulation, member states, in partnership with the European Commission, must develop two key strategic plans to guide their actions over the seven-year programming period: Partnership Agreements (PAs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) (see further European Commission 2014e). Member states that are eligible for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative must outline the specific programming arrangements for the Youth Employment Initiative in both the Partnership Agreement and in the relevant Operational Programme(s). These programming arrangements can take one or more of the following forms: “(a) *a dedicated operational programme*; (b) *a dedicated priority axis within an operational programme*; (c) *a part of a priority axis*” (European Commission 2013g: Article 15 iii: Programming).

Partnership Agreements were introduced as part of the reform of the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy and set out member states’ investment priorities and strategic goals for the five ESI Funds. They identify in detail where (both geographically and thematically) and how the funds will be spent over 2014-2020, as well as how the funds will support the overarching priorities and headline targets of Europe 2020. The Partnership Agreements drew heavily on national ‘position papers’ issued by the Commission in 2012 in the run up to the new programming period, which identified the key lessons learnt from the 2007-2013 programming period and offered country-specific recommendations on how the funds should be used. Member states were obliged to submit their Partnership Agreement within four months of the entry into force of the Regulation, that is to say 22 April 2014. The Commission then had three months from the date of submission to offer its observations. The regulation provided that the Agreements be adopted no later than four months after their submission, on condition that the member state had responded adequately to the

Commission's observations. Critically, Operational Programmes cannot be formally approved—and thus funding released—until the Partnership Agreement has been adopted. The only exception is if a member state has chosen to establish a dedicated YEI operational programme, such as in the case of France.

As with previous programming periods, Operational Programmes translate the strategic priorities and objectives laid out by the member states in their Partnership Agreements into concrete policy actions. OPs set out detailed practical information about how the funds will be delivered, managed and evaluated. In line with guidance issued by the Commission, member states must include details of the actions taken to involve the relevant partners (including regional and local authorities and wider civil society) in the preparation of the operational programme, as well as the role of the partners in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation (European Commission 2013c). Operational Programmes are geographically delimited: they can cover an entire member state (known as a 'national OP'), or a specific region (a 'regional OP'), or they can take the form of a territorial cooperation programme that involves more than one member state. Member states were obliged to submit their Operational Programmes within three months of submitting their Partnership Agreements—thus by 22 July 2014. As with the PAs, the Commission then had three months to issue its observations; the new rules provide that Operational Programmes be formally adopted within 6 months of the initial submission date, subject to member states having adequately taken into account the Commission's observations. Clearly there is a discrepancy between the start of the new funding programme period (January 2014) and the date that the Operational Programmes were formally approved by the Commission. This is particularly relevant given that YEI spending is supposed to be 'front-loaded' and that there is consequently a very tight timeframe to get projects up-and-running and the money spent. This has potential ramifications for the ability of member states to design and implement new

and innovative measures, and also risks the occurrence of ‘underspend’; a major issue at a time when significant numbers of young people are faced with bleak employment prospects.

The implementation of each Operation Programme is subsequently managed by a designated ‘Managing Authority’ (MA) within the member state. MAs are responsible for selecting, monitoring and evaluating the individual projects to be funded under the OP. Projects can be implemented directly by a Managing Authority or through an external provider: in both cases, the MA is responsible for overseeing the project’s delivery. Furthermore, the new 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy rules place a greater emphasis on results and, in keeping with Europe 2020’s focus on country-reporting mechanisms, require Managing Authorities to regularly measure, monitor and report on progress throughout the programme period. Managing Authorities can be located at national, regional or sub-regional level. In the case of the UK, the Managing Authority for the European Social Fund in England<sup>47</sup>, and thus the Youth Employment Initiative, is the Department of Work and Pensions, and specifically its ESF Division, which sits in Sheffield. In the case of France, the ESF and YEI Managing Authority is *La Délégation générale à l’emploi et à la formation professionnelle (DGEFP)* [Department responsible for employment and professional training], and in particular the *Sous-direction du Fonds social européen* [Sub-directorate for the European Social Fund], which fall under the *Ministre du Travail, de l’emploi, de la formation professionnelle et du dialogue social* [Ministry of Work, Employment, Professional Training and Social Dialogue].

As with the YEP, the YEI again promotes multi-level governance by bringing in a clear *supranational* (the initiative itself) and *subnational* (the partnership approach) dimension. In this way, member states’ are automatically forced to operate in a multi-tier, multi-actor political environment.

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<sup>47</sup> In the UK, Operational Programmes for the ESI-Funds are administered by the separate ‘subnational’ administrations of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. As GBSLEP is located in England, it falls under the remit of the England 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth programme.

This section has served to underline the complexity of the EU's formal process of policy formulation and implementation in the area of youth employment; a process that is multi-faceted, multi-layered, and at times confusing—and this just on paper. The following section investigates how EU youth employment policy was formulated in practice, contrasting the 'official' policy process, with the reality of policy-making in the EU, and thereby addressing the issue of the 'goodness of fit' between the two.

#### **4. Step 2: EU youth employment policy in practice, determining the 'goodness of fit'**

The second step in the analytical framework is to determine the extent to which the formulation of EU youth employment policy has in fact been characterised by multi-level governance. This section draws on interview data and a detailed analysis of key EU documents to present three main findings. These are namely that, (1) member states continue to play a central role in the EU's process of youth employment policy formulation and implementation; but (2) that their control over policy direction is disturbed by the soft influence of EU recommendations on national political positions; and (3) a strong emphasis at political and technical level on multi-level governance, at least with regard to the *implementation* of EU youth employment policy.

First, data collected from the interviews with Commission officials indicate that the Commission's main interlocutor in the European policy process remains the member states, both individually through bilateral arrangements and collectively via the Council of the European Union. An analysis of the data reveals three main reasons for this: the design of the policy process itself; the focus on economic governance post-crisis; and finally a lack of capacity within the Commission. Firstly, the central position of the member states, and the



role of the policy process in maintaining their centrality, is best illustrated by the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans. Specifically, the YGIPs were developed and drafted at the national level as per the Commission's explicit request. This was to ensure a coherent overarching national strategy and to foster ownership at the national level. However, what this means in practice is that while the Commission made it clear that regional partners were to be involved in the design of the Youth Guarantee and the YGIP, in reality the extent to which this took place depended heavily on the individual member state. Indeed, evidence from local government officials in both the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region suggests that regional partners were not involved in the development of a national response in either France or the UK. Commission officials also pointed to Spain as an example of where there was significant tension between the national and the regional levels in the drafting of the YGIP: several Commission officials stated that a number of Spanish regions—in particular Cataluña—had been in direct contact with the Commission with complaints that they had not been properly consulted. Tellingly, in response, the Commission reinforced the message that it would only accept a single national YGIP, and not regional YGIPs: “[...] we had to really make it very very clear that from our point of view it is the Member states that have committed to [...] implement the Youth Guarantee, to submit the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. For us it has to be a national plan.” [IV3, senior Commission official, DG Employment]

Secondly, a number of Commission officials pointed to the fact that the renewed focus on and importance attached to economic governance since the 2007-2008 financial crisis, has naturally led to a reinforced focus on the member states as the principle partners, especially in relation to activities under the European Semester. This is because member states bear the ultimate responsibility for their economic and budgetary policies. This shift in focus was highlighted by one Commission official, who stated:

“[...] our attitude vis-à-vis the regions has also changed [...] If you look at what has happened since the crisis with the EU taking a bigger role in trying to influence national [economic] policy, I think [...] that has in a way shifted our emphasis more towards the state-level, because us as institutions would not be able to manage certain processes at regional level [pause] it would be too complicated. So [...] in a way, a stronger EU governance [...] has brought on us the need to also have a stronger state governance.”

[IV9, senior Commission official, DG Employment<sup>48</sup>]

It is worth noting here that there are increasing calls on the part of observers, including Commission officials, to balance the current prevailing focus on economic governance and issues, with a stronger social and employment dimension (Barbier, Rogowski et al. 2015). In particular, several interviewees were deeply concerned that decisions were being taken on economic matters, which failed to adequately take into account their substantial (and often negative) impact on society<sup>49</sup>.

Thirdly, and perhaps most critically, internal capacity issues within the Commission limit its ability to take on a greater role in EU youth employment policy vis-à-vis the member states and, significantly, makes prolonged and systematic contact with the sub-national level difficult with regard to policy development. There are only 2.5 (full-time equivalent) officials working on youth employment policy in the European Commission, located in the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG Employment) (Unit C2). There are additional officials working in the specific ‘geo-desk units’ responsible for overseeing the delivery of the European Social Fund (ESF); however, in practice there are generally only a relatively small number of officials allocated to each member State ‘dossier’.

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<sup>48</sup> Personal interview, Brussels, Belgium, 27 January 2014.

<sup>49</sup> IV7, senior Commission official, DG Employment [Personal interview, Brussels, Belgium, 24 January 2014]; IV10, policy officer, ETUC [Personal interview, Brussels, Belgium, 28 January 2014].

So for example, in the unit responsible for overseeing the ESF in the UK, Ireland, Greece and Cyprus, Unit F3, there are 6.5 officials assigned to the UK dossier, of which 2 deal specifically with England. Similarly, in Unit E2, responsible for France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, 9 officials are assigned to France<sup>50</sup>. In both cases, individual officials often fulfil a specific role within the team and will generally work on a defined aspect of ESF policy and coordination; functions include for example, programme manager, programme assistant, and financial assistant. Importantly, there is a clear division of labour between the policy unit (C2) and the ESF ‘desk’ units, so whilst there may be more personnel available to liaise directly with the regions as part of the delivery of the European Social Fund, this does not necessarily translate into regional influence and input on European youth employment *policy*. Indeed, in the case of the UK, there appeared to be a very different set of relations between the member state and the policy unit, which seemed to be much more adversarial, and its relationship with the relevant ESF unit (F3), which gave the impression of being, whilst not necessarily always easy, much more pragmatic and engaged. This stems from the fact that the two Commission units often deal with separate UK central government actors: C2 will be primarily liaising with representatives from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the European Union (UKRep) and the EU & International Affairs Division in the Department for Work & Pensions; whereas F3 will be in contact with the European Social Fund Division in the Department for Work & Pensions. The differences in the two relationships likely represent the important distinction between *policy*, which the UK sees as an additional (and unwanted) burden, and access to *funding*, which is much needed in times of austerity. UKRep and the EU & International Affairs Division are responsible for putting forward and safeguarding the UK’s national position in the European arena, and ensuring that policies developed at EU-level do not conflict with or place

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<sup>50</sup> Information correct as at November 2014; taken from EU ‘Who is Who’ directory, accessible at: <http://europa.eu/whoiswho/public/index.cfm?lang=en>

unwelcome burdens on the UK; in this sense, they are principally concerned with political considerations. The ESF Division in DWP is charged with the management and operationalization of the ESF in England; while its work will have fed into broader political decisions regarding the shape of the European Structural and Investment Funds in the UK<sup>51</sup>, it is principally concerned with matters of implementation. In this way, different departments in central government, and even different divisions within the same department, are working to different priorities. This creates a highly complex institutional environment.

The second finding of the chapter is that there is evidence to support the idea that while recommendations are not legally binding, they do nonetheless carry political weight. In particular, the case of the UK highlights how collective decision-making in the EU can limit individual state executives' control over policy direction, a key contention of multi-level governance (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). In January 2014, when I was conducting interviews with Commission officials, there was much discussion about whether the Youth Guarantee implementation Plans should be published. Many of the Commission officials interviewed believed that the YGIPs should be made publically available as a matter of transparency to enable greater public scrutiny of member state actions and to foster greater accountability by identifying those member states not performing adequately—what can be understood as a 'naming and shaming' performance management technique (Pawson 2002, Fung, Graham et al. 2008). In the end however, the ultimate decision on whether to make their YGIP publically available or not rested with each individual member state. While some observers clearly felt that the Commission had not done enough to encourage member states to publish their YGIPs, they also suggested that by not forcing the plans into the public arena, member states might be more likely to propose innovative solutions to tackling youth unemployment, as well as to incorporate the Commission's feedback into their plans without fear of public

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<sup>51</sup> Namely through the central government policy 'Making European funding work better for the UK economy' led by the Department of Business and Innovation (BIS).

opinion. As at October 2014, 19 member states, including France, had published their Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans<sup>52</sup>. To date, the UK has not published its YGIP. Indeed, there were initial doubts as to whether the UK would even submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, given the Government's opposition to the scheme. A press memo issued by the Commission following the high-level conference on youth unemployment held on 12 November 2013, which called on member states to implement the Youth Guarantee, explicitly stated that: "[the] UK has indicated it will **not** submit an Implementation Plan" (European Commission 2013d, emphasis in original). The marked emphasis on the word 'not' (highlighted in bold in the original text) would seem to indicate a high level of frustration with the UK's position and possibly an exercise in 'naming and shaming'. Certainly, it is interesting to note that between November 2013, when the memo was released, and January 2014, the UK underwent a change in position. As a senior Commission official revealed:

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<sup>52</sup> These can be found here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1090&langId=en> [Accessed 16 October 2014]

“...the Brits until very recently said they would not submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan [because] they had their own [Youth Contract programme]. They [said] they would submit something but not the YGIP [...] And bon, now 10 days ago we published [...] a memo on the state-of-play [of the YGIPs]<sup>53</sup>. [All the member states who were due to submit in December 2013<sup>54</sup>] have [now] submitted: now it’s only Slovenia [...] that’s missing, and the UK. [So] I called UKRep [the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the European Union] once more and I asked: listen, what shall we put in the memo? We will say then ‘not willing to submit’. And then they got a bit nervous, some cold-feet, and then I got now even from London a written confirmation that they will submit a YGIP. But because of [internal staffing issues] it will be a little bit delayed.”

[IV3, senior Commission official, DG Employment]

The UK’s subsequent change in position appears to suggest that, while the UK Government disagreed with the Youth Guarantee, it did not want to be seen by other member states, and the EU institutions, as being the ‘odd state out’, or of potentially calling into question its commitment to tackling youth unemployment. Continued refusal to submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan may also have negatively affected its relations with other member states, especially at a time when the question of the UK’s continued membership of the European Union was, and continues to be, the subject of heated domestic debate (Johnston 16/03/2016, Castle 20/02/2016). This conclusion appears to be supported by the fact that during the feedback stage, the UK’s YGIP was subject to criticism by the Commission for essentially being a “repackaging” of existing measures, rather than presenting radical structural reforms or new innovative measures to support young people’s employment<sup>55</sup>. Instead, as highlighted in written evidence by the UK Department for Work

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<sup>53</sup> (European Commission 2014b)

<sup>54</sup> Member states with regions eligible for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative were requested to submit their YGIPs by December 2013.

<sup>55</sup> IV4, Commission official, DG Employment [Personal interview, Brussels, Belgium, 23 January 2014]. Interestingly, the YGIP submitted by France was also criticised as being a ‘repackaging’ of existing measures,

and Pensions (DWP) to an inquiry by the House of Lords EU Select Committee, Sub-Committee B on EU Internal Market, Infrastructure and Employment into EU action to tackle youth unemployment<sup>56</sup>, the UK Government indicated that:

“Since the Youth Guarantee is a non-binding Recommendation, we have chosen instead to offer tailored support to young people based on their needs rather than a blanket guarantee. We intend to report to the Commission on the policies we have implemented to support young people into work by equipping young people with the education and skills they need, by supporting them to secure existing labour market opportunities and by encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting new job creation. This includes, but is not limited to [the existing] Youth Contract measures.”

(House of Lords 2014c)

The UK has nonetheless designated an official within the Department for Work and Pensions to act as the national Youth Guarantee coordinator, as per the Commission’s request, despite its opposition to the measure: implying perhaps, its need to be seen to be at least ‘playing the game’, even if albeit only superficially.

Finally, the chapter’s third finding is that while member states might dominate the EU policy process, there is a strong and overt political message around the need for partnership across the different territorial levels in the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the delivery of the Youth Employment Initiative. Partners identified in key EU policy documents encompass both official representatives of government at the sub-national level— notably, regional and local authorities—and relevant stakeholders from the wider economic and social arena, including from civil society. From the outset, the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee makes specific reference to the fact that the Youth

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albeit to a lesser extent than the UK. This is particularly interesting given that France had been the initial advocate and a vocal supporter of the Youth Guarantee.

<sup>56</sup> Conducted over 2013 – 2014.

Guarantee “should be geared to national, regional and local circumstances” (Council of the European Union 2013a, p. 3) and that member states should foster partnership-based approaches, including with “various levels of government” (ibid, p. 4). As part of this, the Recommendation also calls on member states to “promote mutual learning activities at national, regional and local level between all parties involved in combating youth unemployment, in order to improve the design and delivery of future Youth Guarantee schemes” (ibid, p. 5). Unsurprisingly given its close link to the European Social Fund, partnership is a core requirement of the Youth Employment Initiative. Indeed, the Common Provisions Regulation makes specific reference to the need for multi-level governance, and the involvement of regional and local stakeholders, including regional and local authorities:

“For the Partnership Agreement and each [Operational] programme respectively, each Member State should organise a partnership with the representatives of competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners and other relevant bodies representing civil society [...] The purpose of such a partnership is to ensure respect for the principles of multi-level governance, and also of subsidiarity and proportionality and the specificities of the Member states' different institutional and legal frameworks as well as to ensure the ownership of planned interventions by stakeholders and build on the experience and the know-how of relevant actors. The Member states should identify the most representative relevant partners. Those partners should include institutions, organisations and groups which are capable of influencing the preparation or could be affected by the preparation and implementation of the programmes.”

(European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2013: pg. 321)

Moreover, Partnership Agreements should have been developed by member states in consultation with representatives from the local and regional level, interest groups and civil society (European Commission 2014e). The importance given to ‘partnership’ is further



demonstrated by the Commission's adoption of Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the ESI-Funds (European Commission 2014a). Specifically, the Code of Conduct provides member states with guidance on "the organisation of partnerships", including instruction on identifying and actively involving partners in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreements and the Operational Programmes (ibid, p. 1). In particular, the Delegated Regulation states that: "Partnership implies close cooperation between public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society at national, regional and local levels throughout the whole programme cycle consisting of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation."(European Commission 2014a, p. 1: emphasis added) As Bache has observed, "the principle of partnership has formed part of the Commission's view of regional policy since the 1970s [...] [with the aim of] mak[ing] regional policy more effective by formally involving subnational actors most familiar with the problems and priorities of targeted regions" (Bache 1998, p. 74-75).

In summary then, the EU policy process around the formulation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative displays imperfect signs of a smooth-functioning system of multi-level governance. In this sense, EU youth employment policy can be understood to fall into Perry's (2007) 'minimalist' category of MLG. Nonetheless, as indicated above and as will be seen below, it is incorrect, indeed misleading, to state that national state-executives are able to monopolise the policy process.

### 5. Step 3: Identifying mediating factors

The investigation into how EU youth employment policy is formulated (and implemented) in practice at the European-level, detailed above, surfaces a number of mediating factors that are influencing the occurrence of multi-level governance. These can be divided into two categories: factors that operate as facilitators of multi-level governance, and so act as an *opportunity* for MLG; and factors that inhibit multi-level governance, thereby acting as *constraints*. The factors are outlined in table 4.7 and are described in further detail below.

**Table 4.7: Mediating factors at the European-level**

Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of individual state-executive control through collective decision-making, and peer pressure</li> <li>• Overt political aspiration within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance</li> <li>• Presence of EU funding, with, critically, financial conditions attached that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-binding nature of EU recommendations</li> <li>• Need for national ‘ownership’ of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans (prioritised central government involvement)</li> <li>• Capacity constraints within the European Commission</li> </ul>

## 5.1. Opportunities

There are three main factors that support multi-level governance as the appropriate mode through which to formulate and implement EU youth employment policy. The last two factors largely embody what might be understood as an ‘MLG vision’ of policy-making in the European Union—rather than the presence of specific policy *tools* to enable this to happen.

### *Loss of individual state-executive control through collective decision-making, and peer pressure*

The case of the UK above has illustrated how individual state-executives can lose control over the direction of EU policy as a result of collective decision-making processes (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). In particular, an element of ‘peer’ pressure from other member states, and from the European Commission appears to have played a significant role in changing the UK Government’s national position. Indeed, the European Council Conclusions of 27-28 June 2013, while vague in nature, nonetheless openly stress the importance of implementing measures to secure a ‘Youth Guarantee’—thereby indicating a robust consensus among most member states on the value of the scheme (European Council 2013c, European Council 2013b, European Council 2013a), and thus raising the spectre of pressure to conform to a common vision. The case of the UK supports Simona Piattoni’s (2009, p. 51) assertion that member states are operating in a complex “cobweb of mutual interdependencies”, which in turn limits or frames their room for manoeuvre in the European arena.

### ***Overt political aspiration for multi-level governance***

The existence of overt EU policies and preferences that push for the multi-level governance within EU youth employment policy (outlined above in step 1) creates a political environment in which MLG activities are viewed as the appropriate mode of policy-making and implementation. In this sense, MLG activities are viewed as ‘legitimate’, whilst non-MLG activities (and practices that inhibit it) are viewed as running contrary to the ‘right way to do things’. This can act as a powerful source of pressure on member states to support the active inclusion of subnational and non-state actors in the policy process (a key element within MLG); and, moreover, opens up potential spaces for negotiation and contestation in the domestic arena, in which subnational and non-state actors can mobilise to challenge central control (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007). Indeed, it should be noted that although the UK Government does not intend to implement a *national* Youth Guarantee, as a senior DWP official<sup>57</sup> stressed, local areas—led by the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)—*can* implement the Youth Guarantee at their own discretion. In this way then, it is possible for a local area in England to ‘by-pass’ central government’s position and implement European policy of its own volition.

### ***Conditions attached to EU funding that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality)***

Political aspiration for MLG is supported by concrete conditions attached to EU funding (namely the YEI). Financial conditions incentivise member states to align domestic policy principles and institutional practices with EU principles (which advocate multi-level governance) in order to access the maximum amount of EU funding available (2013, Zartaloudis 2015, see also Gerven, Vanhercke et al. 2014). This is likely to be particularly the

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<sup>57</sup> IV35, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions [Telephone interview, 23 September 2014].

case in times of financial precarity and limited domestic budgets—as will be illustrated in the following two country case chapters.

## **5.2. Constraints**

There are three clear constraints to multi-level governance at the European-level. These stem paradoxically from the EU's own institutional and administrative framework.

### ***Non-binding nature of EU recommendations***

It must be recognised that, as EU recommendations are by nature non-binding, the fact that the UK and France are signatories to the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee means very little if the member states do not ultimately implement the Youth Guarantee. After all, a recommendation is simply a piece of paper representing a promise and thus supports the argument posited by some of the state-centric literature on European integration that the member states control the direction and outcome of the European policy process (see for example Moravcsik 1993, 1998, 2002). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the UK was able to dilute the content of the Youth Employment Package in the European Council to ensure that the Youth Guarantee remained a non-binding measure and that, more importantly, access to funding under the Youth Employment Initiative was not contingent on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. As outlined earlier, the YEI was established to assist member states in the implementation of activities under the Youth Employment Package (European Commission 2013b, European Council 2013c). However, there was a very strong conviction among the Commission officials interviewed that the YEI should be primarily, if not exclusively, used to fund measures and programmes that would deliver the Youth Guarantee. This was in stark contrast to the view of UK officials. According to one senior UK official interviewed, while early versions of the YEI stated that it should be used

to implement the Youth Guarantee, the UK successfully managed to amend this in European Council negotiations to activities including, but not limited to, the delivery of the Youth Guarantee so as to ensure that it would still be able to access its quota of YEI funding, despite its refusal to sign up to the Youth Guarantee. As a result, while the European Council Conclusions establishing the YEI make specific reference to the Youth Guarantee, it is sufficiently open to interpretation to allow for alternative actions under the broader focus of the Youth Employment Package: “It will act in support of measures set out in the youth employment package proposed by the Commission in December 2012 and in particular to support the Youth Guarantee following its adoption.” (European Council 2013c) This ambiguity is reinforced in the subsequent European Council Conclusions of 27-28 June 2013: “Member states benefitting from the YEI should adopt a plan to tackle youth unemployment, including through the implementation of the "Youth Guarantee", before the end of the year.” (European Council 2013b: emphasis added)

### ***Need for national ownership of YGIPs***

The importance placed by the Commission on nationally-drafted Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans works against the idea of multi-level governance, which posits “co-decision[-]making across several nested tiers of government” (Marks 1993, p. 407) (see also Hooghe 1996a). Regions were instead very much dependent on central government to take their local needs and plans into consideration; and constricting the European policy process to a two-level arena, limited to the national and European levels of governance.

### ***Capacity constraints***

The very small number of staff within the European Commission responsible for EU youth employment policy severely limits the extent to which subnational and non-state actors are able to engage directly in the policy formulation process (see also Greenwood 2011, Laffan 1997). It is simply not possible for 2.5 Commission officials (full-time equivalent) to liaise systematically and intensively with representatives from the 276 EU ‘regions’—especially given that each area is likely to contain many different views and political objectives. Instead, subnational actors are dependent on their national governments, the Committee of the Regions (CoR), expert Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other large representative bodies such as EUROCITIES—or on their own lobbying capacity. However, there is a debate within the literature on the extent to which bodies like the CoR are able to effectively influence EU policy (see for example Hönnige, Panke 2015, Tatham 2015, although see Piattoni, Schönlau 2015 for an alternative perspective).

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a detailed overview of EU youth employment policy, and in particular its key constituent parts, the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. It began by painting the ‘official picture’, outlining the content and development of the YEP and the YEI, as well as the formal processes by which they are governed and implemented, before drawing on primary interview data and key EU documents to investigate how EU youth employment policy works in practice. What are the implications of this ‘practical reality’ on our understanding of EU youth employment policy

in general and what are its implications on our understanding of how multi-level governance can help us to understand this particular policy?

First, the chapter has shown EU youth employment policy to be a highly complex environment, characterised by a large number of policy measures and activities, and a multi-layered, multi-part institutional framework. It operates both horizontally, across different policy areas, and vertically, across different territorial levels of governance, and its implementation calls on the involvement of both state and non-state stakeholders. Second, it has shown a mixed picture with regard to the extent to which multi-level governance is discernible at EU-level. Utilising Perry's (2007) classification (set out in chapter 2), the EU policy-making process around youth employment displays minimalist instances of MLG: national state-executives continue to dominate, aided by an institutional framework that prioritises central government involvement, as well as small staff numbers within the European Commission. However, national state-executives do not monopolise the process. Three features of the policy process in particular point to a subtle erosion of member state control over policy content and strategic direction: 1) pressure stemming from 'peers' and from the European Commission reduces the ability of individual state-executives to dictate the content and direction of EU youth employment policy; 2) the presence of an overt political 'vision' of MLG as the appropriate mode of policy-making opens up spaces for (subnational and non-state) negotiation and contestation; supported by 3) the inclusion of explicit conditions attached to EU funds (and the YEI in particular) that require national activities to mirror EU priorities and practices.

This chapter has perhaps best served to illustrate the ongoing and multifaceted battle between the member states and the European Commission over the content and direction of, and ultimately the control over, policy. It has demonstrated the value that multi-level governance places on a disaggregated analysis of the nation-state to better our understanding



of policy-making in the European Union (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). State executives do not form a single unified body; rather, they are formed of different actors with different (and sometimes conflicting and competing) priorities, relationships and activities (see also Risse-Kappen 1996). Here, the different relationships experienced by the European Commission with different parts of UK central government are a notable example. Furthermore, the case of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative have reinforced the importance attached by multi-level governance to examining ‘every-day’ policy-making in order to shed more light on the dynamics at play in the policy process. Focus on the highly politicised intergovernmental negotiations around Treaty changes or on votes within the Council of the European Union can only provide a limited part of the policy ‘story’ (see further Marks 1993, p. 392); it does not allow for the identification of the “web of interdependencies” in which member states operate at the European-level, nor the smaller incidents, which nonetheless can have a major bearing on the direction of policy, especially with regard to European employment policy, where the EU institutions have limited formal power.

The next two chapters present the two country case studies. In particular, they investigate the extent to which a partnership approach has been implemented in the UK and France, or whether the political message around multi-level governance is ultimately empty rhetoric. Chapter 5 presents the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative in the United Kingdom (England). Chapter 6 replicates this for France.

**CHAPTER 5**

**THE CASE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM (ENGLAND) AND  
THE GREATER BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL LOCAL ENTERPRISE  
PARTNERSHIP**

**1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the case of the United Kingdom (England) and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP). The UK has long been regarded by scholars and practitioners alike as an ‘awkward partner’ to the EU (George 1998, 1995, Tournier-Sol, Gifford 2015, James 2009, Wilks 1996, Buller 1995). The member state’s reticence with regard to the ‘widening’ and ‘deepening’ of the European project has been particularly evident in the field of social and employment policy. Successive UK governments have systematically opposed attempts to strengthen the EU’s remit over social and employment policy. Notable examples include, the UK’s veto over the proposed parental leave directive in 1983 and 1986; the delayed adoption of the Community Charter of the fundamental social rights of workers, originally adopted by all EC members in 1989, but only adopted by the UK in 1998 following the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam; objections to the content of the Pregnant Workers Directive (Directive 92/85) in the run up to its adoption in 1992; robust opposition to the Young Workers Directive (94/33/EC); the UK’s opt-out of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty by the then Conservative Prime Minister John Major in 1994; and the fierce and ongoing opposition to the implementation of the Working Time Directive (WTD) (see further Anderson 2015, Blair, Leopold et al. 2001). Indeed, long-standing domestic dissatisfaction over the content, impact and relative power of EU policy have ultimately culminated in ‘Brexit’.

Nonetheless, employment—and especially youth employment—represents an important challenge for the UK. Recent statistics indicate that, while the level of youth unemployment saw a downturn over 2015-2016, the unemployment rate for young people (aged 16-24 years) stood at 13.7% over the period January-March 2016 (Office for National Statistics 2016b). Of significant concern are the 12% of all young people aged 16-24 in the UK who were registered as being not in employment, education or training over the period January-March 2016—and are thus labelled as NEETs, the key target group of the Youth Guarantee (Office for National Statistics 2016a). However, as indicated in chapter 3, this marks considerable geographic variation: GBSLEP has particularly high levels of youth unemployment and NEETs. At the same time, there are increasing calls across England for local areas to be given greater decision-making authority and policy responsibilities, including around youth employment. We might therefore expect to see central government under increasing pressure from below to cede decision-making control to the subnational level—and thus, the manifestation of instances of multi-level governance.

This chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a short overview of the political and institutional landscape in which the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative take place. The third section then considers the extent to which England's domestic arrangements regarding the design and implementation of the YEP and the YEI 'match' the EU's stated preference for multi-level governance. Here the section contrasts the formal arrangements with the empirical reality. It draws on relevant key national and local policy documents, as well as on a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 strategically-important policy actors located at the national<sup>58</sup> and the local

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<sup>58</sup> A total of 5 individuals were interviewed from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) [3], Cabinet Office [1] and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) [1]. Unfortunately a representative from the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was not available to be interviewed due to their workload.

LEP level<sup>59</sup> to build-up an in-depth picture of the implementation of the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in the case area. The picture that emerges from the interviews is one of a messy, complex and convoluted policy environment characterised by competing political visions. In particular, divergent views among different central government departments and other national institutions, such as the House of Lords, are simultaneously encouraging and constraining local actors in their search for greater local autonomy in the face of the central state. In this picture, EU Structural Funds continue to embody an important battle-ground in which central government's control is tested. Indeed, the chapter finds that while the central state, represented chiefly by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), continues to exert significant control over the local level, this control is by no means certain, and is continuously being challenged by local actors. The fourth section subsequently identifies a series of mediating factors that are acting as opportunities for and constraints to the occurrence of multi-level governance. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings from the case.

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<sup>59</sup> A total of 7 individuals were interviewed from Birmingham City Council (BCC) [3], Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) [1], the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP Board of Directors [1], and local Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) [2].

## **2. Setting the scene: The broader political and institutional landscape**

The United Kingdom, and in particular England has long been marked by an almost continuous stream of subnational reorganisation (see Jones 2010 for an overview). Successive waves of devolution have given the ‘nations’ of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland a degree of independence from Whitehall, and transformed the UK into an asymmetrical quasi-federal state (Keating, Cairney et al. 2009, Bogdanor 1998, Mitchell, Mitchell 2011, Adams, Robinson 2002). England, however, “remains the gaping hole in the devolution settlement” (see also Morgan 2002, Hazell 2000, p. 1). A programme of decentralisation launched by the 2010-2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, led by Prime Minister David Cameron, resulted in the dismantling of the regional layer of governance across England<sup>60</sup>, with the exception of London, which continues to be governed by the Greater London Authority (GLA). This has essentially left England as “one of the few countries in Europe without a form of regional government” (Jones, Norton 2010, p. 241). Instead, the tenure of the Coalition Government, which oversaw the development and (initial) implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative, has been marked by a distinct policy discourse around ‘localism’ (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011, Clark 2010, see for example, HM Government 2010a, HM Government 2010b, HM Government 2010d). Indeed, the Coalition Programme for Government, which underpinned the Coalition Government’s mandate, made specific reference to its ambition to shift decision-making powers downwards, from central government to local representatives (HM Government 2010a, p. 7). Localism continues to

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<sup>60</sup> This was principally achieved by disbanding the Government Offices in the Regions (GORs) (established in 1994 by John Major’s Conservative Government), the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), and the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) (established under the 1997-2010 Labour Government). It is worth noting here, that this layer of governance was unelected: “this was very much a question of decentralizing administration rather than in any way introducing a regional level of representation to government” (Peele 2003, p. 206).

remain a firm part of the policy discourse of the majority Conservative Government, elected in May 2015 and again led by David Cameron as Prime Minister (Johnstone 09/04/2016, Cameron 11/09/2015). As a result of the localist programme, England has seen introduction of a complex system of ‘subnational’ English governance led by local authorities and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). There are three features of this localist policy agenda in particular that shape the political environment and relationships in which the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative take place, and that are thus worth briefly highlighting. They are: local enterprise partnerships; the Localism Act 2011; and the City Deals and Local Growth Deals.

### ***Local enterprise partnerships***

In 2010, the Coalition Government called on local authorities, businesses and local stakeholders in England to establish local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) based around “real functional economic areas” (HM Government 2010d, p. 13)<sup>61</sup> to replace the disbanded Regional Development Agencies. Part of a wider effort to reform subnational economic development, local enterprise partnerships exemplified the downwards shift away from regions towards local areas as the appropriate level at which to foster growth (Shaw, Greenhalgh 2010). In particular, these “public-private institutions” (Bentley, Pugalis 2013, p. 258) are tasked with leading economic growth and job creation in their local area. As part of this, they are responsible for setting their own strategic vision and investment priorities. There are currently 39 LEPs across England (see map 5.1), and each is characterised by its own individual governance structure: in other words, all 39 LEPs are organised differently.

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<sup>61</sup> Importantly, central government did not impose individual LEPs from above; instead, in a ministerial letter issued by Vince Cable MP, then Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Eric Pickles MP, then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, local groups of councils and business leaders were invited to propose their own partnerships (HM Government 2010c).

Figure 5.1 reproduces a map of the 39 local enterprise partnerships. It is important to note here that while LEPs include both public and private actors, they are *private-sector led*.

There is no specific central government funding provision for LEPs; they are expected to finance their own day-to-day running costs, and are strongly encouraged to leverage private sector investment to achieve the best value for public money (HM Government 2010d). However, LEPs can bid for central government funding programmes to finance projects; major funding opportunities include the Regional Growth Fund, the Local Growth Deals and the City Deals<sup>62</sup>, more on which below. In addition, a significant proportion of the European Structural and Investment Funds for England have been notionally allocated to the LEPs (HM Government 2014b).

There is considerable debate over the extent to which local enterprise partnerships are able to operate as truly autonomous local bodies outside of central government control. Observers point to two factors in particular that imply continued “controlling tendencies” (Bentley, Pugalis 2013, p. 259) on the part of central government. First, unlike their predecessors, the Regional Development Agencies, LEPs are non-statutory bodies. As such, they have no clearly defined legal role within the formal governance arrangements in England (HM Government 2010d). Formal power over public funds and statutory funds thus continues to rest with local authorities and central government. Central government’s ambiguous commitment to local enterprise partnerships is further illustrated by the decision not to delegate managing authority responsibilities for the European Structural and Investment Funds to them; as a result, while the majority of England’s ESI-Funds have been assigned to LEPs, responsibility for the Funds will continue to rest with central government,

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<sup>62</sup> Strictly speaking, funding under the City Deals is allocated to cities and not LEPs; however, certain LEPs encompass cities included under the City Deals. This is the case for example with the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (Birmingham). As such, some LEPs can access funding under the City Deal for their city areas; they are known as the core cities LEPs.

with LEPs and other designated partners fulfilling only an advisory role<sup>63</sup>. Indeed, as will be seen later in this chapter, the Government's ambition of localism, understood here as greater local control and responsibility, stands in marked contrast to the management of the European Structural and Investment Funds in England, which instead emphasises central control.

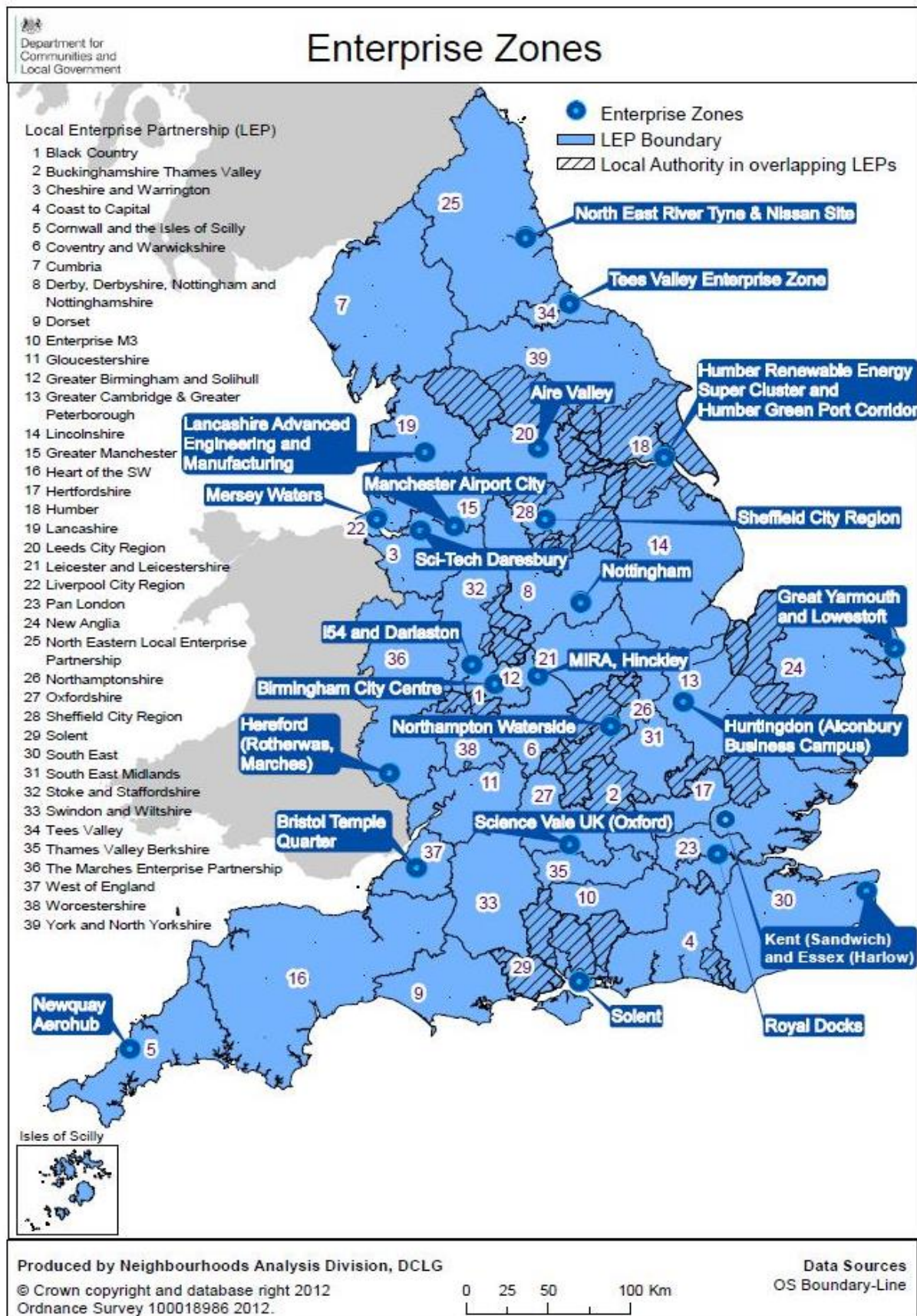
The second main constraining factor on LEPs' independence is their continued financial dependence on (finite) central government funding initiatives (Jones 2010, Raine, Staite 2012, Pugalis 2010). Without adequate levels of funding—and in particular funding without centrally imposed strings that curtail local freedom of manoeuvre—there is a limit to the activities that local enterprise partnerships can realistically pursue. This problem was raised in interviews with local policy actors in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP.

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<sup>63</sup> My thanks here to Europe Direct for clarifying this point for me. [Email query, case ID: 1014428 / 7184240]



Map 5.1: Map of local enterprise partnerships in England



## *The Localism Act 2011*

The Localism Act 2011<sup>64</sup> forms the principal expression of the Coalition Government's commitment to reform, setting out "a series of measures with the potential to achieve a substantial and lasting shift in power away from central government and towards local people" (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011, p. 1). Most significantly for this research, the Act envisages new freedoms and flexibilities for local government, as well as new rights and powers for communities and individuals<sup>65</sup>. In particular, it established the 'General Power of Competence' (GPC) under which local authorities have the "power to do anything that individuals generally may do", including activities not normally undertaken by other public bodies, as long as these do not contravene existing laws (HM Government 2011a). As part of this Ministers are able to devolve responsibility for certain local public functions to local authorities, combined authorities and "economic prosperity boards" (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011, p. 6). The principal aim here is to promote stronger economic growth and greater local accountability (ibid). However, observers paint a very mixed picture as to how much power in reality the Localism Act confers to local government. John Raine for example, contends that while the Act "provides various new freedoms for local authorities [it] also imposes new requirements on them and grants several additional powers to the Secretary of State (for Communities and Local Government)" (Raine 2012, p. 4). For example, "the Secretary of State [has] the power to remove unnecessary restrictions and limitations where there is a good case to do so, subject to safeguards designed to protect vital services" (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011, p. 4). In addition, the Act also introduced new powers to require "public authorities to make payments in respect of certain EU financial sanctions" should their

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<sup>64</sup> Given Royal Assent in November 2011, the Act is applicable in England and Wales.

<sup>65</sup> The Act also sets out reforms to the planning system and to how local housing decisions are made.

actions contravene EU law or financial management practices (HM Government 2011a, Part 2 and 3). This has a bearing on the local management of European Structural and Investment Funds because it means that in cases where a Local Authority is given Intermediate Body (IB) status, on behalf of a local enterprise partnership, it is then liable for any European funding that is deemed by the Commission to have been ‘miss-managed’ (including in cases where the issue has arisen out of human error); rather than central government footing the bill. Many commentators have since argued that, at best, the Localism Act has led to very little change on the ground (Pipe 02/11/2013), and, at worst, it has instead served to centralise power in the hands of Whitehall (Hickson 2013, Jones, Stewart 2012, Bulley, Sokhi-Bulley 2014). George Jones and John Stewart for instance assert that,

“[...] centralism is entrenched by many new, or reaffirmations of existing, powers, regulations and orders proposed for ministers to exercise. Central government advocates localism, but only if it can ensure local authorities do what it wants. The Act is so dominated by this centralist culture that it could well have been called the Centralism Act.”

(Jones, Stewart 2012, pp. 355-356)

Similarly, Gill Bentley and Lee Pugalis (2013, p. 1) raise concerns over “the controlling tendencies of central government”, highlighting “the uneasy relationship between centralised powers, conditional decentralisation and fragmented localism”. Indeed, a common theme within much of the academic literature is the tense relationship between central government and local actors. John Raine (2012) further notes that the deep public spending cuts implemented by the Coalition Government, and scheduled to continue under the current Conservative Government, are likely to severely constrain local authorities’ ability to

instigate new activities under the general power of competence. This scepticism over the perceived ‘real’ impact of the Localism Act ties into wider dissatisfaction with the implementation of the Coalition Government’s localism agenda (Clarke, Cochrane 2013, Bentley, Pugalis 2013, Lowndes, Pratchett 2012).

### ***City Deals and Local Growth Deals***

City Deals and Local Growth Deals form the third feature of the Coalition Government’s localism agenda. Cities are seen as one of the key engines and drivers of national and local growth, and in 2011, building on the message imbued in the Localism Act, the Coalition Government signed a series of agreements with the 8 largest cities<sup>66</sup> outside of London, known as ‘City Deals’ (HM Government 2011b, HM Government 2012b). City Deals aim to “give each city new powers in exchange for greater responsibility to stimulate and support economic growth in their area” (HM Government 2013c). They are envisioned as “a fundamental shift in the relationship between national government and cities – [...] a genuine transfer of power” (HM Government 2011b, p. 1). The City Deals programme is led by the Cities Policy Unit (CPU) based in Cabinet Office, which works jointly with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), as well as with other departments across Whitehall. Interestingly, several local interviewees in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP pointed to this programme as exemplifying the different and competing visions and priorities held by different central government departments; most notably, interviewees stressed that the City Deal programme and its emphasis on greater powers for city and local areas, stands in marked contrast to the centralised management of the ESI-Funds. Moreover, interviewees

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<sup>66</sup> Greater Birmingham and Solihull, Bristol and the West of England, Greater Manchester, Leeds City Region, Liverpool City Region, Nottingham, Newcastle and Sheffield City Region. A ‘second wave’ of City Deals were signed with a further 20 cities across England in 2013.

highlighted that the complex political environment at central level has led in turn to a distinctive and paradoxical environment at local level in which local actors are simultaneously supported and constrained in their search for greater control and autonomy in the face of the central state, depending on which department they are in communication with at the time.

The Coalition Government's ambition to shift power to the local level is further illustrated by the Local Growth Deals, which were introduced in 2014 to build on the perceived success of the City Deals. Amounting to a total national investment of £12 billion, these "one-pot" financial packages were signed with individual local enterprise partnerships to support local economic growth, with a special emphasis on job creation, skills and training, housing training and infrastructure projects (HM Government 2014d, HM Treasury 2013a). Similar to City Deals, local growth deals have been promoted by central government as a way of "decentralising [...] those funding streams that we believe are appropriate for devolution" (HM Government 2013d, p. 4).

This section has served to show that there is an overt domestic trend in England towards greater decision-making authority on the part of local areas—and particularly Local Enterprise Partnerships—over local policy and funding. We would expect therefore to see this replicated in the domestic formulation and implementation of EU youth employment policy. As will be seen in the next section however, the reality is much more complicated.

### **3. Step 2: Determining the ‘goodness of fit’**

Moving on to the second step of the analytical framework, this section considers the extent to which UK domestic practices around the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Policy and the Youth Employment Initiative have been characterised by multi-level governance. The section begins by setting out the formal institutional arrangements through which the YEP and the YEI are to be implemented in England. The following subsection then draws on interview data to examine how implementation has taken place in practice. This dual investigation exposes important contradictions between the formal processes and the reality of implementation ‘on the ground’—and highlights inconsistencies within the UK Government’s rhetoric on localism.

#### **3.1. The formal implementation arrangements**

##### ***3.1.1. The Youth Employment Package***

To recap from Chapter 4, the Youth Employment Package is essentially a set of three interlinked policy measures designed to improve the employment situation of young people across the European Union. The three measures are 1) the Youth Guarantee, 2) the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAA), and 3) the Quality Framework for Traineeships (QFT) (European Commission 2012b). Although all three are their own separate initiatives, the Youth Guarantee forms an umbrella structure within which activities linked to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Quality Framework for Traineeships, take place. Specifically, the Youth Guarantee aims to develop a new “approach” to tackling youth unemployment by encouraging member states to implement structural reforms, and new and

innovative policies and programmes that will ensure that *all* young people under the age of 25 have access to a good quality offer of employment, education or training within four months of becoming unemployed or of leaving formal education (Council of the European Union 2013a). In particular, it focuses on the specific challenges faced by those young people furthest from the labour market, who are often not in employment, education or training—the so-called NEETs. Significantly, the Youth Guarantee desires that member states undertake major domestic reforms in order to tackle the underlying, deep-rooted structural weaknesses that impede young people’s access to the labour market: for example, through reforms to national vocational education and training systems. However, whilst (or perhaps because) the Youth Guarantee is highly ambitious, its status as a Council Recommendation (Council of the European Union 2013a), means that member states are not legally-bound to implement it. Instead, action takes place at the discretion of individual national state-executives, and within the wider framework of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)<sup>67</sup>.

At first glance, the Youth Employment Package, and the Youth Guarantee in particular, does not suggest an auspicious start to an enquiry into the state of multi-level governance in the UK, and in England especially. The UK Government has explicitly stated that it does not intend to implement the Youth Guarantee as conceived at EU-level:

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<sup>67</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the OMC in European social policy see Büchs (2007).

“The measures which the UK Government is taking to address youth unemployment and which ESF and YEI will complement are along lines that are the same as or very similar to the kind of measures suggested in the Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee. However, these measures do not include a guarantee to all those aged under 25 of an offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a four months of their becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.”

(HM Government 2014e, pp. 66-67)

In other words then, although the UK is fully committed to tackling youth unemployment, and has already put in place a number of measures designed to support young people in their search for employment, it will not introduce a system of *guaranteed* employment, education or training. Interviews with central government officials and actors at local level indicated that this was very much a decision taken at central level: the UK’s policy position was formulated by the Department of Work and Pension’s (DWP) EU and International Employment and Social Policy Division, in compliance with an overt “ministerial steer”<sup>68</sup>, and with no input from the local level<sup>69</sup>. Interestingly, all the interviewees located in the DWP noted that the Department was heavily “siloesd”<sup>70</sup> with little cross-over between different divisions; in this way, while there is communication between the two, the work of the EU and International Employment and Social Policy Division on EU policy is seen as being almost entirely separate from work of the European Social Fund Division.

There were three main lines of reasoning behind the UK’s decision not to implement the Youth Guarantee. The first can be understood as a manifestation of opposing philosophical standpoint on the welfare state; the second is associated with the financial

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<sup>68</sup> IV 19, official, Department for Work and Pensions [Telephone interview, 7 April and 17 September 2014]

<sup>69</sup> IV 19, official, Department for Work and Pensions; IV 18, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions [Telephone interview, 18 April 2014]; IV 17, Board Member, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP [Telephone interview, 4 April 2014]; IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council [Personal interview, Birmingham, 27 March 2014]

<sup>70</sup> IV 34, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions [Telephone interview, 23 September 2014]



burden of action; and the third is connected to the specific characteristics of the UK labour market.

As the quote above suggests, the first major source of disagreement centres on the use of the term “guarantee”, and the potential implications that this terminology could have on national governments:

“I also think it partly comes to [...] the definition of what the Guarantee actually amounts to. So we have interpreted it [as] meaning that at the 4-months stage every individual would need to be in full-time activity, and so if they don’t get a job or they don’t choose to get back into education you are then laying on and paying for some kind of full-time activity. Whereas you could [...] more loosely interpret it as—because it uses the terminology of an “offer”—you could just say, well yes we’ve handed the individual the jobs pages and therefore we’ve made them an offer of a job. But of course I suspect that isn’t what the Commission really means.”

[IV 18, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions]

Indeed, there was a clear sense from several interviews with central government officials and other observers<sup>71</sup> that it was not the place of the “State” to guarantee employment for individuals; rather, that employment is ultimately the responsibility of the individual (see Wright 2016 for a discussion). This represents a major philosophical ‘disconnect’ between the EU (and specifically the European Commission) and the United Kingdom, as then represented by the Coalition Government<sup>72</sup>:

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<sup>71</sup> IV 19, official, Department for Work and Pensions; IV 18, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions; IV 13, advisor, BUSINESSEUROPE [Personal interview, Brussels, 30 January 2014]

<sup>72</sup> A disconnect that is likely to deepen with the election of the Conservative Government in May 2015.

“[It is a philosophical disagreement] about what is the right labour market intervention [...] do we take the general view that actually unemployment [...] is the individual’s problem and therefore our job [as the state] is to support them to get out of unemployment and into work, and therefore a lot of the onus is on them to work out what they would like to do based on what the opportunities are and then to pursue and take it up, and so our job is to [provide] information, [and to implement] particular interventions to overcome [...] employer barriers, or other barriers that the individual faces, but actually mostly it’s the individual’s responsibility. Whereas some version of the Social Europe narrative I think is more about more closer to ‘nanny-state’ so it’s our fault [as the state] and therefore we will provide for you. So, as you say, that’s quite a fundamental policy difference.”

[IV 18, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions]

In parallel with this line of argument, there was a strong opinion at ministerial level and within the Department of Work and Pensions that that the UK is already performing well when it comes to tackling youth unemployment, especially in comparison with the efforts of many other EU member states, and that existing provision does not need to be changed: “we’re doing a great job”<sup>73</sup>. Indeed, there seemed to a very adversarial stance among certain interviewees in the Department of Work and Pensions with regard to EU policy, and the European Commission, with distinct hostility towards the Youth Employment Package, which was seen as an “imposition” and as creating highly undesired additional burdens<sup>74</sup>. Interestingly, the Youth Employment Initiative was viewed in a much more positive light, primarily because it offers financial support, rather than promoting specific actions: “In that

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<sup>73</sup> IV 19, official, Department for Work and Pensions

<sup>74</sup> IV 19

respect, the YEI is not a separate EU policy that we have to worry about. It is largely a source of money, with which we can do something sensible.” (House of Lords 2014c, p. 202)<sup>75</sup>

The second line of reasoning behind the decision not to implement the Youth Guarantee relates to the financial cost of additional reforms and policy measures. At the time of the decision, the Coalition Government was already in the process of driving through a major, and expensive, reform of the UK welfare system. Two central components to this reorganisation included the introduction of ‘Universal Credit’<sup>76</sup> and the ‘Work Programme’, a “payment-for-results welfare-to-work programme” (Department for Work and Pensions 2012, p. 2), which together are estimated to cost from between £4.5 billion and £5.7 billion (House of Commons 2015, National Audit Office 2014)—although the final cost of welfare reform is likely to exceed estimates owing to technical difficulties and delays (House of Commons 2015, House of Commons 2014). In the midst of this existing large-scale and costly reform, and at a time of tight public budgets, the Coalition Government was unsurprisingly unwilling to introduce further reforms, or to re-reform its system, in line with a Youth Guarantee. Interestingly, one interviewee in the Department of Work and Pensions appeared to suggest that it would be difficult for central government to lay on additional provision, including activities linked to the delivery of a “Youth Guarantee”, without breaching contractual obligations with existing Work Programme providers<sup>77</sup>.

The third reason behind the UK’s refusal to implement the Youth Guarantee is to do with the specific characteristics of the UK labour market, and also links back to the last point about the financial burden of action. Specifically, the UK has from the beginning of the

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<sup>75</sup> Oral evidence from the Department of Work and Pensions on 28 October 2013 to the House of Lords inquiry into EU action to tackle youth unemployment.

<sup>76</sup> Universal Credit represents an overhaul the benefits system for individuals looking for employment and those on low incomes; chiefly it brings together the different benefits for which an individual may be eligible into one single payment. For more information see the UK Government’s policy on Universal Credit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/simplifying-the-welfare-system-and-making-sure-work-pays/supporting-pages/introducing-universal-credit> [Accessed 6 April 2015].

<sup>77</sup> IV 19, official, Department for Work and Pensions

development of the Youth Guarantee (see Chapter 4) been opposed to the choice of four months as the designated period within which a young person should receive an offer of employment, education or training. Instead, the Government maintains that six months would be a better time period given the particular make-up of the UK labour market, arguing that 80% of 18-24 already “flow off” Jobseeker’s Allowance within six months, and 65% within three months (Department of Work and Pensions 2014, p. 4). In essence, the argument here is that, given the limited nature of public and EU funds, money should be concentrated on those young people experiencing the most difficulty in finding employment or an education/training place; in other words, the 20% who do not “flow-off” Jobseeker’s Allowance after six months. If the four-month period is used, funding is potentially ‘eaten-up’ by young people who would have already been likely to find a job or an education/training place with limited help from the state: for example, because they have higher levels of skills and qualifications, or because they have the necessary knowledge to successfully navigate the job/education/training application process (see further Brine 2006, Perrons, Fagan et al. 2005, Brown, Hesketh et al. 2002). Interestingly, the six-month line of argument was appreciated by several of the European Commission officials interviewed<sup>78</sup>; and indeed, the choice of four months appears to have been an arbitrary decision.

Here then, the UK falls firmly into Perry’s (2007) minimalist category of multi-level governance with a poor degree of fit between EU and domestic youth employment policy. Nevertheless, although the UK may not have chosen to implement the Youth Guarantee at national level, it is nonetheless likely to have an impact on the domestic policy environment. First, because local enterprise partnerships have discretion to implement their own version of the Youth Guarantee<sup>79</sup>, and the measure has caught the imagination of local areas, and particularly local authorities and third sector organisations—Birmingham City Council for

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<sup>78</sup> IV 3, senior Commission official, DG Employment [Personal interview, Brussels, 23 January 2014]; IV 8, Commission official, DG Employment [Personal interview, Brussels, 27 January 2014]

<sup>79</sup> IV 34, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions

example, which forms a key member of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, is strongly in favour of the Youth Guarantee. Second, EU policy and the Youth Guarantee has heavily shaped the priorities that underpin the Youth Employment Initiative, and the European Social Fund; this in turn shapes the activities that member states are allowed to fund using EU resources—so while the UK will not implement a national Youth Guarantee as formally conceived at EU level, the Youth Employment Initiative nonetheless funds activities that link to the idea of a youth guarantee, for example, apprenticeships and traineeships (Department of Work and Pensions 2014, p. 4).

### ***3.1.2. The Youth Employment Initiative***

To recap from Chapter 4, the Youth Employment Initiative is a EUR 6 billion fund, dedicated to supporting regions experiencing high levels of youth unemployment—25% and above—to implement measures linked to the Youth Employment Package, including the Youth Guarantee, with a specific focus on the sustainable (re)integration of young people not in employment, education, or training into the labour market (European Commission 2013b, European Council 2013c). A condition of the fund is that all activities must be targeted at individuals and not structures or systems—in this way, the fund cannot support structural reforms, but must instead finance activities that directly benefit young people, for example, by funding places on educational courses, apprenticeships or traineeships, or activities, such as one-to-one guidance sessions (see Department of Work and Pensions 2014, p. 11).

To facilitate the implementation process, the Youth Employment Initiative has been integrated into the existing European Social Fund (ESF) programming framework. As outlined in Chapter 4, following the reform of the EU Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020, the ESF has in turn been brought under the overarching banner of the European Structural and

Investment Funds (ESI-Funds or ESIF) programme<sup>80</sup> (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2013). In the United Kingdom, the ESI-Funds have been divided into four separate ‘subnational’ programmes for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each ‘subnational’ administration is responsible for its portion of the ESI-Funds; although, as highlighted chapter 3, for England, the ‘subnational’ administration is UK central government.

The UK, led by the Coalition Government, has chosen to develop a single ‘European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme’ for England, in order to ensure coherency between the different funds. The programme brings together the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) into one common strategic framework based around a shared vision. Each fund however, is delivered via its own distinct national Operational Programme (OP) and is led by a separate Managing Authority. Accordingly, in England, the European Social Fund, and thus the Youth Employment Initiative, is delivered through the ‘ESF Operational Programme for England’ (ESF OP England) (Department for Work and Pensions 2014), which is led by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as the designated Managing Authority<sup>81</sup>, and specifically by its ESF Division, which is located in Sheffield.

As indicated in Chapter 4, Operational Programmes convert the broad strategic objectives outlined by member states in their Partnership Agreements into specific investment priorities and goals in order to then develop concrete policy actions to be undertaken. The England ESF OP draws on the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, as

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<sup>80</sup> Together with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

<sup>81</sup> As nominated by the UK Government, in accordance with Article 123 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds (European Commission 2013h).

well as on guidance issued by the European Commission<sup>82</sup>, to focus on activities that support labour market participation, promote social inclusion, and improve skill levels. Investment is targeted around three priority axes: 1) inclusive labour markets; 2) skills for growth; and 3) technical assistance (Department for Work and Pensions 2014). The Youth Employment Initiative operates within this framework to provide additional financial support to those areas affected by high levels of youth unemployment, with a particular focus on young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs). In order to ensure targeted investment on NEETs, spending under the YEI must be accounted for separately from payments made under the European Social Fund; in other words, there must be a separate ‘paper trail’ for audit purposes (Department of Work and Pensions 2014, p. 7).

Local Enterprise Partnerships are seen as key actors within the ESF/YEI development and implementation process. Indeed, the Coalition Government<sup>83</sup> envisaged that LEPs will act as “key strategic drivers” of the ESIF Growth Programme for England, undertaking such activities as “work[ing] with local partners to decide which projects to support; help[ing] to identify match funding; oversee[ing] arrangements for selecting projects (commissioning and/or bidding), or for using Co-financing Organisations to procure ESF provision, in discussion with Managing Authorities; deliver[ing] the milestones and results agreed in their strategy, including making sure that enough money is spent each year to meet annual spend targets; and involve[ing] local partners across the spectrum.” (HM Government 2013e, p. 3)

Significantly, YEI funds (along with the majority of the ESF and other ESI-Funds) have been “notionally” allocated to Local Enterprise Partnerships as part of the Coalition Government’s commitment to localism. As part of this, LEPs were tasked by Government with developing their own European and Structural Investment Fund strategies, detailing how

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<sup>82</sup> Namely, the Commission’s 2013 Country Specific Recommendations to the UK (European Commission 2013k), the Commission Position Paper (CPP) for the UK 2014-2020 (European Commission 2012c) and the UK National Reform Programme (HM Government 2012a).

<sup>83</sup> This policy position is unlikely to change with the election of the Conservative government.

they intend to spend their funding allocation, with clear planned actions and outcomes. The emphasis here was on identifying local spending priorities and objectives that take into account the specific local context and local needs (Department of Work and Pensions 2014, p. 3). The ESIF strategies were developed in conjunction with LEPs' wider strategic economic plans (SEPs); in this way, European funding is supposed to be fully integrated and coherent with the area's wider strategy for growth. This is to maximise the impact of what are ultimately limited funds. Indeed, the ESF and the YEI represent an important source of additional funding for local projects at a time when local authority budgets are experiencing large-scale financial cuts, and at a time when local areas are often facing important employment challenges (Butler, Jowit 18/12/2014, Local Government Association 2014, see for example: BBC News 18/12/2014).

The ESIF strategies were submitted to central government for review in October 2013; revised drafts were then (re)submitted in January 2014 following discussions between the LEPs and the relevant central government departments<sup>84</sup>. Interviews with central government officials suggested that the quality of the ESIF strategies varied widely between the different LEPs; in particular, interviewees expressed concern that many strategies lacked details of specific actions to be undertaken to deliver the broad (and often ambitious) strategic visions developed<sup>85</sup>.

The design and implementation of the England ESF OP is overseen by the 'ESIF Growth Programme Board', which acts as the Programme Monitoring Committee as per EU regulations. The Board is formed of representatives from UK central government<sup>86</sup>, the

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<sup>84</sup> Discussions were led by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), with, in the case of the ESF/YEI, input from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

<sup>85</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions; IV 20, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions [Birmingham, 14 May 2014]

<sup>86</sup> From the four departments concerned with the ESI-Funds: the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).



European Commission<sup>87</sup> and stakeholders from individual local enterprise partnerships, local authorities, universities and colleges, non-government organisations and the business community<sup>88</sup>.

While the involvement of local enterprise partnerships suggests a strong degree of local control, it in fact masks a significant degree of centralisation. Critically, all ESI-Funds, including the Youth Employment Initiative are only *notionally* allocated to the LEPs. So while LEPs may have the money on paper, in reality the funds remain with central government. The centralisation of funds is evidenced in two ways: first, in terms of arrangements around the ESI-Funds themselves, and second, with regard to national match-funding arrangements.

At this point it is perhaps helpful to recall that funds under the Youth Employment Initiative stem from three sources. An initial amount is allocated to regions from the dedicated YEI funding stream; this is then supplemented by an equivalent amount ring-fenced from the national ESF allocation, as well an equivalent amount of domestic “match” funding from national sources. The YEI and ESF allocation fall under the heading of ‘ESI-Funds’. Table 5.1 provides a break-down of the YEI funding available for the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) by source<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> From DG Regional Policy (REGIO), DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL) and DG Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI).

<sup>88</sup> See further: (HM Government 2014a, HM Government 2014c)

<sup>89</sup> It must be noted here that although the Youth Employment Initiative has been allocated at LEP level, under the fund’s eligibility criteria, only the Birmingham and Solihull areas qualify to receive funding.

**Table 5.1: Total Youth Employment Initiative funding available for the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, by source**

Funding allocation by source (€ million in current prices)				
	Specific YEI	ESF	Match	Total
<b>GBSLEP</b>	22.8	22.8	22.8	68.4

*Source:* (Department of Work and Pensions 2014)

The first indication of the centralisation of the ESI-Funds is that the UK Government has explicitly chosen *not* to devolve managing authority responsibilities to local enterprise partnerships<sup>90</sup>. This means that LEPs are not authorised to hold EU funds. Instead, it is the Department for Work and Pensions, as the nominated Managing Authority, which ultimately makes any ESF/YEI payments. In this way, local enterprise partnerships, and other designated stakeholders, (merely) fulfil a strategic and advisory role, rather than a management function (HM Government 2013a, p. 3). As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the issue over local enterprise partnership’s statutory ability to hold funds received from central government is also a problem for other national, centrally-administered funding streams, such as the Local Growth Deal. To overcome this problem, several Local Enterprise Partnerships have signed agreements with their Local Authority member, to appoint the latter as an “Accountable Body”<sup>91</sup>; this is the case with the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, which has asked Birmingham City Council (BBC) to act as its Accountable Body. Several

<sup>90</sup> My thanks here to Europe Direct for clarifying this point for me. [Email query of 17/02/2015, case ID: 1014428 / 7184240]

<sup>91</sup> Local Authorities are legally bound to operate within the framework of a centrally-set accountability system (see Department for Communities and Local Government 2013) and HM Treasury Guidance concerning the management of public money (HM Treasury 2013b).

local interviewees suggested that it would be possible for GBSLEP to nominate Birmingham City Council to act as its Accountable Body in order to receive ESI-Funds directly<sup>92</sup>.

Second, with regard to match-funding arrangements, central government has developed a series of “opt-in prospectuses” whereby local enterprise partnerships can access match-funding by “opting-in” to provision delivered by a series of national programmes and national providers (HM Government 2013a, HM Government 2013b). As indicated above and in Chapter 4, funding from the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative must be “matched” by an equivalent amount from national sources under the principle of additionality. As part of their European and Structural and Investment Fund strategies, Government asked LEPs to identify sources of match funding for the ESI-Funds; co-investment is foreseen from the local private and public sector organisations, as well as from local civil society organisations. However, Government has recognised that, in the past, an important source of match-funding has been government-funded programmes. Under the ‘opt-in model’, LEPs can choose for their ESI-Fund allocation to be delivered by specific national programmes and/or providers. For the ESF and the YEI, the main national “opt-in” providers are the Department for Work and Pensions<sup>93</sup>, the Big Lottery Fund (for activities linked to social inclusion and combatting poverty) and the Skills Funding Agency<sup>94</sup> (for activities linked to education, skills and lifelong learning). By opting-in to this service, “a LEP commits part of its ESI Funds allocation to the programme. In return, the LEP accesses match funding and administrative support.” (HM Government 2013b, p. 3) Interestingly, there is already an assumption that LEPs will opt-in to provision by the Big Lottery Fund to meet objectives linked to social inclusion and poverty: “The planning assumption is therefore

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<sup>92</sup> IV 17, Board Member, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP; IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council

<sup>93</sup> At the time of writing, negotiations concerning the provision of services by the Department for Work and Pensions were still ongoing.

<sup>94</sup> The other national programmes/providers are: GrowthAccelerator, the Manufacturing Advisory Service, UK Trade and Investment, and the European Investment Bank (for social housing ‘retrofits’) (HM Government 2013b).

that around 10% of all Local Enterprise Partnerships' European Social Fund allocations will be directed through this route over the first two years of the programme" (HM Government 2013a, p. 54) This raises questions over the *voluntary* nature of the "opt-in" model: if budgets have already been pledged to national providers, it is likely that LEPs will face significant pressure to maintain the 'status-quo' in order to secure national providers' continued existence. Indeed, as will be seen in the following section, the matter of 'institutional stickiness' was raised by several local interviewees when discussing central government's response to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP's *opt-out*.

Importantly, provision is supposed to be tailored to local needs, and local enterprise partnerships, and key local stakeholders, are supposed to retain "influence and strategic control" over how the services are delivered (HM Government 2013a, p. 53). Indeed, in the "opt-in prospectuses" developed by the Big Lottery Fund and the Skills Funding Agency, there are explicit references to the possibility of a "bespoke local proposal", "local projects", and "tailored service-level agreement[s]": "We are *not* operating a top-down, national programme that tells you what to do. This is a new approach." (HM Government 2013b, p. 30: emphasis in original. See also pp. 25-33) However, as will be seen in the next section the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP has chosen to opt-out of this national provision; in part due to concerns based on previous experience that provision will not be sufficiently 'localised', as well as concerns over the quality of provision.

The decision by the UK Government to preserve financial control in the hands of the central state has principally been framed as a question of risk management, as well as one of access to match-funding: "The liability for the Funds in England will remain with individual contract holders/successful applicants and the Managing Authorities for the Funds." (HM Government 2013e, p. 4) Moreover, because ESI-Funds are paid retroactively by the European Commission, it is in fact the Department for Work and Pensions, as the Managing

Authority, which initially provides the funds for local enterprise partnerships. Table 5.2 details the sources of the different components of the Youth Employment Initiative. Once the money has been spent, the Department can then claim the money back from the European Commission, subject to a successful audit (HM Government 2013e, p. 17).

**Table 5.2: Funding streams by source**

Funding stream			
	Specific YEI	ESF	Match
Source	DWP	DWP	Opt-in / local sources

Risk management in particular was something that came up repeatedly in interviews with central government officials, as well as with interviewees at local level<sup>95</sup>. Specifically, central government believes that it is best placed to manage ESI-Funds so as to ensure compliance with EU regulations; in particular, government officials interviewed repeatedly stressed that central government has the experience, expertise and resources necessary to manage large-scale European projects in line with strict EU regulations<sup>96</sup>. In particular, central government was seen as being most able to take the ‘financial hit’, should any issues of compliance with EU regulations arise.

In summary then, the domestic arrangements around the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative in England highlight central government’s dominance over the policy

<sup>95</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 20, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions

<sup>96</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 34, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions

processes—and consequently a poor degree of fit between EU and domestic policy. However, as will be seen in the next sub-section, the thesis’ investigation into the ‘real’ implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative exposes a hidden picture of contestation between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’ that has important implications for scholarly understanding of the practical application of MLG.

### **3.2. Implementation in practice**

The preceding section described the formal arrangements through which the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative are to be delivered and governed in the United Kingdom, and more specifically in England. This section draws on interviews with central government officials, and policy-makers and opinion-formers from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership to examine how the implementation of these two EU initiatives, encompassing both *policy* and *funding*, have taken place in practice.

The interviews, coupled with a review of key policy and political documents, reveal a highly contested political arena, in which representatives from the Department for Work and Pensions and policy actors from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP are engaged in a highly-charged skirmish to decide on who, ultimately, controls how EU funds are spent. The case of the implementation of the YEP, and the YEI more particularly, exemplify the domestic clash between competing political ideologies: between localism and centralisation, and between individualism and a model of social welfare more in keeping with EU aspirations.

*Tension between central government and the local level over control over financial resources*

Over the course of the interviews it became increasingly clear that the governance and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative was characterised by a significant degree of tension between central government actors, and particularly between representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and actors from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. This tension stemmed primarily from local opposition to the perceived controlling tendencies of DWP, and manifested most visibly around the issue of who should ultimately control the European Structural and Investment Funds. In particular, tension centred on the decision by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership *not* to opt-in to the national framework of provision via the “opt-in prospectuses”. Instead, in January 2014, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP announced that, although it planned to work with the national ‘opt-in’ providers to “to ensure coherent provision and [to] develop potential joint investment arrangements” (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, 2014, p. 40), the LEP would be developing an alternative co-investment model, which would draw on local public and private sources to secure match-funding independently from the national providers/programmes. Under this model, it was envisaged that the LEP’s ESI-Fund allocation would be provided directly by the Managing Authorities, outside of the ‘opt-in’ framework. Significantly, this alternative co-investment approach was primarily designed to source independent match-funding for the LEP’s European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) allocation. National opt-in providers were only identified as a source of match-funding for projects linked to stimulating business and enterprise, which fall chiefly under the remit of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

It must, however, be noted here that, as Local Enterprise Partnerships have no formally designated role in the national management of ESI-Funds (see above), even with the co-investment approach, the ultimate responsibility for managing YEI/ESF funds would continue to remain with the Department for Work and Pensions as the authorised Managing Authority.

The decision by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP to opt-out was greeted by a significant amount of resistance from central government, and in particular by the Department of Work and Pensions, as the Managing Authority most affected by the opt-out, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, as the departmental-lead for UK policy on the ERDF and the ESF<sup>97</sup>. As one local government officer in Birmingham City Council, which leads on the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP's European dossier, stated with regard to the negotiations around the LEP's ESI-Fund strategy,

“There is a lot of tension. And certainly I've been at meetings in the early days with senior representatives of DWP [where] I felt [that] I got taken to a room and I felt I was put under pressure to have a decision then. I said well I'm not the LEP; I said I can tell you which is the direction of thinking and why, but they were virtually saying we need to know now—well of course they don't—and you do feel like you're being bullied when you're sitting there with them and they're saying well 38 of the 39 LEPS have already opted-in. But just because they've opted in doesn't mean to say it's the right way.”

[IV 22, senior officer, Birmingham City Council]<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> IV 15, senior officer, Birmingham City Council [Personal interview, Birmingham, 24 March 2014]; IV 16 [LB], senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

<sup>98</sup> Personal interview, Birmingham, 20 May 2014



The decision by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP to opt-out of national provision was driven in large part by its resolute commitment to the Coalition Government’s localism agenda. Indeed, both private sector and public sector LEP members were fully signed up to the vision of local governance put forward by Lord Heseltine in his 2012 report “No Stone Unturned: in pursuit of Growth”<sup>99</sup>; and notably to its call for “a major reconfiguration of responsibilities for economic development between central and local government, and between government and the private sector” (Lord Heseltine 2012, p. 7) (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership 2014, p. 3). Indeed, local interviewees viewed national resistance over the opt-in as running in direct contravention to the Coalition Government’s localism agenda, and its emphasis on local “freedoms and flexibilities” (HM Government 2011a)<sup>100</sup>, with one interviewee going so far as to call the supposed devolution to the LEPs a “farce”<sup>101</sup>. There was a tangible sense of considerable frustration among local interviewees over central government’s position. As one private sector LEP Board Director remonstrated, “You would have thought that this would have been sorted out long before the UK [central government] had asked the LEPs to put so much time and effort into designing their ESIF bids”<sup>102</sup>. Interestingly, the same interviewee went on to say that while there was a lot of positive talk about greater localism and devolved control at Ministerial level—and that, in particular, Matthew Hancock MP, then Minister of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, seemed to be very keen to try to understand where the LEP was coming from—the message coming out of the “government machinery” (i.e. the Civil Service) was much less positive. This discrepancy was attributed to civil servants being much more bound by rules, so limiting their flexibility and room for manoeuvre, as well as the

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<sup>99</sup> The report was the result of an invitation issued by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, to examine how the UK might create more economic wealth.

<sup>100</sup> IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 17, Board Director (Business sector), Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP.

<sup>101</sup> IV 21, senior officer, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

<sup>102</sup> IV 17, Board Director (Business sector), Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP.

underlying belief that they, as opposed to local actors, are best placed to understand how the system works. This point was also picked up by another interviewee: “Well it’s not in the interest of the civil servants is it? [We are continuously having to jump through] hoop after hoop”<sup>103</sup>. While both private sector and public sector interviewees were clearly strongly in favour of greater local control there was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a more overt political dimension to the interviewees with local government officers. One interviewee in particular, appeared to draw inspiration from Scotland’s referendum on independence, which was taking place at the time, to call for the local equivalent of “max devo”<sup>104</sup>, that is to say maximum devolution to English local areas. This strong and unconcealed desire for local control, especially over European Funds was in large part motivated by a wide-spread sense, particularly among interviewees from the public sector, that the services delivered by national providers under previous EU Structural Fund programming periods had failed to provide an integrated provision tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the local area: “we find that [...] particularly DWP will commission nationally. And then you don’t necessarily get contractors that are connected with the local community in terms of the delivery and impact on the ground”<sup>105</sup>. Local dissatisfaction was intensified by concerns over the quality of the services delivered<sup>106</sup>. Indeed, as indicated earlier, acquiring independent local match-funding was seen as particularly important for YEI-funded projects aimed at improving young people’s access to employment<sup>107</sup>, in order for the LEP to be able to develop locally-tailored “wrap round holistic programmes of support for individuals” as opposed the perceived “silo based approach to the problems evidenced in the LEP area” offered by the opt-in prospectuses (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership 2014, p. 39). As

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<sup>103</sup> IV 21, senior officer, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

<sup>104</sup> IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

<sup>105</sup> IV 21, senior officer, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

<sup>106</sup> IV 15, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 22, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 21, senior officer, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

<sup>107</sup> As well as other ‘access to employment’ projects funded under the ESF and targeting individuals over the age of 24 years.

part of this, local authorities and “other public sector sources” were identified as the primary potential sources of match-funding for YEI/ESF projects (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership 2014). In addition to the dissatisfaction over the ‘localness’ of former provision, several interviewees also expressed disappointment that under the previous 2007–2013 programming period, the tendering process for projects to be funded by the Structural Funds privileged large contractors at the expense of smaller local organisations, and especially local third sector organisations<sup>108</sup>. Local interviewees stressed that under the co-investment model, the LEP would have a greater say and control over the commissioning of projects and providers, emphasising the opportunity to bring in local charity and local stakeholder organisations to run specific projects.

Another important motivating factor behind the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP’s drive for local control over its ESI-Fund allocation is that European funding, whilst limited, nonetheless represents an important source of financing—particularly for local authorities—especially in times of severely squeezed public budgets. This perhaps goes some way to explain why the local authority LEP members have been keen participants in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, and have been actively involved in shaping its overall strategic economic plan, as well as the European Structural and Investment Fund strategy—indeed, the European and International Affairs Division of Birmingham City Council has led the LEP’s ESIF strategy negotiations with central government. Interestingly, certain interviewees from Birmingham City Council appeared to suggest that the Council’s strong support for the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP opt-out also stems from its ideological opposition to the Coalition Government’s stance on the Youth Guarantee; as a Labour-held administration, Birmingham City Council is very much in favour of the initiative, and intends

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<sup>108</sup> IV 15, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

to develop its own version<sup>109</sup>. Although it should be equally noted here that the decision to ‘opt-out’ was a LEP-wide decision, and that the LEP membership crosses the political party spectrum; indeed, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, which is similarly in favour of greater local “freedoms and flexibilities”, is held by the Conservatives.

Interestingly one local interviewee also posited that the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP’s hard stance on the opt-out might in fact be part of a conscious bargaining strategy, in which the LEP asked for the maximum amount of control, knowing that this was unlikely to be agreed by central government, in order to gain greater local concessions than would otherwise have been the case<sup>110</sup>.

### ***National resistance to opt-out driven by the Department for Work and Pensions***

The decision by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership to develop an alternative investment model met with a significant amount of resistance from central government, and in particular by its representative, the Department of Work and Pensions, as the Managing Authority responsible for the ESF and YEI, the funds most concerned by the opt-out. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP’s strongly articulated commitment to localism, appears to have garnered it with a distinctive reputation within central government as being particularly “bullish”<sup>111</sup>. During interviews, officials from DWP<sup>112</sup> pointed to three main issues, which headed the Department’s reluctance around the proposed opt-out. These were namely, concern over the management of financial risk, level of expertise, and fragmentation. As highlighted earlier in

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<sup>109</sup> IV 22, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

<sup>110</sup> IV 15, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

<sup>111</sup> IV 22, senior officer, Birmingham City Council. Also IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions.

<sup>112</sup> IV 18 senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 20, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 34, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions

the chapter, the desire to safely manage the financial risk associated with EU funds was a key motivation behind the development of the ‘opt-in prospectuses’, and thus the centralisation of control. In particular, there seemed to be concern on the part of DWP officials that while the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP wanted full control over its share of the ESI-Funds, it was either unaware of the financial responsibility that this engendered, or believed that central government would absorb any ‘financial hit’ resulting from a failure to pass the European Commission’s very strict audit procedures<sup>113</sup>. Part of the concern stemmed from the LEP’s desire to have a single point of access to funds in order to be able to provide a more integrated and coordinated approach—in this way money from the Youth Employment Initiative, European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund would be combined to create a ‘single-pot’. However, in practice EU auditing rules make this this very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve; as every euro spent must have a clear audit trail back to its original source of funding (see above)<sup>114</sup>. Concern over the ability of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP to successfully navigate the financial risk associated with European funds, ties in with a broader concern over the ability of Local Enterprise Partnerships in general to manage large-scale European projects. In all interviews, DWP officials<sup>115</sup> consistently stressed that both the Department and the other national opt-in providers were the best placed to deliver YEI and ESF projects; that they had the necessary expertise and experience, and by implication, would thus be more successful at the exercise than the LEPs. There was equally a sense that any opt-out on the part of the Local Enterprise Partnerships significantly increased the risk of fragmentation and incoherency within the

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<sup>113</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions

<sup>114</sup> Also IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions.

<sup>115</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 19, official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 20, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 34, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions

programme, with the 39 different LEPs commissioning potentially conflicting and/or competing projects<sup>116</sup>.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that while officials clearly strongly believed that the ‘opt-in prospectuses’ were the best way of delivering ESF and YEI-funded projects, there was nonetheless the sense that they were also partly constrained by the specificities of the EU regulations governing the ESI-Funds:

“But I can see [that] particularly from the big cities perspective they just want much more devolution to set them free if you like. [...] I completely buy the argument that genuine pooling would be much more helpful; if you could just say to Birmingham ‘your national provision plus your European provision adds up to 500 million, [go] do good things with it please’, that would be much neater, but that’s not the world...”

[IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions]

### *A different picture painted by local interviewees...*

Interestingly, local interviewees recognised that the complexity of EU rules meant that running a national programme ensured “clean audit trails”, thereby avoiding “a [potential] spider’s web of processes and systems” and minimising (the very real) audit risk<sup>117</sup>. However, there was a clear sense that this over-focus on risk factors disregarded those areas with a prior history of delivering European funding programmes, such as the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP. Moreover, it acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that local areas were not able to gain experience. In this way, central government’s position was

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<sup>116</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions.

<sup>117</sup> IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

ultimately severely limiting the effectiveness of EU funds<sup>118</sup>. Here, several local government interviewees suggested that the Department's stance masked deeper issues. In particular, they felt that the centralisation of the ESI-Funds was in part due to the Central Government's aversion to placing power into the hands of public sector structures, and especially local authorities<sup>119</sup>. Within this, there is also a question of to what degree may central government's unwillingness to grant the LEP control over its ESI-Funds have been partly motivated by a reluctance in the run-up to a general election to give additional funds to a LEP with a large Labour-held administration, which may successfully implement a scheme that runs contrary to Government policy, namely the Youth Guarantee.

Local interviewees also highlighted that a number of opt-in providers were dependent on all Local Enterprise Partnerships opting-in to their programmes in order to secure the necessary level of investment to develop and run projects, and to cover internal administrative expenses<sup>120</sup>. In particular, it came to light that several opt-in providers had undergone a major bout of restructuring in the run-up to the current 2014-2020 programming period, with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) being identified as a notable example—access to the LEP's ESI-Fund allocations thus becomes a matter of safeguarding their continued existence<sup>121</sup>. This suggests a degree of institutional stickiness, whereby the institutions and the actors operating within them actively adopt strategies and actions that ensure their survival (Pierson 1996, 2000b, Witt, Lewin 2004). As one interviewee notably put it when asked about why they thought that central government was reluctant to hand control over to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP: “It's their jobs [that are on the line]!”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

<sup>119</sup> IV 15, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

<sup>120</sup> IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 21, senior officer, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

<sup>121</sup> IV 21, senior officer, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

<sup>122</sup> IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

### ***GBSLEP mobilising***

In parallel with its direct negotiations with the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills around the opt-out, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP mobilised independently to exert indirect pressure on central government. A key example of this activity is the Local Enterprise Partnership's involvement in the 2013-2014 inquiry by the House of Lords EU Internal Market, Infrastructure and Employment Sub-Committee (B)<sup>123</sup> into EU action to tackle youth unemployment. In particular, officers from Birmingham City Council appear to have single-handedly spearheaded the LEP's contribution in the inquiry, coordinating the submission of written evidence, participating in oral evidence sessions at the House of Lords in London, and hosting a visit by members of the sub-committee to Birmingham as part of an evidence-gathering mission. A key part of this has been the active inclusion of local civil society and third sector organisations. The Council actively incorporated their 'voices' into the formal written evidence submitted by the Council, and, as part of the Committee's visit to the city, organised for committee members to participate in a face-to-face roundtable session with young unemployed people from across the LEP area, as well as a visit to a supported accommodation scheme for homeless young people run by a local charity, St Basil's, to talk about their experiences and the employment and life challenges that they face. The information collected from the visit, as well as the written evidence, formed an integral part of the sub-committee's final report in which it called on the Government to revise its stance on the Youth Guarantee and to transfer greater control over the European Structural and Investment Funds to local areas:

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<sup>123</sup> In June 2015 EU Internal Market, Infrastructure and Employment Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee B) was reappointed as the EU Internal Market Sub-Committee.



“[W]e believe that the Government should rethink its centralised approach to spending EU money, and that instead it should tap into the expertise of local organisations. [...] The Government thinks it knows best in this area, but we believe that not introducing a Youth Guarantee is unwise. We would urge the Government to sign up to the Youth Guarantee instead of putting the money towards existing domestic initiatives.”

Statement by Baroness O’Cathain, Committee Chairman  
(House of Lords 2014a)

The key role of Birmingham City Council can be explained by three factors: first, its highly experienced European & International Affairs Division means that it has access to staff, information and expertise; second, together with Solihull, Birmingham is eligible for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative, and thus has a vested interest in controlling its share; and third, as a Labour-held local government administration it is strongly opposed to the Coalition Government’s refusal to implement the Youth Guarantee. Local interviewees suggest that Birmingham City Council’s contribution to the inquiry, and to the opt-out negotiations with central government, was chiefly led by the Head of the European & International Affairs division, highlighting the key role that specific individuals can play in shaping political and policy situations.

### ***Conflicting viewpoints in central government***

The House of Lords inquiry underlines the presence of divergent views at the national level or within government on action to tackle unemployment, and in particular a sharp divide between Parliament, represented in this instance by a cross-party House of Lords EU sub-committee and the UK Government, represented by the then Coalition Government. Indeed, the inquiry takes place against a backdrop of wide-spread dissatisfaction over the

performance of the Work Programme (see for example, BBC News 2 July 2014, Viney 505/11/2014). Observers have raised concerns over the performance of the Work Programme, and especially with regard to Work Programme providers' ability and willingness to reach and support the 'hardest cases', that is to say individuals experiencing multiple difficulties and/or furthest from the labour market—also known as the 'creaming effect' (National Audit Office 2014, Rees, Whitworth et al. 2014, House of Commons 2013).

In addition, there also appear to be contrasting approaches to unemployment, and 'localism' between different central government departments, most notably between Cabinet Office and the Department for Work and Pensions. Over the course of my local interviews, a recurrent topic was a recent Cabinet Office project tackling youth unemployment in cities, which was routinely held up as a good practice example. In particular interviewees underlined that because the money could not be spent on supporting existing provision<sup>124</sup>, they were given free-rein to design a brand new programme, effectively starting from "a blank page". Although Cabinet Office officials provided significant support and oversight, there was nonetheless a sense that the local area had much more freedom to design, and importantly to deliver, an innovative and localised programme of action. The project stands in marked contrast to the arrangements surrounding the European Structural and Investment Funds. Interestingly, even the interviewee from the local DWP District Office was very supportive of the project; and it appears that the experience of engaging with the Cabinet Office's project gave local actors an impetus to push for a similar deal with its share of the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Social Fund in order to develop similar (youth) employment projects.

To sum up, the manifestation of multi-level governance is a highly nuanced phenomenon in England. On the one hand, it is clear that there is a poor degree of fit between the policies

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<sup>124</sup> Cabinet Office had made this a condition of the funding.

and practices promoted by the YEP and the YEI, and those in place in England. Moreover, there are few signs that the policy process around the domestic development and implementation of the YEP and the YEI is characterised by a maximalist version of multi-level governance. Instead, central government, and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in particular, have retained tight control of the reins. However, central authority must not be overstated. A number of mediating factors have served to limit central government's complete supremacy over the policy process. Instead, central government has been constantly buffeted by pressure from above (supranational) and below (subnational) (Piattoni 2010), which has in turn constrained its ability to monopolise the policy-making and implementation process. These factors are examined in further detail in the next section.

#### **4. Step 3: Identifying mediating factors**

Moving on now to step 3 of the analytical framework, the empirical findings draw attention to a series of mediating factors that are influencing the occurrence of multi-level governance in England around the implementation of EU youth employment policy. As with the preceding EU case (chapter 4), the factors can be split into two groups: those that act as an *opportunity* for multi-level governance—that is to say, the robust involvement of subnational and non-state actors in the policy-making and implementation process—and those that serve to *constrain* the manifestation of MLG (see table 5.3).

**Table 5.3: Mediating factors in England**

Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overt political aspiration within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance</li> <li>• Region’s eligibility for EU funding</li> <li>• Presence of EU funding, with, critically, financial conditions attached that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality)</li> <li>• Scarcity of domestic funds (central government &amp; subnational)</li> <li>• Perception among regional and local actors of (EU) policy’s high political salience</li> <li>• Presence of local policy entrepreneurs</li> <li>• Conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Front-loading’ of funding (short time-frame to spend funding—limits innovation)</li> <li>• Policy’s high political saliency at the national level (risk management)</li> <li>• Conflicting philosophies within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies): where centralising department holds the ‘purse strings’</li> <li>• Presence of existing welfare policy reforms (constraint to Europeanization of policy and practice)</li> </ul>

## **4.1. Opportunities**

The factors that support and promote instances of multi-level governance can be further divided into *external* factors that stem from the EU-level and *internal* factors that originate from within the domestic arena.

### **External opportunities**

#### ***An overt political aspiration within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance***

As previously indicated in chapter 4 on the EU case, the presence of an overtly-stated desire embedded within the Youth Employment Package and the Initiative legitimises multi-level governance as the appropriate mode of policy-making and implementation in this policy area. EU policy thus points to an alternative way of making and implementing policy to the ‘standard’ model in which authority and responsibility is held centrally. This in turn opens up an area for contestation and bargaining on the part of subnational and non-state actors to push against central government control (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007). Central government subsequently faces simultaneous pressure from *above* and from *below* to conform to the EU MLG vision (Piattoni 2010, Jensen, Koop et al. 2014).

#### ***The presence of EU funding, with, critically, financial conditions attached that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality)***

The prospect of accessing EU funds can act as a financial incentive for member states to alter their domestic policies, practices and preferences in line with those established at EU-level. This is particularly the case at times of limited public budgets, when the EU represents an important source of additional funding for public projects. However, EU funds are most

likely to be effective when their apportionment is dependent on member states meeting set *conditions* (Bache 2008, Zartaloudis 2015, Gerven, Vanhercke et al. 2014)—such as, the emphasis on multi-level governance and partnership in the Youth Employment Initiative. Access is therefore dependent on conformity with EU principles. This mediating factor is closely tied to two domestic opportunities outlined below: the scarcity of domestic funding, and the political saliency of the policy area.

### ***The region's eligibility for EU funding***

For EU funding to exert pressure on domestic behaviour, either the member state or, more pertinently, specific subnational localities must be eligible for financial support. In the first instance, funding available to the member state as a whole will put pressure on central government at the national level to conform to EU principles and practices in order access the maximum level of funds on offer. EU funds that have an explicit subnational focus, like the YEI, not only place downwards pressure on central governments at the national level to fit in with EU policy, but also to incentivise subnational actors to exert parallel upwards pressure to ensure conformity, so that their specific territory can benefit from the maximum funding available.

### **Internal (domestic) opportunities**

#### ***The scarcity of domestic funds (central government & subnational)***

The scarcity of domestic funds creates pressure on domestic actors, whether from central government or from the subnational level, to seek alternative sources of financing for public projects. EU funds thus represent an important wellspring of additional money—and domestic actors are more likely to take the steps needed to conform to the conditions attached

in the absence of generous public budgets. In particular, a shortage in centrally-provided funding is likely to strongly encourage subnational actors to mobilise against any perceived action on the part of central government that might jeopardise their ability to draw down the maximum amount of EU funding available to them—thereby opening up areas of contestation and negotiation (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007). This can be seen for example, in the case of GBSLEP above.

### ***A perception among regional and local actors of (EU) policy's high political salience***

Subnational actors are most likely to mobilise against central government control when a policy is deemed to be highly politically salient—either in terms of its potential impact on the local area itself, or on political leaders' change of electoral (re)success (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). Youth (un)employment policy is viewed as extremely salient, with clear and significant economic, political and social consequences. As a result, subnational actors are under pressure from the local population to take action—and to challenge any activities on the part of external actors (including from central government) that risk the employment prospects of local young people.

### ***The presence of local 'policy entrepreneurs'***

The contribution of policy entrepreneurs in pushing forward policy change and innovation has frequently been highlighted in the literature (2013, see for example Zartaloudis 2015, Catney, Henneberry 2015, Braun 2009, Mintrom, Norman 2009, Mintrom 1997, Mintrom, Vergari 1996, Roberts, King 1991). The case of GBSLEP has illustrated the important role played by specific individuals in mobilising subnational actors to challenge central government control. In the case of GBSLEP, the European and International Affairs Division

of Birmingham City Council (and in particular its Head of Division) was instrumental in: providing local actors with up-to-date information about EU policy and funds; bringing together and mobilising disparate local actors from the public, private and third-sectors; building, coordinating and sustaining a cohesive local response; and liaising with central government departments to push for greater local control over policy and financial resources.

***The presence of conflicting views and working practices within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies)***

The presence of conflicting centrifugal and centralising philosophies between different central government departments (namely, the Department of Work and Pensions and the Cabinet Office) has provided GBSLEP with a strategic ‘space’ in which it has been able to exert pressure on DWP for a more localised response and for greater local control over EU policy and (financial) resources.

#### **4.2. Constraints**

Constraints to MLG can also be split into *external* constraints deriving from the EU-level, and *internal* domestic constraints.

##### **External constraints**

***‘Front-loading’ of funding hinders policy innovation and structural change***

The ‘front-loading’ of funding acted as a major impediment to radical change at the domestic level, either in terms of policy content, structural reforms or changes to working practices. As the literature makes clear, change of any kind requires *time* (Sartorius, Zundel 2005, Zundel,



Erdmann et al. 2005, Harris, Kinney 2004). Moreover, in political environments marked by a significant degree of mistrust between different parties, building effective working relationships in which participants trust each other takes considerable time (Levi 2003): it may even take several years of concerted and sustained action to achieve. Indeed, several local interviewees highlighted that other LEPs had “gotten off the ground” more rapidly and efficiently than the GBSLEP because they already had a long history of working together—as a result, they already had working arrangements in place, experience of working with each other, and, critically, a higher degree of trust and confidence in one another<sup>125</sup>. As a result, the short time-frame to spend funding severely limits policy and institutional innovation.

### **Internal (domestic) constraints**

#### ***The policy’s high political saliency at the national level encourages centralisation***

The case study illustrates that policy areas, such as employment policy, that are perceived by central government actors to be highly politically salient and/or politically sensitive are likely to face significant national resistance to their decentralisation. In the case of youth employment policy in England, centralising tendencies are driven by fears over the management of financial risk and concerns over fragmented service delivery—however, as will be seen later on in the case of France, calculations on the part of political leaders regarding future electoral performance also play a role in maintaining central control over a policy area. In situations when a policy area is perceived to be highly politically salient by both central and subnational actors—as in the case of youth employment policy—this creates significant tension between the different territorial scales, as each tries to maximise its control over the policy.

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<sup>125</sup> IV 15, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 16, senior officer, Birmingham City Council; IV 22, senior officer, Birmingham City Council.

***The presence of conflicting views and working practices within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies): where the centralising department holds the ‘purse strings’***

The existence of contradictory views and working practices between central government departments can act as both an opportunity for and a constraint on multi-level governance. As seen above, the very different visions subscribed to by the Department of Work and Pensions and the Cabinet Office (the former acting as a force for centralisation, and the latter exhibiting centrifugal objectives) provided GBSLEP actors with the political space in which to challenge central control over EU resources. However, the fact that the DWP ultimately holds the ‘purse-strings’, and thus holds a position of power within the negotiation process (Kim, Pinkley et al. 2005, Mannix, Neale 1993), allows it to undermine the UK Government’s broader ‘localist’ agenda and maintain a ‘centralist’ discourse—and thus hinder the occurrence of multi-level governance.

***The presence of existing welfare policy reforms***

The UK case has demonstrated how the presence of existing welfare policy reforms can act as a constraint to the Europeanization of domestic policies, practices and preferences—which in the case of EU youth employment, includes multi-level governance as the desired mode of policy-making and implementation. Large-scale welfare reforms are typically expensive, highly complex and highly politicised. As such, there are significant challenges associated with changing direction mid-way through ongoing reforms and/or instigating further reforms, namely: the financial costs of such action and the ability to persuade those involved of their necessity (Harris, Kinney 2004, Bonfiglioli, Gancia 2011, Pressman, Wildavsky 1984, Pollitt, Bouckaert 2004).

## **5. Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the domestic formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative in England through the subnational case of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP). It began by briefly describing the political and institutional environment in which the formulation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI occur. This section emphasised the existence of a distinct policy discourse around ‘localism’ on the part of both the Liberal Democrat—Conservative Coalition Government (2010-2015) and the succeeding Conservative Government (elected in May 2015). The chapter then investigated the ‘goodness of fit’ between domestic and EU policy, practices and preferences—and namely, the extent to which multi-level governance characterises the domestic policy arrangements through which the YEP and the YEI are designed and delivered nationally and locally in England. Here, the section contrasted the formal implementation arrangements with the empirical reality experienced by actors in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP. In this way, the chapter was able to highlight inconsistencies between the two ‘worlds’, and consequently to expose the ‘messy’ reality below the formal ‘clean-cut’ version of events. Drawing on Perry’s (2007) two-fold categorisation (see chapter 2), England displays minimalist instances of ‘deep’ multi-level governance. This is unsurprising given the member state’s strong unitary character. However, the chapter finds that, while central government continues to hold a dominant role within the policy-making and implementing process, its capacity to exert a monopoly of control over the policy process has been diluted by a number of internal and external factors. Specifically, areas of negotiation and contestation have opened up around the perceived disconnect between the Government’s ‘localism’ agenda and the centralising tendencies of the Department of Work and Pensions. In this case,

centralisation has been driven by mistrust and by issues of institutional stickiness: with regard to the former, the DWP does not trust Local Enterprise Partnerships to be able to successfully manage large-scale European programmes financially, and thus potentially incurring significant audit costs. With regard to the latter, empirical evidence suggests that GBELP's opt-out of national provision could jeopardise the continuing existence of certain national providers. The disjoint between localism and DWP's hidden centralising tendencies has been further reinforced by conflicting viewpoints between different central government departments and key national actors, and namely between DWP and the Cabinet Office and the House of Lords. Disappointment over the broken promise of 'localism', combined with a very strong desire for greater local "freedoms and flexibilities", dissatisfaction over the quality and focus of previous nationally-delivered employment programmes, the scarcity of domestic public funds and the presence of an overt EU vision of multi-level governance have combined to mobilise GBSLP actors to challenge central government control. In particular, the Youth Employment Initiative (and the wider European Structural and investment Funds) has provided GBSLEP actors with a platform from which to channel their ambitions for greater decentralisation. In this way, although, strictly-speaking, England displays minimalist instances of multi-level governance, as conceptualised by Perry (2007), it nonetheless provides important material to further our understanding of the limits and possibilities of multi-level governance—and in particular, by highlighting the specific mediating factors that influence its occurrence. In this way, the chapter also helps to bridge the conceptual gap between the literatures on multi-level governance and Europeanization.

The next chapter considers the case of France and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region.

**CHAPTER 6**

**THE CASE OF FRANCE AND**

**THE NORD-PAS-DE-CALAIS REGION**

**1. Introduction**

This chapter examines the case of France and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region. As with the preceding case of England, this chapter is based on extensive documentary research and in-depth semi-structured interviews. A total of 10 experts<sup>126</sup> from central government and the sub-national institutions were interviewed to build-up a detailed understanding of how the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is implemented in the case area, and the challenges that impede the functioning of a ‘smooth’ system of multi-level governance. The structure of the chapter mirrors that of the previous UK case. The first section sets the scene in terms of the broader domestic political and institutional landscape in which the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative takes place. It highlights that for the past 30 years France has gone through a highly politicised process of decentralisation and territorial reform—and one that is ongoing. As part of this greater decision-making powers and responsibilities are slowly being transferred to regional and local authorities, and the regions in particular have become distinct political spaces (Pasquier 2015). The third section then considers the ‘goodness of fit’ between the EU’s preference for multi-level governance and the domestic arrangements that

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<sup>126</sup> Participants were located in the following institutions: Délégation générale à l’emploi et à la formation professionnelle (DGEFP) [1]; Secrétariat Général pour les Affaires Régionales du Nord-Pas de Calais (SGAR) [2]; Direccte Nord-Pas-de-Calais [1]; Conseil régional Nord-Pas de Calais [3]; Conseil départementale du Nord [3]; Métropole Européenne de Lille [1]. A full (anonymised) list of interview participants can be found in annex 1. Unfortunately due to heavy workloads only one individual from central government agreed to be interviewed; however, as the official was located in the unit responsible for managing the European Social Fund in France, and occupied a well-informed senior position, they were able to provide an in-depth insight into the policy area. This notwithstanding, all the interview data was cross-referenced with each other and with documentary analysis to ensure reliability and validity.

govern the making and implementation of EU youth employment policy in France. Similar to the UK case, there is a distinction drawn between the ‘formal’ policy arrangements in place and the reality of implementation ‘on the ground’. In the case of France however, the chapter finds that in both ‘worlds’ employment is a ‘messy’, complicated and multi-faceted policy area, characterised by many different policy measures and programmes, multiple actors and shared responsibilities, limited resources and complicated institutional arrangements. The fourth section identifies a series of mediating factors which operate as enablers and inhibitors of multi-level governance working. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the main findings from the case.

## **2. Setting the scene: The broader political and institutional landscape**

France is characterised by a highly complex and fragmented politico-administrative system, often described by observers, academics and practitioners alike, as ‘*mille-feuille*’, or a thousand layers (see for example Loughlin 2008). Key institutions at sub-national level include: the State’s representatives (namely, the *Préfecture de la région*, the *Préfecture de département*, the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR) and various ministerial field services), the regional and local authorities (namely, the regional and departmental councils, the inter-communalities, and the communes), and a plethora of public and private organisations. Historically a highly centralised Republic in the Jacobin tradition, over the past three decades three successive waves of territorial reform have gradually transformed “a quasi-ideal case of the centralized state” (Thoenig 2005, p. 685) into one where greater decision-making powers and responsibilities have progressively been transferred to regional and local bodies (Pasquier 2015, Cole 2012, Cole 2005, Pasquier 2012, Loughlin 2008,

Thoenig 2005, Cole, Pasquier 2013, Le Lidec 2007). However, reforms have tended to add new institutions and layers to the existing system, rather than engaging in radical structural transformation to aid simplification. Most notably, in 1982-83, the Deferre Laws, ratified under the presidency of François Mitterrand, heralded a major change in France's institutional structure, creating 22 directly-elected regional councils<sup>127</sup>, and transferring greater decision-making powers, responsibilities and resources to the 96 existing metropolitan departmental councils<sup>128</sup> and the largest communes, following a corresponding loss of executive power on the part of the *Préfet*, the State's chief representative at sub-national level (for a comprehensive overview see Cole 2005). This first (contemporary) wave of decentralisation was followed in 2003-04 by a constitutional reform. Symbolically, the Constitution now describes France as a *decentralised* Republic; and, for the first time, recognises regions as one of the sub-national administrative layers alongside the communes, departments and inter-communalities (*intercommunalités*) (Legifrance 2003). In addition, the Constitution provides for the experimental transfer of decision-making powers and responsibilities to regional and local authorities. It should be noted here that while the Constitution might at first glance suggest a neat hierarchical relationship between the different authorities, Article 72 explicitly states that no one regional or local authority can exercise supervisory control over any other. In practice, this can translate into a certain degree of institutional rivalry between different actors due to over-lapping territorial jurisdictions and competences, and competition for resources (Cole 2005). Moreover, as Alistair Cole contends, the constitutional reforms did not ultimately challenge “the hierarchical control of the state over its constituent regions” and as such France remains “very much a unitary state” (Cole 2005, p. 129).

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<sup>127</sup> *Conseils régionaux*.

<sup>128</sup> *Conseils départementaux*. Formerly called general councils (*conseil généraux*), the change of name follows the adoption of the 2015 General Code on regional and local authorities (Legifrance 2015a, 2013).

The third wave of decentralisation began in 2013, under the auspices of the then recently elected President, François Hollande, and build partly on a reform of regional and local authorities initiated by the previous President, Nicolas Sarkozy. The latter were never fully implemented due to robust government opposition, which blocked their adoption. The current reform programme aims for a major reorganisation of France's sub-national territorial governance structure, targeting in particular the disjointed administrative layers, complicated shared responsibilities and intertwined and convoluted funding streams. Specifically, it seeks to improve the efficiency of public action and the quality of public services by clarifying the responsibilities, competences, resources and geographic boundaries of regional and local authorities, and the inter-communalities, as well as the mechanisms by which to ensure their effective scrutiny<sup>129</sup>. Reforms are to be implemented through three legal projects: 1) law 2014-58 on the modernisation of public territorial action and the recognition of the *métropoles*<sup>130</sup> (also known as MAPTAM); 2) the draft bill on mobilising economic growth and employment in the regions and promoting equality between territories<sup>131</sup>; and 3) the draft law on the development of territorial solidarity and local democracy<sup>132</sup>. In particular, the proposed law on mobilising economic growth and employment in the regions will strengthen the competences of the regional councils in the field of regional economic development, vocational education/training, apprenticeships, careers guidance and further/higher education. Most controversially, in April 2014 central government under the premiership of Manuel Valls announced plans to abolish the 96 departments by 2020 and to reduce the number of regions from 22 to 13, through a series of mergers and the redrawing of boundary lines (Valls

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<sup>129</sup> Detailed information about the precise nature of the reforms can be found on a dedicated government website: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/action/la-reforme-territoriale> [Accessed 12 August 2015].

<sup>130</sup> *LOI n° 2014-58 du 27 janvier 2014 de modernisation de l'action publique territoriale et d'affirmation des métropoles (1)* (Legifrance 2014).

<sup>131</sup> *Projet de loi de mobilisation des régions pour la croissance et l'emploi et de promotion de l'égalité des territoires*. At the time of writing, this was still being negotiated in the French Parliament (Senate and National Assembly).

<sup>132</sup> *Projet de loi de développement des solidarités territoriales et de la démocratie locale*. Again, at the time of writing, this was still being negotiated in the French Parliament (Senate and National Assembly).



08/04/2014). Partly driven by the desire to ‘simplify’ and modernise the French state system, the reforms mark the beginning of a shift from the department as the most important sub-national unit after the central State, to the region (Cole, Pasquier 2013). Unsurprisingly however, the elimination of the departments has been met by fierce opposition on the part of the departmental councils, and latest information at the time of writing indicates that this plan has been put on hold until 2021, thereby placing it under the mandate of the next Presidential term (Nunès 06/11/2014, 08/10/2014). It remains to be seen however, whether the next President will choose to push through what is proving to be a deeply unpopular policy.

In contrast, in November 2014, following several months of long and heated debate, the French Parliament accepted the government’s proposed new regional architecture, and as of 31 December 2014, France now comprises 13 regions (Le Monde.fr 20/11/2014, Jérôme 17/11/2014, Legifrance 2015b, Assemblée nationale 2014). Accordingly, on 1st January 2016, Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) merged with neighbouring Picardie to become Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie, also known as the *Hauts-de-France* region. As explained in chapter 3 on the research design, this research project deals with the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, and not on the newly created Hauts-de-France region. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie has extended its call for regional projects to be funded under the YEI in order to maximise the programmes’ coverage<sup>133</sup>. However, the fund (and its related Operational Programme, more on which below) continues to be managed by the same officials in the, now-expanded, regional council based in Lille (which retains its title of regional capital). This is possible because of the EU’s ‘N+3’ rule under Cohesion Policy, which allows funds to be spent within 3 years from the year in which they were allocated: so in the case of the YEI, funding was allocated in 2014 and 2015, giving member states until the end of 2018 to spend their allocations (European Commission 2014c).

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<sup>133</sup> See further: [https://www.nordpasdecals.fr/jcms/c\\_137311/guide-des-aides/initiative-pour-l-emploi-des-jeunes-iej?profil1=null&centreinteret1=null&motsClefs=](https://www.nordpasdecals.fr/jcms/c_137311/guide-des-aides/initiative-pour-l-emploi-des-jeunes-iej?profil1=null&centreinteret1=null&motsClefs=) [Accessed: 11/05/2016]

In July 2015, the law on the new territorial delimitations of the regions was followed by the adoption of the law on the new territorial organisation of the Republic, known as NOTRe<sup>134</sup> (Legifrance 2015c, Le Monde.fr 16/07/2015). Significantly, this law reinforces the importance of the regions in the sub-national administrative architecture, as well as the inter-communalities (such the *métropoles*), although without detracting from the departments. In particular, the 13 regions are now responsible for regional strategic planning and economic development, planning, vocational/professional education and training (including apprenticeships), managing upper secondary schools (*lycées*) and transport. Regions will also coordinate the regional public employment services, with the exception of those functions fulfilled by the *Pôle emploi*<sup>135</sup>. As Romain Pasquier argues, regions have gone “from being merely the locus of territorial planning [to become] spaces of political representation where decisions were made” (Pasquier 2015, p. 86).

### ***Employment policy: A partially devolved competency***

Most significantly for this research, following successive waves of decentralisation, and especially those of 1982-83 and 2003, competency for employment is a partially devolved power in France (see Cole 2005 for an overview). While the State remains responsible for employment policy as a whole, the 13 regions, led by the regional councils lead on matters related to vocational education and training, including apprenticeships, an important part of the Youth Employment Package, as well as on regional- and economic development, which necessarily involve an employment dimension. The 96 departments, led by the departmental councils are responsible for matters relating to social assistance, welfare subsidies and social inclusion, which may also include activities linked to the prevention of unemployment. At the

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<sup>134</sup> LOI n° 2015-991 du 7 août 2015 portant nouvelle organisation territoriale de la République (NOTRe).

<sup>135</sup> The departments remain responsible for roads, lower secondary schools (*collèges*) and social and welfare aid; and the communes are responsible for very local services.

time of writing<sup>136</sup>, urban communities [*Communauté Urbaine*] such as Nord-Pas-de-Calais' *Métropole Européenne de Lille* have no competency in the field of employment or in the management of European Structural Funds. As such, the main actors involved in the implementation of activities linked to the Youth Employment Package are the regions, via the regional councils and regional *state* representatives. At this point it is probably helpful to explain that the French State is divided between the national politico-administrative institutions (including Ministries and central government departments), which sit in Paris, and representatives of the state located in the regions. In the case of employment policy, the main central government institution is the *Délégation générale à l'emploi et à la formation professionnelle*<sup>137</sup> (DGEFP) [Department for employment and vocational training], which also acts as the national YG coordinator. Employment policy is then implemented in the regions by a network of state representatives: namely, the *Préfet de région*, the state's main regional representative, supported by the *secrétariat général pour les affaires régionales (SGAR)* [secretariat-general for regional affairs], which manage and coordinate central government policy in the regions, the *Directions régionales des entreprises, de la concurrence, de la consommation, du travail et de l'emploi (DIRECCTE)* [regional directorate of businesses, competition, consumer affairs, work and employment], and the public employment services (namely the *Pôle emploi* and *Missions Locales*). In addition, there is some cross-over with the national Ministry of Education and the regional actors responsible for delivering education in their territories. In addition, as indicated above, the regional councils are responsible for a number of areas that have an indirect but important impact on employment and the Youth Employment Package/Initiative—namely, apprenticeships and vocational (and professional) education and training. Unsurprisingly, the

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<sup>136</sup> Future cycles of decentralisation are planned that will confer greater powers to the Urban Communities, including in the field of regional development and employment. At the time of writing, the exact competences to be transferred remain under negotiation.

<sup>137</sup> The DGEFP sits within the Ministry for Work, Employment, Vocational training and Social Dialogue [*Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi, de la Formation Professionnelle et du Dialogue Social*].

plurality of actors spread across multiple territorial scales and thematic areas has created a highly complex politico-administrative system, characterised by considerable uncertainty. Similar to the case of England, this section has demonstrated that the French state system is characterised by a highly visible and politically-mandated objective of decentralisation—and specifically, the transfer of greater decision-making authority and responsibilities to the regional level. Here then, we would expect to see discernible instances of multi-level governance around the domestic formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. As will be seen over the following two sections however, a number of internal features and mediating factors are impeding the ‘smooth’ functioning of MLG.

### **3. Step 2: Determining the ‘goodness of fit’**

The chapter now moves to consider the ‘goodness of fit’ between the EU preference for multi-level governance policy-making and implementation arrangements and the French domestic arrangements. The section contrasts the formal institutional arrangements through which the YEP and the YEI are to be implemented in France with how it has taken place in reality: that is to say, the contrast between theory and practice. The section discovers that not only are the institutional arrangements complicated ‘on paper’, but that this complexity is multiplied ‘on the ground’ in a dense network of programmes, actors and inter-relationships.

### 3.1. The formal implementation arrangements

#### 3.1.1. *The Youth Employment Package*

France was a strong supporter of the Youth Employment Package (YEP) at EU-level, and particularly the Youth Guarantee (YG). Indeed, the concept of an EU-wide Youth Guarantee was initially tabled by France, and the backing of the member state was integral in helping the Commission to push the initiative through EU negotiations<sup>138</sup>. Robust political support for EU-wide action to tackle youth employment was further evidenced by France's active involvement in the organisation of a series of 'high-level' conferences and meetings<sup>139</sup> in the run-up to the submission of the country's Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP) on 22 December 2013. The central role played by France was a particular point of pride among national and local interviewees<sup>140</sup>. Youth unemployment is widely recognised as a major political, economic and social challenge for France. As one interviewee<sup>141</sup> highlighted, many politicians from across all territorial levels—including the current centre-left President, François Hollande—have been elected on the promise of employment, and youth employment in particular; their future electoral success is thus closely tied to the public's perception of their performance (Revault d'Allonnes, Bissuel 18/01/2016). President Hollande in particular was elected in 2012 due in large part to his manifesto's emphasis on

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<sup>138</sup> IV 3, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 23 January 2014]; IV 7, Member of Commissioner's Cabinet, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 24 January 2014]; IV 24, senior official, La Délégation générale à l'emploi et à la formation professionnelle (DGEFP) [Personal interview, Paris, 19 June 2014]; IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais [Personal interview, Lille, 24 June 2014]; IV 26, senior officer, Conseil général du Nord [Personal interview, Lille, 24 June 2014]; IV 29, senior officer, Métropole Européenne de Lille [Personal interview, Lille, 24 June 2014].

<sup>139</sup> Notably, the 2nd High-Level Social Conference for employment [*« La deuxième grande conférence sociale pour l'emploi »*] held in Paris on 20-21 June 2013, the Youth Employment Conference held in Berlin on 3 July 2013, and organised jointly by the French and German governments, and the High-Level Conference of Heads of State and Government on Youth Employment held in Paris on 12 November 2013.

<sup>140</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP; IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais; IV 26, senior officer, Conseil général du Nord; IV 29, senior officer, Métropole Européenne de Lille.

<sup>141</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP.

employment<sup>142</sup> (BBC News 07/11/2014), and his tenure to date has been marked by the introduction of numerous policies and programmes directed at improving the situation of young people in the labour market, as well as in society more broadly. Key activities within this framework include the recommissioning of the inter-ministerial committee on youth, the adoption of a national youth plan, and the introduction of several high-profile employment-specific initiatives targeted at young people, such as ‘*emplois d’avenir*’ [‘Future Jobs’] and a national youth guarantee, separate from the EU initiative, the “*garantie jeunes*”. The principal aim is to provide a personalised service tailored to specific needs and situation of the individual concerned, and in particular the degree to which they are disengaged from the labour market.

However, despite clear political support at the highest level for an EU Youth Guarantee, several of the Commission officials interviewed<sup>143</sup> expressed disappointment at the lack of new and innovative actions to tackle youth unemployment in France’s Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP) (see also European Commission 2015b)<sup>144</sup>. Instead the plan (Premier Ministre 2013) chiefly outlines the numerous existing domestic measures, with only a few abstract references to the *potential* development of new, complementary initiatives to support the integration of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) into the labour market. The development of these, however, is left to the discretion of regional and local actors. Disappointment in the lack of innovation in France’s

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<sup>142</sup> Following his election, Francois Hollande declared youth employment to be the priority of his five-year Presidential mandate.

<sup>143</sup> IV 4, official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 23 January 2014]; IV 5, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 23 January 2014]; IV 7, Member of Commissioner’s Cabinet, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

<sup>144</sup> This sense of disappointment was also picked up in interviewees in NPdC; certain interviewees [notably, IV 29, senior officer, Métropole Européenne de Lille] voiced their dissatisfaction that the development of the national YGIP had not been used as an opportunity to rethink current provision in the wake of wide-spread dissatisfaction in the effectiveness of existing national measures in getting young people into sustainable employment, particularly those most at risk of social and labour market exclusion (L’Express 06/05/2015).

YGIP led certain Commission officials<sup>145</sup> to note that France, similar to the United Kingdom, could be a frustrating partner, albeit for different reasons.

On the one hand, France is often an engaged partner with the European Commission and an active participant in the Commission's (EU) Employment Committee (EMCO), "willing to talk and listen"<sup>146</sup>. However this is frequently tempered by wanting to be seen as having 'power' in the EU and seen to be able to defend its national interests to its public back home. This means that positive engagement 'behind closed doors' at EU-level is not necessarily visible in domestic political messages, and does not necessarily translate into national action. As another example of France's independent nature: Similar to their British counterpart, the French government does not appear to be wholly convinced by the four-month time-frame of the Youth Guarantee. However, instead of withdrawing from the initiative, France has indicated that, in line with the wider pursuit of a personalised approach to tackling youth unemployment, the availability of measures will be driven by the requirements of the young person; as such measures may be provided at any time, including after four months. Interestingly, at the time of the interviews there appeared to be just as much frustration towards the lack of innovation contained in the French YGIP, as to the UK's refusal to submit a document.

In summary then, on the surface France demonstrates a good degree of fit with EU youth employment policy. However, a closer inspection uncovers discrepancies between the strong official support for the YEP and the YEI, and a reality characterised by limited adaption.

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<sup>145</sup> IV 4, official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion; IV 7, Member of Commissioner's Cabinet, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

<sup>146</sup> IV 4, official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

### ***3.1.2. The Youth Employment Initiative***

In 2004, the law on local rights and responsibilities transferred responsibility for the management of the European Structural Funds from central government to the regional level. In practice however, prior to 2014, the State retained sole management authority status, and European programmes were principally managed and delivered by its representatives in the regions: the *Préfet de région*, assisted by the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR). This state of affairs changed for the 2014-2020 programming period following the entry into force of the 2014 law on the modernisation of public territorial action and the confirmation of the metropolises (Legifrance 2014), which transferred Management Authority status to the regional councils for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and for *part* of the European Social Fund (ESF). Management Authority status for the ESF is shared between the State and the regional councils.

As mentioned in the previous two chapters, the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is delivered through the existing European Social Fund administrative framework (European Commission 2013g, European Commission 2013h) (see in particular Chapter 4). Table 6.1 provides a break-down of the YEI funding available for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region by source.



**Table 6.1: Total YEI funding available for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region, by source**

Funding allocation by source (€ million in 2011 current prices)				
	Specific YEI	ESF	Match	Total
NPdC	22.3	22.3	22.3	66.9

Source: (Région Nord-Pas de Calais 2014)

For the 2014-2020 programming period, the French authorities have chosen to split France’s ESF—YEI allocation into two ‘envelopes’<sup>147</sup>: 1) a national envelope which accounts for 65% of the funds, for which the Managing Authority is the *Délégation générale à l’emploi et à la formation professionnelle (DGEFP)* (and specifically its ESF sub-directorate<sup>148</sup>), and 2) a regional envelope, comprising the remaining 35% of funds, to be administered by the individual regional councils, also acting as a Managing Authority. Interestingly, the European Commission raised concerns over the partial decentralisation of YEI funds to the regions, citing the risk that it would significantly slow down the speed of implementation—a major concern given that funding is supposed to be spent in the first two years—, as well as limiting the impact of the funds (European Commission 2014d, p. 6).

The national envelope has been further divided into two separate Operational Programmes<sup>149</sup>: a national Operational Programme for the European Social Fund<sup>150</sup> (national ESF OP) and a separate national Operational Programme for the Youth Employment

<sup>147</sup> This arrangement covers metropolitan France and France’s overseas departments and territories with the exception of Réunion and Mayotte.

<sup>148</sup> *La sous-direction Fond Social Européen*. The sub-directorate is thus responsible for designing and managing national ESF and YEI activities, as well as ensuring their follow-up (oversight, evaluation, and budgetary control).

<sup>149</sup> As explained in chapter 4, Operation Programmes outline in more concrete terms the national actions to be financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds, in line with the priorities identified in the national Partnership Agreement.

<sup>150</sup> It should be noted that the ESF OP may also include activities that can be accessed by young unemployed people.

Initiative (national YEI OP)<sup>151</sup>. Adding further complexity to an already intricate system, the national YEI OP contains both a national and a regional dimension: 16% of the credits are managed and implemented centrally by the DGEFP; the remaining 84% of credits have been placed under the responsibility of the *Préfet de région*, supported by the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR) and the regional directorate of businesses, competition, consumer affairs, work and employment (DIRECCTE, and in this case, the DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais), which have been given delegated Management Authority status. For both the national and regional components, key delivery agents will be the public employment services. The aim here has been to allow for considerable local initiative and discretion, in line with the ongoing process of decentralisation.

The regional envelope is mobilised through regional Operational Programmes, which brings together funds from the European Social Fund, including where relevant the Youth Employment Initiative, and the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)—this is known as the regional ESF-ERDF Operational Programme. In the case of this research, the Managing Authority for the regional OP is the Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council, led by its Europe Division. In order to avoid potential duplication and conflict with activities under the national YEI OP, a decision was taken by the NPdC regional council to concentrate on three priority areas, in keeping with their [legal] competences under decentralisation: apprenticeships, lifelong learning (including training pathways that lead to accredited qualifications), and entrepreneurship<sup>152</sup>. The national YEI OP focuses on measures to support employment<sup>153</sup>. As part of this, an official agreement has been signed between the regional

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<sup>151</sup> France was the first EU member state to have its YEI OP agreed by the European Commission, a point that was highlighted by the DGEFP official interviewed [IV 24].

<sup>152</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>153</sup> As with the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, the national YEI Operational Programme is principally concerned with financing existing domestic measures (such as the *emplois d'avenir* and the *national* Youth Guarantee) with a particular emphasis on those that: improve the identification of young people who are NEET (and those at risk of becoming so); offer personalised (career) guidance and follow-up; and that support access to employment (such as, supported employment pathways). There is only one sentence explicitly referring to the possibility of developing experimental and innovative measures.

council, led by the President of the region, and the state regional representatives, led by the *Préfet de région*, outlining the division of responsibilities, functions and objectives.

The European Commission has, unsurprisingly, raised some concerns over the complexity of the institutional arrangements for implementing the European Structural and Investment Funds, and particularly the ESF and the YEI (see European Commission 2014d). In particular, the need for clear dividing lines and effective coordination between the national YEI (and ESF) Operational Programme and the regional Operational Programme in order to avoid the duplication and double-financing of activities, as well as missed opportunities. In addition, there are no formal horizontal coordination arrangements between regions; each region effectively operates within its own bubble, unless it has made its own bilateral provisions. In the case of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, this has meant that some of its priorities and strategies are in competition with neighbouring regions<sup>154</sup>. The French Authorities have taken some steps to overcome this, notably by setting up a number of committees to facilitate coordination between the different Operational Programmes and actors, and to provide strategic oversight; although, as will be seen, dialogue primarily takes place at regional level and between regional actors.

At the national level, and in line with ESI-Fund regulations (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2013), the French authorities have established a shared national monitoring committee to oversee the effective management of the national YEI OP and the national ESF OP. The committee is led by a co-presidency formed of the Minister for Work, Employment, Vocational education and Social dialogue and a representative from the *Association des Régions de France (ARF)* [Association of French Regions], and brings together national and regional partners involved in the implementation of the ESF and YEI. Representatives from the European Commission also participate.

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<sup>154</sup> IV 32, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas de Calais [Personal interview, Lille, 26 June 2014].

At the regional level, committees can be divided into those that deal specifically with the European Funds and Operational Programmes, and those that deal with the coordination of employment policy more generally, including action around the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. The latter is chiefly dealt with by the committee responsible for the regional coordination of employment and vocational training, the CCREFP [*Comité de coordination régional de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle*], led by the Nord-Pas-de-Calais DIRECCTE. The European Funds and Operational Programmes are overseen by three committees: the programming committee [*le comité de programmation*] comprising representatives from the regional councils, the departmental councils and the State, and presided over by the *Préfet de région* and the President of the regional council; the regional inter-fund monitoring committee [*le comité de suivi*], which brings together the principal regional players, and is again led by the *Préfet de région* and the President of the regional council; and the technical YEI committee, which brings together representatives from the regional councils and from the regional state institutions in order to facilitate coordination between the national YEI OP and the YEI-component of the regional ESF-ERDF OP. Representatives from the European Commission are also invited to participate. In addition, general dialogue between the regional council, responsible for the regional ESF-ERDF OP, and the state's regional representatives takes place within the existing State-Region committees [*comités Etat-Région*]. Given the number of committees in existence, membership is duplicated where possible so as to ensure continuity between the different platforms<sup>155</sup>.

To recap then, there are three Operational Programmes active in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPdC) region that deliver measures aimed at improving the employment situation of young people not in employment, education or training across the territory: the national ESF

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<sup>155</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

OP, the national YEI OP (with components administered both centrally and regionally), and the regional ESF-ERDF OP. Here the YEI displays a greater degree of fit with EU preferences than the YEP, in that the domestic arrangements have sought to involve the subnational politico-administrative tiers.

The following sub-section considers how the implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative is playing out in practice in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region.

### **3.2. Implementation in practice**

An examination of the interview data highlights that the formulation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI in France is characterised by three main findings. First, both the Youth Employment Package and the Initiative were very much welcomed by political leaders at all territorial scales; but that this political support has not translated into radical structural or policy reform. Second, central government continues to dominate employment policy-making and delivery, despite a domestic programme of decentralisation; although, unlike with the case of England, this has less to do with the management of financial risk and a harmonised service provision, and more to do with the capacity of employment policy to influence electoral outcomes. Third, however, there are signs that the presence of EU policy and funding around youth employment have bolstered internal decentralisation movements in favour of greater regional responsibilities, and have also led to regional adaptation in line with EU principles—a sign of top-down Europeanization effects. In this way, EU youth employment policy is helping to support the gradual erosion of central government authority in the area of employment.

***YEP and YEI widely welcomed by political leaders at all territorial levels, but little substantive policy or structural change***

First, in contrast to the UK, both the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative were very well received at all territorial levels in France, central, regional and local. There are perhaps two main reasons for this: first, and perhaps most importantly, unemployment, and youth unemployment in particular, is widely held by politicians, observers and the general public to be one of the most critical contemporary challenges facing France (Bonnetous, Bekmezian 11/05/2016, L'Express 11/09/2014). Moreover, all the individuals interviewed, at both central state and regional/local level, regarded youth unemployment as a common *European* challenge, affecting the majority of EU member states, with a few notable exceptions<sup>156</sup>. Indeed, observers have pointed to the very real possibilities of further economic turmoil across the Union, including in France, which will have powerful ramifications for all member states (Giret 18/03/2016, Treanor 10/05/2016, lefigaro.fr 26/05/2016, Joanny 27/05/2016, Das 29/05/2016). There was consequently widespread consensus that this was a policy area in which the EU, and in particular the European Commission, *should* act. In this way then, the Youth Employment Package and Initiative were viewed as legitimate actions by the domestic actors responsible for employment policy. Second, and perhaps most interestingly, both the YEP and the YEI were welcomed by central and regional/local interviewees as a new *non-prescriptive* approach by the European Commission<sup>157</sup>. One senior central government official explicitly stated that there was no sense within the Ministry for Work, Employment, Vocational training and Social Dialogue that French public policies were being constrained by EU policy<sup>158</sup>. Indeed, the YEP was seen as representing a step change from the heavily procedural, and prescriptive, approach

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<sup>156</sup> Namely, Germany, the Netherlands, and certain of the Nordic countries.

<sup>157</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP; IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>158</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP.

that had marked previous policy, in that the Commission only provides a broad framework of action and ‘base principles’; member states are then left to decide which specific policies and programmes best suit their national conditions. In this way, the YEP/YEI is seen as a *facilitator* and *supporter* of national action, rather than a *constrainer*. This stands in marked contrast to the view of UK central government officials, who saw the YEP as yet another example of EU rigidity and an encroachment on domestic affairs<sup>159</sup>. This difference in opinion is likely attributable to the fact that the Package’s underlying principles fit better with the French state model, with its emphasis on social welfare and public policy, than with the UK model, which emphasises individual responsibility and financial allocations. Suggestively, the central government official interviewed<sup>160</sup> pointed to the main difference between the UK and French models as being the question of: Do we act to equip the individual for the labour market or do we change the labour market to better fit the needs of the individual? In short, this can be understood as two contrasting and competing economic models: Between a social welfare economic model, as put forward by Amartya Sen (see notably Sen 1999, 1997), and a capitalist welfare state model as conceived by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990). As Cole and John (2001, p. 3) have noted, England and France represent “contrasting liberal democratic poles”.

Nonetheless, despite strong political backing for the policy project, there has been relatively little substantive policy change. France’s Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan concentrates predominantly on existing domestic measures, rather than the bolder structural reforms pushed for by the European Commission (Premier Ministre 2013). Indeed, throughout the interviews there was a strong perception on the part of the French and Commission officials that while France is openly in favour of the Youth Employment

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<sup>159</sup> See chapter 5: IV 18,, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions; IV 19, official Department of Work and Pensions; IV 34, senior official, Department of Work and Pensions.

<sup>160</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP.

Package and the Youth Guarantee, it will ultimately do what it wants<sup>161</sup>. This example serves to illustrate the tension inherent in EU policy. On the one hand, the vagueness of European policy makes it more likely that the member states will sign up to European policy, such as the Youth Employment Package, which may even alter national policy and programmes through a subtle process of Europeanization (i.e. contact with the ideas); but on the other hand, policy vagueness means that the Commission is unable to demand major structural changes or radically different innovative actions. These are ultimately left to the will of the member states.

***Continued dominance of central government, despite the partial devolution of employment policy competencies***

Second, the political welcome extended to the YEP and the YEI does not equate to the willingness on the part of the French authorities to relinquish any formal power over employment policy to the EU-level. Similar to the UK, both central government and local interviewees<sup>162</sup> pointed to the State's tendency to retain control over employment policy, even in the face of large-scale politically-mandated decentralisation. A major example of this is central government's continuing control of 65% of the ESF and YEI credits through the national ESF and YEI Operational Programmes. Although 84% of this is devolved down to the regional level under the responsibility of the *Préfet de Région* and the *DIRECCTEs*, these are still state actors that take instruction from the DGEFP and the Ministry for Work and Employment. As one local interviewee highlighted, [the overall steer of] employment policy, and youth employment policy in particular, is still very much decided at central level, with

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<sup>161</sup> IV 9, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 27 January 2014].

<sup>162</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP; IV 29, senior officer, Lille Métropole; IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais [Personal interview, Lille, 26 June 2014].



little possibility for local adaption<sup>163</sup>. Unlike in the UK however, where central government officials principally attributed this centralising tendency to the need for a harmonised approach to employment policy (and especially welfare payments) across the national territory, in France interviewees were open in their statement that this likely had more to do with the capacity of employment issues and policy to sway voters in elections (see for instance Revault d'Allonnes, Bissuel 18/01/2016)—as well as a way for the central State to retain a degree of control over the regions.

The continued dominance of central government also ties into a perception on the part of almost all the interviewees that there had been a return to an intergovernmentalist style of policy-making in the EU, driven by the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008<sup>164</sup>. One central government official<sup>165</sup> argued that, in his experience, post-crisis, it was the heads of state and government, through the European Council, that greatly influenced the European Commission's policy decisions.

***Signs that the presence of EU policy and funding around youth employment has bolstered internal decentralisation movements, and has led to regional adaptation***

Nonetheless, despite indications that central government continues to hold the reins when it comes to European and national employment policy, there are a number of equally clear signs that EU policies and programmes have altered both national and regional/local policies and practices, and that suggest that central control is no longer on such a secure footing as the past.

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<sup>163</sup> IV 29, senior officer, Lille Métropole.

<sup>164</sup> Interestingly a number of the older interviewees also described how their own views on the European Union had changed over the years, moving from a relatively pro-federalist stance at the beginning of their careers to a more intergovernmental position.

<sup>165</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP.

Firstly, interviewees at the regional and local level strongly believed that the Youth Employment Initiative and the wider European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI-Funds) have sustained pressure on central government to continue with the process of decentralisation in favour of regional actors. In particular, several interviewees<sup>166</sup> suggested that the development of the 2014-2020 ESI-Funds programme led to a rethink by central government on its internal institutional organisation, leading to the transfer of management authority status to the regional councils in order to keep with the publically-made promises of further decentralisation. In the case of the European Regional Development Fund, for which regional councils are now the sole management authority, this has significantly strengthened the regional council's control over their territory's economic development agenda; this necessarily includes an employment dimension in terms of the economic sectors promoted, the types of jobs that are thus available, and the skills and qualifications needed to gain and maintain employment. Although the regional councils are jointly responsible for the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative, together with the central state, the partial transfer of authority nonetheless reinforces their control over the decentralised policy areas of vocational education/training and lifelong learning, including apprenticeships, which form an integral element of the Youth Employment Package and of the national response to tackling youth unemployment. In this way, the ESI-Funds, as delivered through the regional ESF (YEI)—ERDF Operational Programme, have reinforced the importance of the regional councils as key actors in the development and implementation of domestic employment strategy and programmes; and work against the centralised nature of employment policy by supporting local strategies and programmes adapted to local circumstances.

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<sup>166</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais ; IV 26, senior officer, Conseil général du Nord.

Secondly, regional actors have explicitly adapted regional and local strategic priorities to better fit with EU priorities in order to access EU funding. Officials in both the regional and the departmental councils<sup>167</sup> highlighted that they had acted to ensure that their institutions' current economic development and employment strategies were fully aligned with the priorities of the EU's Europe 2020 strategy so as to secure the maximum amount of ESI-funds available to the area. As an example, officials from the *Nord* departmental council spoke of their frustration that under the previous programming period they had lost out on European funding because the departmental strategy only partially fit with EU objectives; funding went instead to the neighbouring department, and sometimes rival, the Pas-de-Calais. The strategic misalignment was attributed a lack of awareness and sensitivity among non-EU-focussed officials within the departmental council of the requirements of the European Structural funds when developing local public policies. This mentality has changed in an environment of fiscal austerity, with tightening central budgets, when it has become financially imperative to draw down and mobilise European funding to support local programmes<sup>168</sup>. In this way, European policy, and, most significantly, the funding attached, alters regional and local strategies and public policy, which in turn affects the type and content of programmes being delivered on the ground and accessed by the local population.

Before moving on it is worth noting that while at first glance adaptation appears to be primarily a top down process of Europeanization—in other words the EU impacting on the regional/local level—there were some signs of the mobilisation of actors at the regional/local level to influence EU policy in Brussels. As with the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, mobilisation predominantly took place through large European associations such as EUROCITIES (this particularly in the case of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais

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<sup>167</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais ; IV 26, senior officer, Conseil général du Nord ; IV 27, senior officer, Conseil général du Nord [Personal interview, Lille, 24 June 2014].

<sup>168</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP; IV 29, senior officer, Lille Métropole; IV 31, senior officer, SGAR Nord-Pas-de-Calais [Personal interview, Lille, 25 June 2014]; IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

region and its city-region, Lille) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), as well as through the European activities of national bodies, such as the association of French regions (ARF), the association of French departments (ADF), the association of Urban Communities in France (ACUF) and the association of city mayors of France (MGVF). Similar to officers in Birmingham City Council, French interviewees believed that their membership of the large European associations gave them a more coherent and powerful voice in getting their views across to the European Commission than if they acted alone. Their membership also means that they are able to access information about what is going on at EU-level (and what money might be available) that they would otherwise not see, as well as to build links with other regions and local areas across the EU (and potentially to bid for projects together). Interestingly, a lack of English language skills among local politicians was flagged up as something that held local action in the EU arena back. Group action via French national bodies was also seen as essential in changing national policy to better reflect the needs of regional and local areas. As an example, officials and the elected members of the *Métropole Européenne de Lille* (MEL), a major inter-communality within the region that encompasses the regional capital of Lille, began to work on their position on the new EU 2014-2020 Cohesion Package as soon as the European Commission published its report on economic and social cohesion in 2010; they were then able to submit their official position to the European Commission's open consultation, and at the same time lobbied the Commission through EURO CITIES, the French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the association of Urban Communities in France and the association of city mayors of France for the needs of urban cities to be taken into account in the EU regulations and policy. Once the European framework had been more or less finalised, MEL then turned its attention on lobbying central government to ensure that what had been decided at EU-level would not be ignored at the French national level, and that

urban cities (a minority in the French geo-administrative landscape) were properly recognised in national plans. Once this had been done, lobbying then took place at regional level to ensure that the state's representatives and the regional and departmental councils were fully aware of the Métropole Européenne de Lille's position on the region's economic and social development.

Thirdly, in the process of bringing regional and local strategic priorities in line with Europe 2020 there was a sense from regional and local interviewees based in both State and regional—local institutions<sup>169</sup>, that they were part of a larger European project, working towards an EU-wide goal to improve the economic and social situation of young people in their area and across the European Union as a whole. There were also signs that the European political message on youth employment was being picked up by local politicians, with local political messages and youth employment programmes being framed as taking place within the context of a larger European project, thus adding to the legitimacy and importance of local action. There was a clear sense that key local politicians, including the President of the region, were unwilling to be left behind other national and European regions, or, perhaps more importantly, to be perceived by the local electorate as being left behind in the face of the major youth employment challenge facing the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. Regional and local interviewees<sup>170</sup> suggested that the European Union and the European Commission in particular, play an important role in providing an overarching policy framework and a common set of goals for all member states to work towards; and that this overarching framework is essential at a time when member states' economic and social situation are strongly interconnected, and instability in one member state can easily spread to neighbouring countries. In this way there is then an inclination on the part of regional and local actors to look to the European Union, and the European Commission, for ideas on how

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<sup>169</sup> Préfet de région; DIRECCTE ; regional and departmental councils; and the Métropole Européenne de Lille.

<sup>170</sup> IV 30, officer, SGAR Nord-Pas-de-Calais [Personal interview, Lille, 25 June 2015].

to proceed on the ground, and thus altering regional—local policies and practices to reflect the European policy vision. As part of this, interviewees also pointed to the influence of EU concepts, expertise and criteria, as well as processes of socialisation and learning in changing national and local employment (and social) policy discourse<sup>171</sup>.

Interestingly, the idea of the Commission as a ‘lodestar’ was not fully shared by the official based in the Ministry for Work<sup>172</sup>; however, in contrast with UK central government officials, the criticism was not that the Commission was doing too *much*, but rather was doing too *little*. In particular, the official called into question the Commission’s ability, and possibly inclination, to promote both its work and the ultimate value of the European project, and to create a common sense of European general interest among the member states; instead of each member state concentrating on its own national interest, regardless of what might be best for the whole. In addition, there was a palpable sense of frustration in the perceived lack of support from the Commission in the implementation of European policies and programmes, and especially European Structural and Investment Fund programmes, like the ERDF, ESF and YEI: there was too much focus on dry legal regulations and paperwork, and not enough understanding of the specific ‘real-world’ challenges national administrations and civil servants face when implementing the programmes. For example, as in the case of the UK, actors at all territorial levels, and in particular officials from the regional council and the regional state institutions<sup>173</sup>, underlined that European programmes often represented a significant administrative burden, especially for smaller operators who have less staff available, and able, to deal with the paperwork associated with delivering projects. Indeed, several interviewees appeared to suggest that a number of project operators were unlikely to submit applications for funding because of the amount of administrative work involved.

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<sup>171</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP; IV 30, officer, SGAR Nord-Pas-de-Calais; IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>172</sup> IV 24, senior official, DGEFP.

<sup>173</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais ; IV 31, senior officer, SGAR Nord-Pas de Calais; IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais [Personal interview, Lille, 26 June 2014].

Interestingly, the high administrative cost of European programmes was openly acknowledged in the interviews with European Commission officials; one official<sup>174</sup> in particular felt that the Commission had in the past been too quick to lay the blame for over-complexity at the feet of the member states, which are ultimately responsible for how the programmes are delivered within their territory. Nonetheless, the official pointed out that in the case of France, the administrative complexity inherent in the European Funds was not helped by an additionally complex domestic framework.

Finally, interviewees stressed that the complicated domestic institutional arrangements through which the Youth Employment Initiative (and the broader European Social Fund) are to be delivered in France<sup>175</sup>, have led to the creation of a strong regional partnership between the different actors involved; and notably between the *Préfet de région*, the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR), the DIRECCTE and the regional council. Significantly, this partnership was seen as being *just as important* as the financial contribution, which itself was highly welcomed at a time of constrained public budgets. Interviewees<sup>176</sup> pointed to changes in working practices as a result of the Youth Employment Initiative; in particular they stressed how the different Operational Programmes had required the different institutional actors to come together and “sit at the same table” in order to develop a coherent approach and to clarify who would be responsible for doing what. This was seen as being crucial to avoid duplication—a major concern with limited funds—and to ensure that nothing fell in between the cracks of the two OPs. In this way, officials have been forced to overcome institutional rivalry to develop good working relationships with one

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<sup>174</sup> IV 9, senior official, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion [Personal interview, Brussels, 27 January 2014].

<sup>175</sup> As the reader might remember, the YEI is delivered through two distinct Operational Programmes: a national YEI Operational programme, which is split into a centrally-administered component and a regionally-administered component, managed by the *Préfet de région*, supported by the SGAR and the DIRECCTE; and a regional ESF (YEI)—ERDF Operational Programme, managed by the regional council.

<sup>176</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais ; IV 31, senior officer, SGAR Nord-Pas de Calais; IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

another. This collaborative working practice has been formalised in a written agreement signed by the President of the regional council and the *Préfet de région*. However, it should be noted that communication and cooperation also take place more informally between officials in the different institutions, and can be as simple as a telephone call to share information or ask questions about a specific piece of paperwork. In particular, the transfer of joint management authority status to the regional council has led to the development of strong working relationships between officials there and those in the SGAR—the representative of the State—who were formally responsible for the ESF, and who as a result have built up considerable expertise on the management of the Funds. In addition, in order to smooth the transition, certain SGAR officials have been seconded to the regional council to help develop capacity, while others have chosen to make a permanent move. As a result, and given that the ‘world of the institutions’ is relatively small, most officials know one another and many have worked together previously thereby cementing cross-institutional working relationships. In another example of changing working practices, the DGEFP has begun to inform the decentralised State institutions jointly with the regional council<sup>177</sup>, a sign that central government recognises the close partnership needed on the ground; previously, the regional council would have had to go through the association of French regions (ARF), which would have then contacted the DGEFP on the council’s behalf. Significantly, regional interviewees indicated that a strong regional partnership was essential in navigating the complex process of decentralisation taking place around them, in which nothing is known for certain and things may change at any given time with very little warning, and in which the informal sharing of information is a key element in finding out what is going on<sup>178</sup>. As one interviewee who had made the shift from SGAR to the regional council highlighted, it is even difficult for the State’s own representatives in the regions to receive a clear message from the central

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<sup>177</sup> IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>178</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais ; IV 31, senior officer, SGAR Nord-Pas de Calais; IV 33, officer, DIRECCTE Nord-Pas-de-Calais.



level<sup>179</sup>. In this way, regional actors appeared to be working together to build a stable regional platform/environment to provide certainty and cohesion in the face of considerable territorial transformation and uncertainty. This was in fact cited as one of the major (indirect) benefits of the Youth Employment Initiative.

Nonetheless, despite strong collaboration and cooperation between regional actors, interviewees contended that the high levels of complexity and uncertainty were hindering local innovation; and that the multiplicity of actors and existing measures, as well as the different Operational Programmes meant that it was difficult to form a fully coherent approach and potentially limited the impact of funding<sup>180</sup>. In particular, interviewees consistently identified the main challenge as resulting from the ‘*franco-français*’ nature of the delivery arrangements; that is to say something that is typically French, and in this case the implication was an organisation that is needlessly convoluted and intricate. As one senior official from the *Métropole Européenne de Lille* put it, “the problem is that things are enormously complicated by the [system] architecture that has been retained [by the central State]”<sup>181</sup>. Tellingly, another interviewee, this time from the regional council, explained the problem as:

“Everyone wanted to spare the sensitivities of the different partners—central State, regional State and the local and regional authorities—all the while ultimately knowing that perhaps the best thing to have done would have been to either give the regions everything or nothing at all. Instead, it’s a complicated division of responsibilities that, in the end, satisfies no-one.”

[IV 25 [CS] senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais]

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<sup>179</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>180</sup> IV 25, senior officer, Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais ; IV 29, senior officer, Lille Métropole.

<sup>181</sup> IV 29

Innovation has been further limited by the short two-year period in which the YEI is to be delivered<sup>182</sup>. As with the UK, interviewees argued that the tight time-frame created significant pressure and that they had not been given enough time to first develop, and then implement, new, innovative, and fully-formed programmes<sup>183</sup>.

In summary, France displays a mixed picture with regard to the degree to which the domestic arrangements around the YEP and the YEI match the EU preference for multi-level governance. The French regions, in contrast to their English counterparts, have an explicit statutory responsibility for key elements of (youth) employment policy, as well as designated management authority status for part of the European Structural and Investment Funds, including the YEI. However, this is not a smooth-functioning process of MLG. Instead a complex mix of factors is affecting the enactment of multi-level governance. These are addressed in further detail below.

#### **4. Step 3: Identifying mediating factors**

The chapter now turns to the identification of the factors that are mediating the occurrence of multi-level governance-working around the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative in France and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. The factors are set out in table 6.2 and discussed in further detail below. Echoing the two previous case chapters, the factors are grouped into two categories: those that *facilitate* MLG and those that *constrain* its manifestation.

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<sup>182</sup> See further chapter 5.

<sup>183</sup> IV 29, senior officer, Lille Métropole; IV 31, senior officer, SGAR Nord-Pas de Calais.

**Table 6.2: Mediating factors at the domestic-level in France**

Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overt political aspiration within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance</li> <li>• Presence of EU funding, with, critically, financial conditions attached that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality)</li> <li>• Region’s eligibility for EU funding</li> <li>• Perception among regional and local actors of (EU) policy’s high political salience</li> <li>• Scarcity of domestic funds (central government &amp; subnational)</li> <li>• Complexity of domestic territorial reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Front-loading’ of funding (short time-frame to spend funding—limits innovation)</li> <li>• Policy’s high political saliency at the national level (electoral success)</li> <li>• Complexity of domestic territorial reforms</li> </ul>

### **3.3. Opportunities**

The factors that act as an opportunity for MLG can again be divided into *external* factors, stemming from the EU-level, and those that are *internal* to the French politico-administrative system.

#### **External opportunities**

*Overt political aspiration within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance;*

*Presence of EU funding, with, critically, financial conditions attached that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality);*

*Region's eligibility for EU funding*

As also seen in the case of England and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, the existence of an overt political aspiration within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance, as well as the presence of EU funding, access to which is dependent on a member state's alignment with EU principles and preferences, combine to create a policy environment in which multi-level governance is held up as the legitimate 'way of doing policy'. This in effect delegitimises central government's monopoly over the policy-making and implementing process; and provides subnational actors with a platform from which to challenge central government's authority—a platform that, crucially, cannot be automatically brushed off by central government. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the EU's preference for multi-level governance—and thus the transfer of decision-making authority downwards to the subnational level—has also bolstered internal decentralisation pressures. Here then, central government is caught and compressed between two forces advocating the dispersal of

decision-making authority away from the centre: Piattoni's (2010) pressure from *above* and *below*.

However, it must equally be noted that a region's eligibility for EU funding is likely to be an important determinant for the degree to which subnational actors are influenced by EU principles. Regions not eligible for EU funding are likely to experience less internal pressure to conform to EU principles because they are not subject to the same financial conditions attached to EU funding.

### **Internal (domestic) opportunities**

#### ***Scarcity of domestic funds (central government & subnational)***

The French case, and in particular the experience of the *Département du Nord* (see above) highlights that the availability of EU funds is not always enough: subnational actors are much more likely to push for regional/local adaptation when this is coupled with a corresponding scarcity of domestic funds. In this situation, the absence of domestic funds on which the subnational level is dependent to deliver public programmes and projects forces subnational actors to seek alternative sources of financing. Here, an additional caveat may be needed: the EU needs to provide enough capital for the resultant administrative burden to be deemed to be an acceptable cost—in this sense, subnational actors are likely to evaluate to benefits of action versus inaction on the basis of a 'return-on-investment' calculation.

### ***Perception among regional and local actors of (EU) policy's high political salience***

Tying in with the previous factor, subnational actors are much more likely to mobilise their forces to access EU funding, and adapt subnational policies, practices and preferences accordingly, when the policy area in question is deemed to be of sufficient political saliency. In the case of the YEP and the YEI, because employment, and especially young people's employment, is widely and intensely regarded as one of the most critical challenges facing France—and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region in particular—policy actors at all territorial scales are very aware of any policy and financial opportunities that may help to improve the situation. Significantly, there is also a great deal of *public* pressure on politicians and civil servants to be seen to be doing something to boost youth employment levels. In a situation where many citizens, and subnational policy actors, are deeply unhappy with the performance of nationally-developed employment programmes to deal with the youth employment problem, and where increasing powers are being devolved to the regional level, subnational actors have been given added impetus to push for greater regional control over employment policy. While the regional council is currently only officially responsible for apprenticeships and vocational education and training, there was very much a sense that the regional Operational Programme was being used as a trial scheme by central government for the further decentralisation of powers in the future. In effect, EU youth employment policy had been mobilised by NPdC regional actors to reinforce domestic pressure over territorial reform.

### ***Complexity of domestic territorial reforms***

The complexity of domestic territorial reforms has functioned both as an opportunity and as a constraint to multi-level governance in France. On the opportunity side, EU youth employment policy has served to bring together disparate regional actors, whose previous relationships were often characterised by a considerable degree of tension around competing objectives, into a close regional partnership. The partnership was principally formed by the regional actors to negotiate their different responsibilities regarding the implementation of the YEP and the YEI, and to thereby avoid, or at least minimise incidences of service duplication and conflict between the different institutional objectives. In this way, the partnership provided regional actors with a support structure through which to navigate the complexity of the French politico-administrative system and the uncertainty over the content and direction of the domestic decentralisation reforms. In addition however, this partnership has also reinforced the importance of the regional level within the politico-administrative system (Pasquier 2015, 2012), thus keeping the pressure on central government to continue to devolve policy responsibilities and decision-making authority. Although it must be recognised here that regional actors include the state's representatives (Prefect, SGAR and DIRECCTE), which raises some question over the 'real' degree of decentralisation engendered.

### **3.4. Constraints**

Again, the factors that function to hinder the manifestation of multi-level governance can be categorised into external, originating from the EU-level, and internal domestic constraints.

#### **External constraints**

##### ***‘Front-loading’ of funding (short time-frame to spend funding—limits innovation)***

As indicated at the end of the last section, and similar to the experience of local actors in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, French interviewees indicated that the short-time frame linked to the Youth Employment Initiative had significantly hindered policy innovation and had closed off any idea of radical structural reform. Indeed, the lack of time available to develop new policy ideas essentially meant that attention was focussed on existing domestic programmes, as these could be readily deployed without delay.

#### **Internal (domestic) constraints**

##### ***Policy’s high political saliency at the national level (electoral success)***

Similar to that of the UK, this case study again highlights that, policy areas like youth employment policy, that are perceived by central government and national political leaders as being politically salient and/or sensitive, are more likely to be subject to centralising tendencies. In the case of France, the continued centralisation of large parts of employment policy (essentially all employment policy except apprenticeships and vocational education/training) in spite of a major, nation-wide programme of decentralisation is chiefly driven by calculations over its influence on politicians’ electoral performance. Here then is the opportunity for significant tension between national-level actors (central government and



political leaders) and regional actors, both of whom are motivated by their desire to control the direction and content of employment policy, but who are moving in opposite directions: centralising versus centrifugal pressures.

### ***Complexity of domestic territorial reforms***

Here the complexity of domestic territorial reform acts as a constraint to policy innovation and multi-level governance, because the attention of policy actors' is necessarily focussed on navigating the 'here and now', rather than on developing radical change, whether in terms of policy content or the domestic institutional structure. Moreover, given that territorial reform programmes are most often initiated, developed and coordinated by central government, central government thus assumes a dominant position within the reform process, as subnational actors look upwards for instructions and clarification. This can reinforce the subnational level's reliance on central government for direction, at least for the time that reforms are taking place. Furthermore, as in the case of the UK with welfare reform, policy actors are unlikely to have much appetite for further changes amongst massive, complicated and rapid (relatively-speaking) territorial restructuring. In particular, policy actors are likely to be affected by 'reform-fatigue', lack of time and space to develop new ideas, as well as the intrinsic political and financial difficulties of altering existing reform processes (Harris, Kinney 2004, Bonfiglioli, Gancia 2011, Pressman, Wildavsky 1984, Pollitt, Bouckaert 2004, Bowen, Chan et al. 2016).

## **5. Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the domestic formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative in France, with an emphasis on the particular experience of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. The chapter started by setting out the broad domestic political and institutional environment, drawing attention to complex processes of territorial reform that has seen the growing importance of the regional level in the subnational politico-administrative space over the past thirty years (Pasquier 2015). This section also underscored the partially decentralised nature of employment policy in France, with policy competence and decision-making authority split between central government forces and the regional councils. Employment policy is thus characterised by multiple actors, objectives and policy measures, with multiple lines of responsibility and intricate institutional arrangements. The chapter then moved on to consider the extent to which the French domestic arrangements around the formulation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI followed multi-level governance. In this way, the section addressed the question of the ‘goodness of fit’ between domestic and EU policy, practices and preferences. Mirroring the UK case chapter, the section looked at both the formal delivery arrangements, as well as the ‘reality’ of implementation, as drawn from the experience of the French national and subnational policy-makers interviewed. The chapter found that France, in the first instance, similar to England, displayed only minimal instances of multi-level governance around the design and delivery of the YEP and the YEI according to Perry’s typology (Perry 2007). Although the French government was one of the main driving forces behind the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee in particular, high levels of political support have not engendered large-scale structural transformation or policy innovation. The management structures around the YEP and the YEI reflect employment policy’s continued

domination by central government—whether centrally-located in Paris, or through the State’s representatives in the regions. Lack of structural transformation and policy innovation can be attributed to two factors in particular: the presence of existing programmes of territorial reform and the ‘front-loading’ of funding. The reluctance of central government and, more pertinently, of national political leaders’ to cede total (or even majority) control over employment policy is principally driven by the policy’s recognised influence on the outcomes of elections—as well as, to a lesser degree, a method of controlling the regions through central planning. However, as with the case of the UK, a deeper inspection of events uncovers important indicators of gradual multi-level governance—and notably, of the role of EU policy and funding in exerting downwards and upwards pressure of central government control, leading to its gradual erosion. Specifically, this chapter finds that the YEP and the YEI have fed into and reinforced internal pressure on central government actors to press ahead with the domestic programme of decentralisation, at a time when the centre’s appetite for the transfer of further powers to the subnational level seemed to be have been waning. There was within this a clear sense from the interviews that regional actors had banded together around the implementation of the YEP and the YEI—and more broadly, around the delivery of the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)—as a way of overcoming high levels of institutional uncertainty over the direction and content of territorial reforms—and subsequently as a way of strengthening their self-sufficiency in the face of considerable institutional complexity. Moreover, regional actors indicated that their full management authority (MA) status for the ERDF, and their partial MA status for the YEI/ESF was a major opportunity for them to prove their capabilities to central government—with the aim of then being able to push for greater decentralisation of decision-making authority around the ESF and domestic employment policy. The next chapter offers a comparative discussion of the empirical cases.

**PART III**  
**COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION**  
**& CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER 7

### A COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter offers a comparative discussion of the national and local experiences of England and France with regard to the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative, which are the core elements of the EU's policy on youth employment. The chapter finds that while the member states display minimal occurrences of 'true' multi-level governance (Perry 2007) around the design and delivery of the YEP and the YEI, this masks the presence of subtle, yet significant, pressure from the supranational and the subnational levels, which is continuously challenging, and slowly eroding central government authority. In short, central governments are unable to monopolise the policy-making and implementing processes. In particular, central government has been unable to unilaterally impose and maintain (that is to say, control) strategic policy direction, policy content and centralised domestic institutional arrangements. In this way, multi-level governance continues to provide a useful analytical tool through which to understand policy-making in EU youth employment policy because it draws attention to supranational and subnational activities. It thus offers a nuanced and detailed interpretation of the policy-making and implementation processes—one that would be entirely overlooked if one were to focus solely on the national level and on the actions of central governments.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. The next section considers the 'goodness of fit' exhibited between the EU youth employment policy's call for multi-level governance and the domestic arrangements in place in France England for the governance and implementation of the YEP and the YEI. The section examines and explains the differences and similarities between the national and subnational experiences of the two

member states. The third section then discusses the factors that have mediated the manifestation of multi-level governance in the two member states. The section finds a surprising degree of communality between the factors that have supported and constrained MLG. Instead, the biggest differences between the two countries lie chiefly with the forces that have driven centralising tendencies around employment policy. In England, centralisation has been principally driven by fears related to the management of financial risk linked to failing the EU audit procedures, as well as concerns over programme fragmentation. In France, centralisation is dominated by the perception on the part of politicians of the strong correlation between performance on employment policy and success in future elections. The chapter then closes with a summary of the main findings of the chapter.

## **2. Goodness of fit: A comparative discussion**

It does not come as a surprise that in both of the case study countries, the direction and substantive content of employment policy is heavily controlled by central government. However, evidence from the case studies indicates that, in both England and France, the presence of a distinct EU policy on youth employment, and the funding attached to it, have combined with internal domestic processes of territorial reform to blur traditional dividing lines of authority. This blurring is particularly evident with regard to the relationship between central government and the subnational actors in the two local case areas. The Youth Employment Initiative in particular, as well as the European Structural and Investment Funds more widely, have acted as a ‘rallying banner’ around which regional and local actors have mobilised to exert pressure on central government to continue with the decentralisation of decision-making authority and, particularly in the case of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, to negotiate for greater control over important financial

resources. The result in both countries is a messy, complex and highly politicised policy environment, in which the central state retains ultimate control, but where its position is no longer so secure. Thus, central government must continuously deal with skirmishes on the part of regional and local actors determined to wrest further competences from the ‘centre’ in favour of the ‘periphery’. This section considers and explains the similarities and differences between the two cases.

**Tackling youth unemployment is seen as vitally important...but contrasting national reactions to the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee in particular, point to different degrees of “goodness’s of fit” between the EU and national understandings of the role of employment policy.**

Youth unemployment represents a major economic, social and political challenge in both the United Kingdom and France. Political leaders in both countries have publically pledged themselves to improving employment rates among young people, and particularly the specific problems faced by those individuals most disconnected from the labour market: young people not in employment, education or training, commonly referred to as NEETs. However, despite a common commitment to tackling youth unemployment, the two member states have—perhaps unsurprisingly—displayed very different reactions to the Youth Employment Package and to the Youth Guarantee in particular.

These two contrasting reactions point to two very different national interpretations of the role of employment policy and, more importantly, the role of government within this, as well as the role and organisation of a welfare state more broadly. The French understanding of employment policy and the role of the state coincides more closely with EU policy: in this way, France displays a good degree of fit with EU policies, practices and preferences (Risse,

Cowles et al. 2001, Knill, Lehmkuhl 2002). In the case of the UK however, there is a clear mismatch between the EU and domestic interpretations of the ‘right’ way to tackle youth unemployment (‘policy misfit’, see Risse, Cowles et al. 2001), which in turn points to a deeper philosophical mismatch and the presence of direct adaptational pressures on embedded domestic institutional structures—and namely on the national administrative style.

France has frequently been considered to be a hybrid welfare regime with statist, corporatist and pluralist elements (Palier 2000). In this model the actions and the responsibilities of the state and the family unit are privileged, and the market is marginalised. This is in contrast to the UK model which has traditionally been described as a liberal welfare regime, which privileges the market at the expense of the state (Anderson 2015, p. 18, see also Esping-Andersen 1990, Ferrera 2005). The Youth Guarantee emphasises State-led action, whether in the form of specific employment programmes for young people not in employment, education or training or through far-reaching structural reforms, which will, by their nature, require the significant involvement of the State and of government machinery. In this way the Youth Guarantee is more closely aligned with the principles of the French welfare system—unsurprising given that the initiative was instigated by the French.

In addition, the different national reactions to the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee has implications for how the governance of EU youth employment policy is enacted across the different territorial levels in the two countries. First, because the national position taken on EU policy subsequently colours central government’s relationship with the European level: that is to say that it has implications for the boundaries between the ‘domestic’ and the ‘international’ (*domestic—international*). Second, because it also colours central government’s relationship with the subnational level, including with non-state actors: that is to say that it has implications for the boundaries between the ‘centre’ and the



‘periphery’ and between the ‘state’ and ‘society’ (*centre—periphery* and *state—society* boundaries) (see chapter 2 and Piattoni 2010).

France has been a vocal and resolute champion of the Youth Guarantee, and indeed was one of the key forces behind its initial proposal. Information gathered through the research interviews held in Paris and in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region indicated that there were four main factors behind France’s strong support for the measure: first, as a reflection of the need for national government leaders and politicians to demonstrate to the public at home that France is able to directly shape and influence EU—that is to say, to be able to portray France as a ‘*maker*’ of policy, rather than a passive ‘*taker*’ of policy (Börzel 2003, Schultze 2003); second, as a reflection of the high political salience of employment policy in the domestic arena and for domestic voters; third, as a reflection of the recognition across all territorial levels that youth unemployment is a *European* challenge which must be confronted at the EU-level, and thus is a legitimate area for EU action; and finally, as a reflection that actors at all territorial levels in France, in contrast to the UK, viewed the Youth Guarantee, and the Youth Employment Package more widely, as a new and novel *non-prescriptive* approach by the European Commission, that *facilitates* rather than constrains domestic action. In addition, as in the UK, the offer of financial assistance through the Youth Employment Initiative was very well received at the national, regional and local levels. Regional interviewees in particular contended that the European Union had become an increasingly important source of funding in the face of tightening public budgets. Regional officials intimated that the decentralisation of additional decision-making competences and responsibilities to the regional and local level had not always been supported by the allocation of additional public funds.

In stark contrast, despite being a signatory to the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union 2013a), the UK has from the

beginning of the policy development process been a vocal opponent to the measure. As noted in greater detail in chapter 4, opposition has centred on three issues: 1) the four-month time-frame in which actions under the Youth Guarantee must take place; 2) the financial burden of additional reform; and 3) a deep-rooted philosophical disconnect between the EU and UK model of social welfare. The first two factors encompass practical considerations, while the third points to a deeper divide between the UK and EU's employment and social principals. To briefly recap, UK government officials have consistently argued that the four-month time-frame does not adequately take into account the characteristics of the UK labour market, in which 65% of 18-24 year olds "flow-off" Jobseeker's Allowance within three months, and 80% within six months (Department of Work and Pensions 2014, p. 4). UK officials subsequently argued that a six-month time-frame would be more appropriate in order to concentrate funding on the 20% of young people who have not been able to find (or maintain) employment, and who are likely to be the most disadvantaged and at risk of long-term social and economic exclusion. This was cited as particularly important, given that both EU and national funding is limited at a time in which public budgets are being tightly squeezed. Interestingly, as mentioned in chapter 4 and 5, this argument was widely acknowledged by the European Commission officials interviewed; the four-month period seems to have been chosen more because it emphasises the importance of rapid and timely intervention, than for any specific technical reasons. Secondly, following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in May 2010, the UK government had embarked on a highly politicised, large-scale, complex and costly reform of its welfare system. On this front, opposition to further changes in line with EU policy stemmed from both from the perceived major financial implications of additional reforms and changes to an already partially-completed overhaul of domestic structures (see further Harris, Kinney 2004); as well as an entrenched belief (some would say; bordering on arrogance) on the part of ministers and key

central government officials that the employment (and structural) situation of the UK was far stronger than that of many other EU member states and that the current set of reforms was better for the UK than anything that the EU (and the European Commission in particular) could propose. In this mind-set, EU policy is competing with UK domestic policy. This latter point ties in with the third issue from which opposition to the Youth Guarantee stems, namely a fundamental (philosophical) difference in the way that the UK government conceives the role of the state within a welfare system, and the model suggested by the EU and the European Commission more particularly. This is most clearly evidenced by the UK's emphatic aversion to the use of the term 'guarantee' to describe the policy measure. Interviewees in the Department for Work and Pensions were at pains to stress that it is not the responsibility of the state to *guarantee* its citizens' employment. Instead, the state's role should be limited to initial education (i.e. the acquisition of key skills), the provision of information about employment opportunities, and the reduction of barriers facing individuals' access to the labour market. The onus is thus on the *individual* to find and maintain employment. In contrast, the Social Europe vision advanced by the EU supports greater levels of state engagement and intervention in welfare policies (European Commission 2015a, Anderson 2015). Further disagreement has centred on the interpretation of the word 'offer' used in the recommendation establishing a Youth Guarantee. The UK has a long history of mandatory work programmes. This has meant that the UK government (and DWP officials more specifically) have interpreted 'offer' to mean that at the four-month stage every individual would need to be in full-time activity, and if they did not find or "choose"<sup>184</sup> to take up an employment or an education/training place, then government would be legally obligated to provide and fund some type of full-time activity. This would consequently have major financial and resource implications for the British government. It is worth noting here

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<sup>184</sup> IV 18, senior official, Department for Work and Pensions. The choice of word here is particularly telling.

that the UK *has* shown support (albeit guarded) for the Quality Framework for Traineeships (QFT) and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAA). This is likely because action under the two initiatives is left largely in the hands of the member states. The QFT sets out common quality standards in the form of *guidelines* for traineeships across the EU; the EAA essentially represents a *commitment* on the part of member states to improve apprenticeships. As such, action is fully at the discretion of individual governments. Moreover, the two initiatives tie in with current domestic employment policy, which contains a strong focus on preparing individuals for the needs of employers (McKnight 2015); and indeed, with the wider UK philosophy that it is chiefly an individual's responsibility to prepare themselves adequately for employment and the needs of the labour market.

In contrast to the unfavourable reception received by the Youth Guarantee, the Youth Employment Initiative was regarded in a much more positive light by UK government officials. As one DWP official put it, "the YEI is not a separate EU policy that we have to worry about. It is largely a source of money, with which we can do something sensible." (House of Lords 2014c, p. 202) This underlines a critical difference in the way that *policy* is viewed in comparison with *funding*: as an administrative *burden* versus financial *support*. This is also evidenced within the day-to-day relationships that UK government officials have with different units within the European Commission: relations are much more cordial with those Commission officials responsible for overseeing the European Social Fund, and within it the Youth Employment Initiative. Relations with the unit within the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion responsible for youth employment *policy* are much more adversarial. Essentially, the UK government wants EU funding to tackle youth unemployment without any 'strings' attached.

## **Different reactions but similar policy outcomes**

In reality however, neither France's strong political support for the Youth Guarantee or the UK's formal commitment to the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee have translated into radical policy or structural transformation in either domestic arena. This can be viewed as an example of when EU member states 'talk the talk, but don't walk the walk'.

In the case of the UK, the lack of change can be attributed to the non-binding nature of EU Recommendation, meaning that the implementation of a Youth Guarantee on the part of the member state is purely voluntary. In the case of France, the principal reasons behind the lack of change are less clearly identifiable. There was a clear sense from interviewees that, as in the case of the UK, central government was reluctant to alter existing employment programmes aimed at young unemployed individuals even in the face of widespread dissatisfaction on the part of regional and local policy actors, as well as the general public. This reluctance was generally attributed to two issues: first, a belief, shared by Commission officials, that while France is openly in favour of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee, it will ultimately do what it wants; and second, similar to the UK, the inability of central government officials to recognise that (national) programmes may not be effective, and even in the case of acknowledgment, an inability to effect change because of the difficulties linked to altering large-scale, nationally-implemented government programmes mid-delivery (in terms of both the technical and the financial implications that such a course of action would engender, see Harris, Kinney 2004, Pressman, Wildavsky 1984). This corresponds to notions of institutional 'stickiness' and path dependency (Pierson 2000b, Witt, Lewin 2004, North 1990, Pierson 2000a, Wilsford 1994), in that, once political actors have chosen a particular policy pathway, unforeseen consequences (such as the

financial implications of changing direction) effectively ‘force’ them to continue onwards despite a recognised need for change.

However, it must be noted that the lack of policy innovation and structural change in both the UK and France can also be attributed to specific issues with the design of the Youth Employment Initiative. Specifically, interviewees at all territorial levels in both countries identified the short time-frame in which the YEI is supposed to be delivered (funding has been ‘front-loaded’, which means that it needs to be spent in the first 2 years, i.e. 2014-2015) as a major impediment to the conception and implementation of new, innovative policy measures, to say nothing of major structural change. This has been exacerbated by the short turn-around between the European Commission’s initial proposal of the YEP and YEI (December 2012) and its adoption in the Council of the European Union (22 April 2013). While this underlines the urgency and importance attached to the need to reduce youth employment across the majority of the member states, and while national actors would have been aware of the EU policy in the run-up to its adoption, in reality this left domestic actors with very little time to come up with original, workable policy ideas, which could then be operationalised in short order.

**Employment policy is still highly centralised in both countries despite (wide-ranging) internal processes of decentralisation...**

As indicated at the beginning of this section, the research confirms that employment policy is still highly centralised in both the UK and France despite (wide-ranging) internal processes of decentralisation. In both cases, the endurance of central control over the policy can be largely attributed to the drive for political survival on the part of national politicians and central government actors (and its mandated agencies), and is thus another example of so-called

institutional ‘stickiness’. In France, employment policy is strongly associated with electoral outcomes. There was widespread conviction amongst interviewees that the success of politicians in elections at *all* territorial levels is heavily influenced by the voting public’s perception of the strength of their chosen approach towards increasing levels of employment and their past performance. As a notable example, President François Hollande was voted into office in 2012 in large part on the back of his employment promises, and particularly his focus on tackling rising levels of youth unemployment. He has since openly declared that his decision to stand for re-election (and indeed any future electoral success) will depend on whether he is able to meet his promises on employment (Palais de l’Elysée 14/07/2015).

Given that politicians are subject to such a high level of (political) accountability—and employment policy is thus so strongly tied up with their survival as elected politicians—national government leaders are subsequently highly unlikely to surrender significant levels of decision-making and policy-making control to subnational administrative tiers. In the UK, national opt-in providers were dependent on the ESI-Funds allocated to the LEPs for their operating budgets. Without the funding, there was a strong possibility of job cuts among existing employees. GBSLEP’s decision to opt -out of national provision thus threatened their institutional survival, pushing them to exert considerable pressure on the LEP to effectively (re)centralise its funding allocation. They thereby created additional tension in an already strained central-local relationship. In both cases, a centralised employment policy can also be understood as an exercise in control and power on the part of the centre over territorial spaces, people and outcomes (Perry 2007, p. 1054, Ritzer 1996), however with some subtle differences between the two cases. In France the focus is on electoral outcomes, while in England, the focus is predominantly on monetary considerations. Whilst concern over future elections undoubtedly plays a role in the decisions of UK politicians, it was much less apparent in the field interviews, in comparison with French officials. A centralised

employment policy has instead been primarily framed by central government—and notably by the Department for Work and Pensions—as a way of ensuring fairness within the system in terms of citizens’ equal access to services across the national territory. There was a sense from interviewees in the Department of Work and Pensions that if local areas were given too much freedom a situation could develop where one area was seen to provide claimants’ with greater levels of support (financial or otherwise) leading to potential shifts in population as people sought to move to those locations, as well as opening up the possibility of legal action on the part of claimants in other areas, and a resulting enforced ‘race to the top’, which could in turn have huge financial ramifications.

In England and France, the centralising tendencies of the central state in the area of employment policy are driven by specific actors. In the case of England, it is the Department for Work and Pensions that is the driving force behind central government’s reluctance to cede greater power and decision-making competences to local areas. In France, national politicians continue to exercise tight control over overall policy direction, as well as local implementation via the state’s regional representatives—namely, the regional Prefecture, the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR) and the regional directorate of businesses, competition, consumer affairs, work and employment (DIRECCTE)). Furthermore, in both England and France the centralising tendencies are conflicting with internal, politically mandated processes of decentralisation. This situation creates significant tension between 1) different central government actors, and between 2) the centre and regional and local actors. In France, this tension manifests itself most visibly in the relationship between central government and the regional and departmental councils. In the UK, the centralising dynamics of the Department of Work and Pensions is at odds with the work of other central government departments, and most notably with the ‘localist’ vision championed by the Cabinet Office and its Cities Policy Unit—as well as with other state actors, including the House of Lords, as



represented by its EU Internal Market, Infrastructure and Employment Sub-Committee (see chapter 5). Indeed, several local interviewees in GBSLEP noted that they were operating in a contradictory political environment where they were both strongly encouraged to seek out greater decision-making competences and responsibilities by certain central government actors (notably the Cabinet Office), and simultaneously constrained in their efforts by other central government actors (specifically the DWP). A number of interviewees questioned whether it was therefore possible to talk of a uniform government strategy—and emphasised that their relationships differed significantly depending on which central government department they were dealing with. Interestingly, local interviewees highlighted the positive experience of working with the Cabinet Office, in which local autonomy was emphasised, as one of the motivations behind the decision to challenge the Department of Work and Pensions for greater control over the area's share of the ESI-Funds, including the Youth Employment Initiative. This highlights the important role of policy entrepreneurs in creating new opportunities within the domestic policy environment and institutional structure (Roberts, King 1991, Kingdon 1995, Zahariadis 2008).

**However, centralisation masks important subnational dynamics that are challenging central government control...**

It is important however, not to overstate central government's control over EU policy and funding. The picture of a straight-forwardly centralised employment policy masks significant tension in the relations between central government and the subnational level, as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, between state and non-state actors. Indeed, the two case studies illustrate that, despite central government's continued strong-hold on employment policy, regional and local actors are using the Youth Employment Package and the Youth

Employment Initiative to bolster existing domestic processes of decentralisation, to negotiate greater concessions from central government (*GBSLEP*) and to create a strong regional partnership and policy framework in the face of a highly politicised and changeable national political environment (*NPdC*). In this way, EU policy and funding are blurring the traditional dividing lines of authority between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’. In the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership area, local actors—and notably local government officers from Birmingham City Council—have drawn on the ideas contained within the Youth Employment Initiative to negotiate concessions from central government in the form of greater control over European funding than would have otherwise been possible. In France, the national implementation of the YEP and the YEI is characterised by the multiplicity of programmes, institutions and actors, resulting in a high degree of institutional and policy complexity, which is in turn intensified by an already complex internal process of decentralisation and territorial reform. In the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the YEI, and to a lesser extent the YEP and the Youth Guarantee, have provided an opportunity for regional and local actors—and in particular representatives from the regional prefecture, the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR) and the regional council—to create a strong regional partnership and a joint space for cooperation, coordination and dialogue as a way of navigating a changeable national political and policy environment. Moreover, there is evidence of top-down Europeanization as subnational actors in both local cases have sought to embed EU employment policy principles into their own regional and local economic and employment strategies. Adaptation has primarily been motivated by the need to meet the conditions attached to receiving EU funds (i.e. financial conditionality) in order to be able to draw down the maximum EU support available at a time of limited domestic public budgets. However, in addition, adaptation was also used by regional and local actors as a method of separating themselves from the ‘centre’ and of highlighting their commitment to the economic and

social success of their territory. In both areas, regional and local actors often expressed clear dissatisfaction with existing employment policy and service provision. Interviewees complained that the development of a national Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan had not been used by central government as the chance to radically rethink national employment policy and its programmes. The YEP and YEI were consequently seen as a platform through which to challenge central government policy and call for more locally tailored solutions to youth unemployment. In this way, adaptation in both local cases was driven by EU rules governing financial conditionality, as well as internal territorial dynamics.

Regional/local adaptation was supported by a high level of awareness among regional and local actors of EU youth employment *policy* and the YEI *funding* available—which, critically, was reinforced by a strong belief in its relevance for the local area (especially in the case of the funding). However, it is worth noting that awareness tended to be predominantly concentrated among EU specialists, who then disseminated the necessary information to the individuals, units and departments affected. Certain institutions were more successful than others in creating a coherent institution-wide EU strategy, which then fed (horizontally) into other policy areas, as well as the institution’s broader strategic aims and objectives. This is an example of top-down Europeanization (Risse, Cowles et al. 2001, Radaelli 2003) and arguably an example of Knill and Lehmkuhl’s “framing integration” (2002) whereby EU policies, practices and preferences have altered domestic policy by ‘re-framing’ domestic beliefs and expectations regarding policy direction and content. In the case of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, this function was principally performed by Birmingham City Council (BCC), and its dedicated European and International Affairs team—which forms the chief repository of the institution’s EU knowledge—as well as by key staff members responsible for employment matters within the Council’s Economy Directorate. Local interviewees consistently referred back to the European and International

Affairs team when discussing EU policy and funding, and in particular the Head of European and International Affairs who was seen as a key influential figure with access to critical information and the main interlocutor with the EU institutions and central government departments on matters relating to the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative. Due to the lack of ‘in-house’ EU knowledge on the part of Board members and within the (small) LEP secretariat, the Local Enterprise Partnership was heavily reliant on the work of the BCC European and International Affairs team to create a coherent LEP EU strategy. In France, EU policy and funding specialists were located in each of the main regional and local politico-administrative institutions, with the most heavily resourced being the regional council, the secretariat-general for regional affairs (SGAR) and, to a slightly lesser extent, the services of the *Département du Nord*, each of which had a dedicated and relatively well-staffed team (5+ individuals) working on EU and internal affairs. As with Birmingham City Council, EU knowledge and awareness was concentrated in these dedicated teams, who then liaised with specific individuals in the sub-divisions responsible for employment policy, whose work would be affected by the YEP and the YEI. Other institutions, such as the regional directorate of businesses, competition, consumer affairs, work and employment<sup>185</sup> (DIRECCTE) and the Métropole Européenne de Lille had a smaller number individuals (1-3 staff members) principally acting as internal and cross-institutional liaison officers and working on specific projects. The *Département du Nord* is an example of an institution where the Internal Relations directorate (which dealt with EU affairs) had previously found it difficult to persuade other directorates to integrate EU policy and ‘thinking’ into local policies and the department’s overarching strategy, with the result that the *Département* lost out on funding under the 2007-2013 Structural Funds programming period because its local objectives did not fully fit with EU objectives—a prerequisite to

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<sup>185</sup> Directions régionales des entreprises, de la concurrence, de la consommation, du travail et de l'emploi.

receiving funding. The absence of Europeanization at that time can be explained by the fact that, at a time when central government funding could easily be accessed by the *Département*, there was no particular incentive to actively pursue EU funds. Now that centrally-administered resources are scarce, and regional and local funding is limited (at the time of writing), there is a strong impetus on the part of regional and local policy officers to access financial support from the EU. This experience has also played out in the UK.

The concentration of EU knowledge and awareness among specific divisions and individuals was also apparent at central government level in both the UK and France. EU (employment) policy work is by-and-large treated separately from the day-to-day making and implementing of “domestic” policy. UK interviewees for example, highlighted that the Department for Work and Pensions was heavily siloed with little cross-over between the different divisions. This might be partly explained by the fact that employment policy covers a wide-range of thematic areas, requiring many different specialised sub-departments and teams. Consequently, similar to DG Employment in the European Commission, these sub-units tend to work relatively autonomously within their own specific policy field. Coordination and integration chiefly takes place around specific issues that require cross-boundary collaborative working or as part of (formalised) internal coordination processes, such as, in the case of DG Employment, weekly meetings between the Director-General, the Directors of the eight internal Directorates and other key staff to keep each other apprised of each other’s work and to flag-up potential (and upcoming) problems and challenges.

In both country cases, awareness of EU youth employment policy was driven by two main factors: 1) the need engage in EU-level negotiations and policy development activities, whether in the Council of the European Union (such as the negotiations surrounding the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee) or directly with the European Commission on a bilateral basis; and 2) the need to draw up the national and regional/local

strategic documents required to be able to receive funding under the Youth Employment Initiative, and the European Social Fund (such as the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, the ESF/YEI Operational Programmes and the national Partnership Agreement). This means that even when member states oppose EU policy (as in the case of the UK) or seek to engage only on their own terms (France), the EU institutional framework, in which they are indelibly enmeshed, forces them to engage with the policy. Thus, within this framework, the UK was obliged to take a position on the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee, which would have necessitated internal discussions—and while the position was ultimately a negative one, EU youth employment policy will nonetheless have indirectly altered the domestic policy environment by simply being ‘on the radar’ (Hix, Goetz 2000).

### **Very different centre—periphery relationships**

In England, relations between central government (as represented notably by the Department for Work and Pensions) and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) were often characterised by tension and hostility between the two parties. This essentially boils down to a lack of trust: central government appears to have little confidence in the ability of the LEPs and local councils to provide a harmonised and uniform welfare provision, and to fulfil the subsequent financial audit requirements should responsibility for this be devolved downwards to the English subnational level. In turn, GBSLEP—and most particularly, the local authority members—has very little confidence in central government’s ability—and specifically, the Department for Work and Pensions and its agents, the national opt-in providers—to provide integrated and localised (youth) employment programmes. In France, the relationship between central government and the representatives of the regional and local authorities are politicised and sometimes tense, but

by-and-large much more cooperative than in the UK. Nonetheless, cooperation and coordination is severely hindered by the complexity of the domestic political system, and pervading uncertainty over institutional arrangements and policy direction.

The following section considers the political implications of the research.

### **3. Mediating factors: A comparative discussion**

This research has identified a number of factors that can either hinder or support the development and application of a multi-level system of governance. These factors can be organised into four categories. These are namely: 1) *external constraints* to multi-level governance, stemming predominantly from the EU itself; 2) *internal domestic constraints*; 3) *external opportunities*, that facilitate MLG; and finally, 4) *internal domestic opportunities*. These are set out in table 7.1, and are described in further detail below. As will be seen, certain factors can function both as opportunities for, or constraints to, MLG depending on specific circumstances.

**Table 7.1: Factors that constrain and support the application of multi-level governance**

	<b>External (EU)</b>	<b>Internal (domestic)</b>
<b>Constraints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Front-loading’ of funding (short time-frame to spend funding—limits innovation)</li> <li>• Need for national ‘ownership’ of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans (prioritised central government involvement)</li> <li>• Capacity constraints within the European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy’s high political saliency at the national level</li> <li>• Conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies): where centralising department holds the ‘purse strings’</li> <li>• Complexity of domestic territorial reforms</li> <li>• Presence of existing welfare policy reforms (constraint to Europeanization of policy and practice)</li> </ul>



	<b>External (EU)</b>	<b>Internal (domestic)</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Region's eligibility for EU funding</li> <li>• Conditions attached to EU funding that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (<i>financial conditionality</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception among regional and local actors of (EU) policy's high political salience</li> <li>• Scarcity of domestic funds (central government &amp; subnational)</li> <li>• Presence of regional and local policy entrepreneurs</li> <li>• Conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies)</li> </ul>

### **External constraints (stemming from the EU itself) to multi-level governance**

The research identifies three key external constraints to multi-level governance, stemming from the EU itself, namely: 1) the presence of tight time restrictions on EU funding; 2) an emphasis on the necessity for national 'ownership' of EU policies and programmes; and 3) the presence of capacity constraints within the European Commission.

### ***‘Front-loading’ funding hinders policy innovation and multi-level governance***

The experience from the two case studies highlights that ‘front-loading’ funding—that is to say, stipulating a short time-frame in which EU money must be spent—far from fostering greater levels of activity within member states, in reality acts as a break to both policy innovation and multi-level governance. A key component to policy innovation is *time* (Sartorius, Zundel 2005, Zundel, Erdmann et al. 2005, Harris, Kinney 2004): time to come up with new ideas, to convert these ideas into practical strategies and policy measures that can be implemented ‘on the ground’, to disseminate these strategies and policy measures to the different central government departments and regional/local actors who will be involved in their implementation, and, finally, time to implement them. Time will also be needed to iron out the ‘teething problems’ that occur during the implementation of new policies. Short time-frames to spend EU money limits policy innovation because actors, whether from central government or from the subnational level, do not have long enough to produce, develop and implement new ideas. Short time-frames can also create a sense of urgency, which can limit creativity as actors concentrate on simply spending the money, rather than on developing new solutions to policy challenges. This is particularly the case in an environment where domestic funding is limited, and extra provision depends on EU financial support. Time is also a critical element in building strong and effective partnerships between actors at different territorial levels—a key component of multi-level governance. Even more so in countries where there has been less of a tradition of multi-level governance working, or where relationships between central government and subnational actors have frequently been characterised by tensions and/or distrust. This cannot be overcome in a matter of months.

*Need for national ‘ownership’ of EU policies and programmes prioritises central government involvement in EU policy process*

A further constraint on multi-level governance is paradoxically the EU institutional framework itself. Despite calling for greater partnerships within and across territorial levels, the need on the part of EU institutions to ensure that national governments take ‘ownership’ of EU policies has naturally prioritised central government involvement in the EU policy process—often at the expense of subnational actors. National governments are ultimately responsible for the majority of domestic policy and its outcomes. It is thus critical that national government leaders ‘buy-into’ the EU policy ‘vision’, and its measures: without this ‘buy-in’ it is unlikely that the ‘vision’ or the measures will be implemented domestically. However, a consequence of the prioritisation of national governments as critical partners within the EU policy process is that it then limits access for subnational actors. Instead, regional and local actors’ access to and capacity to participate in the policy process and to influence policy depends heavily on the central governments themselves. Moreover, access issues are not limited solely to the EU-level, but can also play out within the domestic arena: at a technical level, the European Commission’s emphasis on the need for national strategies also mean that central governments determine the degree to which domestic regional and local actors are able to shape the national position to EU policy, as well as how EU policy is then implemented within the national territory. In this way, the EU’s institutional framework itself—and the precedence it gives to central governments—closes off an arena for negotiation and contestation on the part of regional and local actors to engage directly with the European policy process (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007).

### ***Capacity constraints within the European Commission limits multi-level governance***

Capacity constraints in the form of limited staff numbers within the European Commission mean that it is operationally impossible for most policy units to engage in sustained and systematic dialogue directly with regional and local actors about policy, its content and direction. Even in those Directorate-Generals where regional and local actors have regular direct contact with Commission officials—namely those DGs which administer EU funds (such as DG Employment and DG Regional Policy)—the strict division of labour between Commission units means that engagement does not necessarily translate into regional influence and input on European policy. Moreover, capacity constraints reinforce the dominance of national governments: it is far more feasible to keep track of and engage with 28 member states, than it is with 276<sup>186</sup> (NUTS-2) regions. Thus despite calls for the greater participation of subnational actors in the EU policy process, the European Commission—the stronghold of EU policy formulation and development—is structurally unable to communicate and coordinate with the regions (and localities) in such a way that allows them to participate and, crucially, directly influence EU policy. Some observers might point to the presence of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), as an institution created to fill this very gap; however, a number of studies have illustrated the Committee’s limited influence on the Commission and EU policy<sup>187</sup> (Hönnige, Panke 2015). There is then a paradox at the heart of the European policy process. On the one hand, the concept of multi-level governance forms a core element of the European Union’s *modus operandi*—the term, and its underlying meaning (read: partnership), can be found in the political speeches of European Commissioners, in those of national politicians in the European Council and Members of the European Parliament. It is referred to in legally-binding EU regulations and provisions, and it

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<sup>186</sup> Eurostat figure correct as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015.

<sup>187</sup> It should be noted however that this argument is not without its critics, including Simona Piattoni and Justus Schönlaue (2015).

is underscored in countless technical documents from all EU institutions. And yet, in reality, the need for strong policy coordination at EU-level precludes a strong role for regions in the European policy process. In the face of limited Commission resources, national governments play an important role in coordinating, filtering and integrating regional positions into their own national position to then be put forward at EU-level. In this way, national governments are *needed* to act as ‘coordinators’ or ‘filters’ in order to avoid an ‘overload’ of the European policy process that could potentially result from problematic differences of opinion and policy aspiration across 276 EU regions.

### **Internal (domestic) constraints to multi-level governance**

The research has identified four important internal, domestic constraints to multi-level governance. These are: 1) the degree to which the policy is viewed as being politically salient by central government actors; 2) the presence of conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies), where the centralising department holds the ‘purse strings’; 3) the presence of complex territorial reforms; and 4) the presence of pre-existing welfare policy reforms—this latter acts more particularly as a constraint to the Europeanization of domestic policy and practices.

#### ***The policy’s high political saliency at the national level encourages central government dominance/control***

The degree to which a policy is viewed as politically salient by national government leaders plays a role in determining the likelihood, and the extent to which, it will be subject to multi-level governance. Specifically, the more a policy is viewed as politically salient by central government actors, the less likely authority over the policy-making and decision-taking processes is to be shifted downwards to the subnational level, or upwards to the supranational

EU-level. The degree to which a policy is viewed as politically salient by national politicians and (central government officials) is driven by two factors in particular: the *financial* and *political* risks associated with policy failure. The financial risk centres on the monetary implications of losing control over the policy area: this encompasses both the financial ramifications of devolving budgetary competences to subnational administrative units (and the associated financial risks of policy fragmentation (see above and chapter 5)), as well as notions of institutional ‘stickiness’ (devolving budgets may lead to a corresponding reduction in staff numbers, and, potentially, the ultimate dissolution of the institution itself). The political risk centres on the impact of any policy failure on future electoral success on the part of national government leaders (this is for example evident in the case of France in this research).

***Conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies), where the centralising department holds the ‘purse strings’***

The presence of conflicting philosophies within central government can act as both a constraint and an opportunity for multi-level governance. In this case, the centrifugal tendencies of key central government departments can be significantly undermined by an opposing centralising tendency of other central government departments, especially when the centralising department holds control over important financial resources on which subnational actors are dependent. This leads to the uneven application multi-level governance, where regional/local actors are responsible for certain policy areas, but are closed off from shaping and/or making decisions in others, which may have an equally important impact on the local territory. Moreover, the centralising tendencies displayed in one policy area can be carried over to other policy areas that are linked to, or affected by, the first: so for example, the centralising forces shaping employment policy may in turn affect a

region's broader policy around economic development, which is subject to decentralisation. This can in turn lead to conflict between regional and local actors and the 'centre'.

However, under other circumstances this constraint can also act as an opportunity for multi-level governance, opening up gaps in central government policy towards the subnational level—and thus providing a space for contestation and negotiation for greater regional/local involvement and influence in the policy process.

### ***Complexity of domestic territorial reforms***

In the case of this research, the presence of complex territorial reforms have acted as a constraint to multi-level governance in that they have fostered significant levels of uncertainty among regional and local actors: uncertainty over processes, working practices, partnerships, policies and outcomes. As territorial reforms are, generally-speaking, devised and instigated by central government forces, attention is thus naturally directed to the centre for confirmation as to the direction of reforms and the course of action to be followed—and thus reinforces central government's role within the policy environment.

However, under other circumstances, it is equally possible to conceive that complex territorial reforms could provide an opportunity for regional and local actors to push for greater control over decision-making and policy-making in their territories. This particular constraint should therefore be understood as being subject to the specificities of *time* and *space*.

### ***Presence of existing welfare policy reforms as a constraint to the Europeanization of domestic policy and practices***

While this constraint is more particularly relevant to the *Europeanization* of domestic policy, it also has repercussions for domestic practices—where domestic 'practices' (understood here

as ways of doing things) are characterised by a dominant ‘centre’. More particularly, the presence of existing welfare policy reforms is likely to hinder changes to domestic policy and practice in line with EU policy and practices (namely the desire for a multi-level system of governance) because of the challenges associated with adaptation. As indicated earlier in the chapter (and also in chapter 5), these challenges can relate to the ‘hard’ financial cost of altering reforms mid-way through their implementation, as well as the difficulties in changing mind-sets once decisions have been taken.

### **External (EU) factors supporting multi-level governance**

The research has identified two key external factors that support the advancement of multi-level governance within member states, notably: 1) a region’s eligibility for EU funding; and 2) the presence of conditions attached to EU funding, that is to say, the presence of financial conditionality.

#### ***Region’s eligibility for funding***

The role played by the availability of EU funding in advancing multi-level governance in a member state is closely linked to two of the internal supporting factors: the scarcity of domestic funding and the high salience of the policy for regional and local actors. Regional and local actors faced with a situation where central government funds are limited, but the policy is seen as vitally important for the region/local area and its population will naturally turn to other sources of financial support. Consequently, if EU funding is available, actors will turn to the EU. Here, the availability of EU funding must be matched with conditions linked to access and usage, the second external supporting factor.



### ***Presence of conditions attached to funding***

Together, an area's eligibility for funding and the conditions attached to the funding create a political space within the domestic arena for contestation and negotiation between central government and subnational actors: both central government and regional and local actors depend on EU funding, but to access this financial support they must a) match domestic policy to EU policy principles, and 2) match domestic practices to EU practices, which namely places a strong emphasis on partnership across the multiple territorial levels and between state and non-state actors. In member states where domestic policy and practice do not match EU principles, and where central government is reluctant to instigate any change, regional and local actors have a vested interest in and incentive to mobilise against the centre.

### **Internal (domestic) factors supporting multi-level governance**

The research has identified four significant important internal (domestic) factors that support the advancement of multi-level governance within member states. These are: 1) the degree to which the policy is viewed as politically salient by regional and local actors; 2) the scarcity of domestic funding available; 3) the presence of regional and local policy entrepreneurs; and 4) the presence of conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies).

### ***Perception among regional and local actors of (EU) policy's high political salience***

The likelihood that subnational actors will mobilise against central government is further determined by the degree to which they view the policy area as politically salient—both in terms of its potential impact (and that of any policy failure) on the local territory and its population, as well as on their own institutional and/or political survival. In cases where

regional and local actors believe that a policy has a critical bearing on the economic (and social) well-being of the area and its people and/or on their institutional survival (likely to be closely interlinked), they are likely to feel that they have little choice but to engage with EU policy and the position of central government to affect change in the status quo.

***Scarcity of domestic funds (central government & subnational)***

As indicated above, the scarcity of internal domestic funds forces regional and local actors to turn their attention to alternative sources of funding. When EU funding is available—and in a sufficient quantity to outweigh the (administrative) costs of accessing it—it represents an important source of financial support, and, critically, one that cannot be ignored. When conditions are further attached to the funding, regional/local actors are in effect forcibly incentivised to take action to ensure that they are able to access the maximum amount available—whether this is by adapting their own regional/local strategies to be in line with EU strategy, or to strongly induce central government to adhere to the Common Provisions Regulation governing EU funds, which requires partnership between the different territorial levels. In addition, the scarcity of domestic funds can open up a negotiating space through which regional and local actors are able to put forward their demands for greater control over resources and decision-making powers.

### ***Presence of regional and local policy entrepreneurs***

A significant determinant in this research in subnational mobilisation has been the presence of regional/local policy entrepreneurs. These individuals have played a critical role in raising awareness of EU policy and the funding available among other actors within the region/local area and convincing them of its importance; identifying specific opportunities around which to mobilise; supporting the development of regional/local strategies to access funding and influence central government in favour of greater regional/local authority over resources and decision-making competences; and building extensive networks of contacts and partnerships, which in turn allows them to communicate with, coordinate and organise regional/local responses and mobilisation.

### ***Conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies)***

While conflicting objectives on the part of central government departments can constrain multi-level governance, they can equally act as an opportunity for subnational mobilisation. Inconsistencies over objectives and 'ways of working' within central government open up areas for contestation and negotiation, which can in turn provide regional and local actors with the 'space' to seize greater concessions from central government than might have been possible if faced with a united central government 'front'.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a comparative discussion of the findings drawn from the three empirical chapters, and most notably from the two country cases, France and England. The chapter began by comparing the ‘goodness of fit’ between the member states’ domestic structures and the EU policy, practices and preferences around the design and delivery of the YEP and the YEI. The chapter then considered the specific factors that have mediated the manifestation of instances of multi-level governance in the two member states, and found an unexpected degree of similarity between the two cases.

Mostly notably, the chapter found that, with regard to the match between domestic and EU youth employment policy, France displays a much closer degree of fit than England. This comes as a consequence of contrasting understandings of the purpose of employment policy and the role of the state. France, as a ‘conservative welfare state’ (Anderson 2015, p. 44), ascribes more closely to the model of ‘Social Europe’ promoted by the EU, and particularly the European Commission. Within this framework, the state has a duty to support its citizens in their efforts to find and maintain employment. In contrast, the UK, a ‘liberal welfare state’ (ibid, p. 44) regime places greater emphasis on the responsibility of the individual in their search for employment. With regard to the match between 1) the official EU policy, practices and preferences and the realities of the EU policy-making process, and 2) between EU policy, practices and preferences and domestic implementation arrangements, both the European and the two domestic arenas display minimal instances of ‘authentic’ multi-level governance. Instead, states continue to be the principal actors within the EU youth employment policy-making and implementation processes. The primacy of central governments at the European-level is secured by two factors in particular. First, the EU’s own institutional framework prioritises central government involvement so as to ensure national ‘ownership’ of EU youth employment policy. In addition, the relatively small number of staff

working on EU youth employment policy and funding in the European Commission, and the division of labour between policy and funding units, makes it structurally impossible to engage in systematic, comprehensive and meaningful dialogue with 276 EU regions. Second, the high salience of (youth) employment policy in the domestic area heightens the desire of national political leaders and central government to retain control over decision-making. At the domestic level, the comparative discussion highlights different drivers behind the centralisation of employment policy in France and England, in spite of dual internal decentralisation movements. In France, the reluctance of national political leaders and of central government more widely, to relinquish further control over employment policy (at least for the time being) is mainly due to the policy's association with the outcome of elections at all territorial levels. Although the issue of political survival is undoubtedly also of relevance in England, the continued concentration of employment policy decision-making authority in the hands of central government is more explicitly connected to concerns over financial management.

However, this is not a straight-forward tale of central government monopolisation. The research's detailed investigation into the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative exposes a series of internal and external features of the political environment that are inhibiting central government control over policy direction and exerting centrifugal pressures on centralised domestic institutional arrangements. In short, features that support multi-level governance. At the supranational EU-level, the existence of a distinct EU policy 'vision' of youth employment that openly and formally calls for multi-level governance-working essentially legitimises subnational involvement in the policy-making and implementation processes, and consequently creates a legitimate political 'space' for subnational mobilisation. This downwards pressure is significantly reinforced by the presence of specific EU funds, access to which is conditional

upon adherence to EU principles—and especially, the partnership principle—and which is available only to *regions*. At a time when public budgets are severely restricted and the employment challenges faced by regions are vast, alternative sources of financial support are a critical element in being able to provide public programmes in subnational territories. Here, a region's eligibility for (conditional) EU funding, combined with the absence of domestic funds and a policy's high political saliency opens up important spaces for political contestation and negotiation (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007), and encourages the activation of subnational forces. In this way, the thesis underlines that centralised and/or unitary states cannot be viewed as interchangeable 'black boxes'. Instead, the research reveals an intricate story of discord and rivalry, and of diverse and conflicting interests that have served to erode central state dominance over the development and implementation of EU youth employment policy.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **1. Introduction**

This thesis has analysed the extent to which the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) is able to illuminate and explain the making and implementation of European Union (EU) youth employment policy, and notably the policy's two core measures, the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). It has done so through the distinctive lens of two highly unitary EU member states, the United Kingdom (England) and France, and the specific subnational territories of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region.

The geographic and policy focus of this thesis make an original contribution to MLG scholarship. Youth unemployment represents a major contemporary social, economic and political challenge for the UK and France, as well as for the European Union as a whole, risking sustainable economic prosperity and genuine social cohesion at all territorial scales. However, youth unemployment policy has largely been overlooked in the MLG literature in favour of other policy areas, and in particular EU regional policy (Piattoni 2010, Hooghe, Marks 2001, Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996, Marks 1996a, Bache 2008, 1993, Hooghe 1996a, 2000, Benz 2007, De Lassalle 2010, 2002, Bache, Andreou et al. 2011, Bailey, De Propis 2002) and environmental policy (Knill, Lenschow 2001, Heinelt 2008, Knill, Tosun 2008, Fairbrass, Jordan 2004, Lenschow 2002, Weale, Pridham et al. 2000). This thesis has sought to redress this imbalance. Moreover, not only is youth employment policy of significant empirical relevance, but EU youth employment policy explicitly calls for the participation of supranational, national, subnational and non-state actors in its formulation and

implementation. In this way, it offers a rich environment for the analysis of MLG dynamics. Unitary states have similarly been frequently overlooked in the MLG literature in favour of federal and decentralised states (Jeffery 1997, Mayntz 1999, Conzelmann 1998, Sutcliffe 2000, 1996), which provide a more obvious setting for cross-scale and multi-actor policy activities. Indeed, both the policy sector and the geographic areas observed represent ‘least likely’ cases for the manifestation of instances of multi-level governance. Nevertheless, drawing on the literature on Europeanization, unitary and centralised states afford a valuable opportunity through which to identify the presence of subtle but powerful factors that serve to facilitate or impede instances of multi-level governance—and which might otherwise be missed in a more hospitable environment.

At first glance, this thesis has found minimal signs of the occurrence of robust and coherent instances of multi-level governance (Perry 2007) around the design and delivery of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative, both in the two national member state settings, as well as at the European level itself. National state-executives continue to dominate the policy-making and implementation processes around EU youth employment policy. Critically, however, a deeper investigation discovers that they are unable to *monopolise* these processes. Instead, the presence of subtle, yet significant, pressure from the supranational and the subnational levels is continuously challenging, and slowly eroding, central government authority. In particular, central governments have been unable to unilaterally impose and maintain strategic policy direction, policy content and centralised domestic institutional arrangements around EU youth employment policy. This research demonstrates the continued usefulness of the concept of multi-level governance as a heuristic device for understanding and explaining policy-making and implementation in the European Union. MLG allows for a nuanced and detailed interpretation of the policy dynamics at play around EU youth employment policy—which would be entirely absent if one were to focus



solely on the actions of EU institutions at the European-level or on those of central governments at the national level.

This concluding chapter brings this thesis to a close. It is organised as follows. The next section reprises the main points and the key findings of the thesis in a chapter-by-chapter summary. The third section then considers the value and limitations of an MLG and Europeanization approach to understanding policy-making and decision-making authority in the European Union. It identifies areas for further theoretical development. The fourth section puts forward a number of areas for future research. The fifth section considers the policy implications of the research, and draws five lessons for policy-makers. The thesis closes with a final word on the research and its importance.

## **2. Summary of the thesis**

This thesis has been structured around three parts. Part I clarified the conceptual boundaries of the research, and set out the design of the research project itself.

Chapter two presented a focussed literature review of multi-level governance and Europeanization, the two concepts that have provided the thesis' theoretical foundation. As part of this, the concept of multi-level governance was stripped back to its core components. Namely, MLG points to the idea that contemporary States function in a complex political environment, in which policy-making and implementation processes take place across multiple territorial scales, and involve a variety of supranational, national, subnational and non-state actors (Piattoni 2010, Bache, Flinders 2004, Hooghe, Marks 2001). As a result, it implies that any effort to understand policy-making and implementation dynamics must consider the role played by state and non-state actors at each of these territorial tiers. MLG

offers a number of reasons why national political leaders may relocate decision-making authority upwards to the supranational level or downwards to the subnational level, either voluntarily or non-voluntarily (see further chapter two). However, it does not pinpoint specific factors that may mediate the occurrence of instances of multi-level governance. For this, the thesis drew upon the literature on Europeanization; and in particular, on Bache's (2008) revised version of Risse, Cowles and Caporaso's (2001) "three-step approach" of domestic change. From these two focussed literature reviews, the thesis surfaced four guiding research questions and established a tailored analytical framework:

1. To what extent has EU youth employment policy promoted instances of multi-level governance in the two highly unitary member states of the United Kingdom (England) and France?
  - 1.1. What are the relevant aspects of EU youth employment policy in regard to analysing its effects on multi-level governance and through what mechanisms and with what degree of force do these impact England and France?
  - 1.2. What is the degree of 'fit' between the EU's vision of youth employment policy and the domestic policy in England and France? To what extent do the domestic policy arrangements in place in England and France exhibit the features of multi-level governance? (*Degree of fit*)
  - 1.3. Which mediating factors (if any) are enabling or preventing the implementation of EU youth employment policy and instances of multi-level governance in England and France?

The questions have been addressed through four analytical tasks: First, the thesis has provided a comprehensive review of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative to identify the features that promote multi-level governance (*chapter four*). Second, it has determined the extent to which the formulation and implementation of the YEP and the YEI at European-level and in the two case countries ‘matched’ the principles of multi-level governance (*chapters four, five and six*). A key element within this has been to examine the roles and responsibilities of the different of territorial actors; consider the existence and operation of areas of negotiation and bargaining between national and regional actors; and assess the capacities of different subnational actors to exploit nationally-created opportunities and /or develop policy from the bottom-up (Crespy, Heraud et al. 2007, p. 1071). Third, the thesis has identified a series of factors that are serving to facilitate or impede instances of multi-level governance around the YEP and the YEI at the European-level and in England and France (*chapters four, five, six and seven*). Finally, the thesis has sought to categorise the degree to which multi-level governance characterises the design and the delivery of the YEP and the YEI at the European-level and in the two countries, with reference to Perry’s (2007) minimalist—maximalist spectrum (*chapters four, five, and six*).

Chapter three described the ‘paired comparison’ case study approach (Tarrow 2010, Yin 2008) adopted by the thesis and discussed the data collection methods employed. The chapter justified the case study approach on the basis of its ability to provide a highly detailed empirical account of complex ‘real-life’ phenomena, which in turn permits the identification of key relationships and variables ‘on the ground’ (Eisenhardt 1989, Schramm 1971, 1971, Lijphart 1975). The empirical data was principally gathered through a series of 35 semi-structured interviews with strategically-important policy-makers and opinion-formers located in Brussels, London, Paris and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise

Partnership area and in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. In order to overcome the restrictions of a relatively small number of interviews, scrupulous care was taken to speak to those individuals who had extensive first-hand knowledge of the formulation and implementation of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative. Interview data was cross-referenced and supported with a systematic and detailed analysis of documentary evidence (see chapter 3 for further details) in order to ensure its validity and accuracy.

Part II of the thesis comprised the three empirical case study chapters. Chapter four considered the way in which the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative were developed and negotiated at the European-level. The chapter found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the member states have dominated the EU policy-making process around the YEP and the YEI, in spite of the active involvement of the European Commission and, to a lesser extent, the European Parliament. The central role played by the member states can be chiefly explained by primacy given to national state-executives by the EU policy-making process itself in order to foster a sense of ‘national ownership’ so as to encourage domestic change; and by clearly discernible capacity constraints within the European Commission that make sustained and intensive dialogue with subnational and non-state actors physically impossible. However, it must be stressed that the dominance of the member states *has not* translated into their monopoly over the policy-making process. Indeed, in line with the findings of previous MLG scholarship, collective decision-making at EU-level has led to a loss of control on the part of individual state-executives (Marks, Hooghe et al. 1996). This was most apparent in the case of the UK, where the UK government was forced to revise its official position with regard to the Youth Guarantee (a core element of the YEP) in light of significant pressure from both the European Commission and other member states (see further chapter 4). Indeed, three factors have severely restricted member states’ control over the content and strategic direction of EU youth employment policy. These are namely: 1) the

presence of a well-developed EU youth employment policy ‘vision’ on the part of the European Commission and the use of collective decision-making mechanisms (as seen above); 2) the insertion of an explicit demand for multi-level governance within the YEP and the YEI, which subsequently legitimises subnational and non-state ‘voices’; and 3) the inclusion of clear financial conditions attached to EU funding, which necessitates multi-level governance. These factors not only limit member states’ room for manoeuvre at the European-level, but, as seen in the case country chapters, have acted as an endorsement for the mobilisation of subnational and non-state actors for greater decision-making authority within the domestic sphere.

Chapter five discussed the domestic drafting and implementation of the YEP and the YEI in England, with a focus on the experience of the subnational territory of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. The chapter found minimal signs of a maximalist variety of multi-level governance, with instead a strong degree of centralisation around the YEP and the YEI. The concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of central government has been driven chiefly by the by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP), the domestic actor primarily responsible for EU youth employment policy and funding in England<sup>188</sup>. The manifestation of ‘deep’ instances of multi-level governance has been mediated by three factors in particular. First, as a consequence of a marked disconnect between EU and UK principles and preferences regarding (youth) employment policy, the ‘type’ of welfare state to be pursued and the state’s role within such as system. Second, the presence of existing, wide-reaching and expensive welfare reforms have engendered the reluctance on the part of the UK government to engage in further structural transformation in line with the Youth Guarantee and the YEI. Third, as a result of fears on the part of the DWP over the ability of subnational actors to manage EU funding in line with the European

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<sup>188</sup> The DWP is also responsible for the United Kingdom’s national position on EU youth employment policy.

Commission's strict audit procedures, as well as concerns over the fragmentation of employment programmes and services.

However, in its detailed investigation of the delivery of the YEP and the YEI in England, the thesis revealed that this is not a simple tale of central government monopoly. Instead, the chapter uncovered a complicated and inter-linked set of seven factors, which have considerably limited the ability of central government to fully dictate the direction of EU youth employment policy and to maintain a wholly centralised institutional structure for its implementation. These were namely: 1) the presence of an explicit demand within EU youth employment policy for multi-level governance; 2) the availability of EU funding, access to which is, critically, dependent on meeting financial conditions that include partnership requirements; 3) a region's eligibility for funding, united with; 4) a scarcity of domestic funding opportunities; 5) the high saliency of youth unemployment on the local political agenda; 6) the existence of conflicting objectives within central government (centrifugal vs centralising tendencies); and 7) the presence of local policy entrepreneurs. These individual features have combined to create a political environment in which subnational mobilisation is both legitimised and indeed, strongly fostered. Most notably, the YEP and the YEI have opened up areas for subnational contestation and bargaining on the part of actors from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. The Youth Employment Initiative in particular has acted as a 'rallying banner' under which GBSLEP actors have mobilised to push for greater local control over EU *and* central government financial resources. In parallel, divergent views over the Youth Guarantee between UK central government and Labour-held Birmingham City Council, a key participant in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, have helped to create a disconnect between the 'centre' and the 'periphery'—which in turn have acted as an added impetus for subnational mobilisation in favour of further decentralisation and devolution.

Chapter six explored the case of France and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. The French experience contrasted with that of England in three main ways. First, politicians and policy actors across all the French territorial scales were strongly in favour of the Youth Employment Package, including the Youth Guarantee, and the Youth Employment Initiative. Significantly, youth unemployment was viewed by the French officials interviewed as a common *European* challenge, and EU involvement in the policy field was thus deemed to be appropriate, even necessary. This divergence in opinion between French officials and UK central government actors can be attributed to their opposing standpoints on the role of employment policy and the welfare state more broadly. The French welfare model coincides more closely with the EU ‘Social Europe’ model, which calls for a more active role of the State to support its citizens’ employment status (Anderson 2015)—whether by focussing on the individual’s personal circumstances and needs, or in terms of state intervention through structural reforms for a ‘fairer’ labour market. Second, the institutional arrangements in place around the domestic implementation of the YEP and the YEI in France were incredibly complex, both on paper and in their ‘real-life’ operationalisation. Indeed, employment policy as a whole in France is characterised by a multiplicity of actors, programmes and institutions, with overlapping, and conflicting, priorities and responsibilities, and exacerbated by a growing shortage of domestic funds. The ongoing implementation of an extensive territorial reorganisation adds further uncertainty to an already potent mix. Third, similar to England, there are limited signs of maximalist instances of multi-level governance: The institutional arrangements around the domestic formulation and implementation of the YEP and YEI are still heavily centralised. However, unlike in the UK, centralisation is driven predominantly by electoral considerations on the part of national politicians.

The absence of a major domestic policy or structural change in France in line with EU policy, practices and preferences as set out in the YEP and the YEI can be ascribed to: 1) the

ability, and indeed the inclination, of the French government, and French political leaders, to ultimately do what they want—in particular, French politicians have often wished to be seen by their voters as ‘makers’ of EU policy, and not as unquestioning ‘takers’ (Börzel 2002); 2) the roll-out of far-reaching territorial reforms, which have massively complicated the political environment in which the YEP and the YEI exist, limiting and hindering any appetite for further change; and finally, 3) the short-time frame allocated to spending YEI-money, which has drastically impeded the capacity of national and subnational policy actors to develop new, innovative and workable solutions to youth unemployment.

However, as with the UK, this is not a straight-forward account of a centrally-mandated monopoly over the domestic policy-making and implementation processes around the YEP and the YEI. Instead, there are clear signs that EU youth employment policy has in fact served to fuel and strengthen internal pressures to decentralise greater policy- and decision-making responsibilities over employment policy and economic development to the regional level—a process which had been at risk of stalling due to central government’s antipathy to the loss of more power. Indeed, the NPdC regional council’s partial competence over the YEI and YEI, and full competence regarding regional economic development and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (see chapter four) was being used by regional actors as a concerted strategy to provide evidence to support future demands for greater regional power. Linked to this, regional actors—both state and regional council—have banded together to foster a strong working regional partnership, primarily as a way of navigating the uncertainty and complexity engendered by the French system; but *also* as a way of distinguishing themselves from the ‘centre’. In this way, there are indicators of a gradual shift towards more institutionally-embedded manifestations of multi-level governance.



Part III comprised the thesis' two final chapters. Chapter eight presented a comparative discussion of the findings drawn from the three case study chapters, and reflected on their implications for our understanding of multi-level governance. The chapter established that while national state-executives dominate the formulation and implementation of EU youth employment policy both at the EU-level and in the domestic sphere, this *does not* translate into their total control over the policy processes. Instead, the making and delivery of the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative has been characterised by strong rival centralising and centrifugal pressures—which have in turn produced a complex policy environment in which multi-level governance is simultaneously constrained *and* encouraged. Acting as constraints to multi-level governance are:

- The time constraints linked to the spending of YEI funds ('front-loading of funding'), which act as a break to policy development and changes to working practices (*external*);
- The need for national 'ownership' of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans, which prioritises central government involvement over subnational participation (*external*);
- Capacity constraints within the European Commission (*external*);
- Youth employment policy's high degree of political saliency at the national level, which strongly encourages central control (*internal*);
- Conflicting objectives within central government over the location of decision-making authority, where the centralising department holds the 'purse strings' and thus has greater negotiating leverage over subnational actors (*internal*);

- The presence of complex domestic territorial reforms, which fosters a unreceptive environment for further change (*internal*);
- The presence of existing welfare policy reforms, in which further change is viewed with, at best, antipathy, and, at worst, open hostility (*internal*).

At the same time, the following centrifugal factors have pushed back against the above centralising forces to empower subnational actors to mobilise for greater policy competence and decision-making powers:

- Youth employment policy's high degree of political saliency among regional and local actors strongly supports, and increases, the likelihood of their mobilisation to counter any perceived negative effects from central government activities (*internal*);
- The scarcity of domestic funds forces subnational actors to locate and access alternative sources of financial support for key programmes (*internal*);
- A region's eligibility for EU funding at a time of limited domestic funds, serves to draw the attention of subnational actors to the EU-level and to take action to access the financial support available—including by confronting central government (*external*);
- Conditions attached to EU funding that emphasise multi-level governance and partnership (financial conditionality) places pressure on domestic policy, institutions and actors to conform to EU policies, practices and preferences (*external*);

- The presence of key subnational policy entrepreneurs to plan, muster, coordinate and launch effective subnational activities to lobby for greater decision-making authority (*internal*);
- Conflicting objectives within central government over the location of decision-making authority opens up ‘space’ for subnational contestation and negotiation (*internal*).

This thesis has demonstrated that EU youth employment policy-making cannot be understood solely in relation to the actions of member states’ central governments; and centralised states cannot be treated as fixed and identical ‘black boxes’. Analysis requires the multi-scalar and multi-actor approach put forward by multi-level governance—and bolstered by the mediating factors drawn from the literature on Europeanization.

### 3. Theoretical implications of the research: the strengths and limitations of the MLG and Europeanization approach

The following section explores the theoretical implications of the research, setting out the strengths and limitations of the MLG and Europeanization approach (see table 8.1). As part of this, it highlights areas that would benefit from further development.

**Table 8.1: Strengths and limitations of MLG and Europeanization**

	<b>MLG</b>	<b>Europeanization</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Focus on three analytical boundaries (domestic-international; centre-periphery; state-society)</li> <li>&gt; Actor-centred approach</li> <li>&gt; Territorial dimension</li> <li>&gt; Emphasis on implications of web of interdependencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Focus on the effects of EU policies, practices and preferences on the domestic sphere</li> <li>&gt; Identification of mechanisms of Europeanization</li> <li>&gt; Provision of six broad categories of mediating factors</li> </ul>
<b>Limitations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Lack of mediating factors</li> <li>&gt; Ambiguity around power</li> <li>&gt; Absence of critical interpretations</li> <li>&gt; Potential for normative bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Difficulties in modelling for causality</li> <li>&gt; Lack of specific mediating factors</li> <li>&gt; Potential for normative bias</li> <li>&gt; Absence of critical interpretations</li> </ul>
<b>Spaces for further development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Theoretical clarification: ‘instances’ of MLG</li> <li>&gt; Empirical research: further identification of specific mediating factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Empirical research: further identification of specific mediating factors</li> <li>&gt; In the case of the UK: de-Europeanization following Brexit?</li> </ul>

### **3.1. Multi-level governance**

#### ***Strengths of the approach***

The chief strength of MLG lies in its ability to map and explain the development of policy arrangements and forms of political mobilisation, which are subtly altering the power dynamics along three traditional state ‘boundaries’: notably, between the domestic sphere and the international sphere; between the centre and the periphery; and between the state and society (Piattoni 2010). In this way, it is able to shed important light on how authoritative governance is enacted in the European Union and where decision-making authority rests. Moreover, by adopting an actor-centred approach (Marks 1996a), MLG enables a disaggregated analysis of the main players in the policy-making environment that, in turn, allows for a deeper understanding of the factors that influence particular choices and patterns of behaviour. This holds equally true for MLG’s multi-scalar approach to understanding decision-making.

Ultimately, MLG draws our attention to the web of interdependencies in which contemporary state-executives find themselves. Binary, static state-centric theories visions of international, EU or domestic policy-making are not enough to fully elucidate the complex nature of the interests and actions of different actors at different territorial scales. To focus on one territorial scale or on the actions of national state-executives is to blind oneself to the complicated realities of present-time politics and policy-making.

### *Limitations of the approach*

This thesis has highlighted the continuing utility of a multi-level governance analytical framework for capturing and explaining policy-making dynamics in the European Union. However, it must be recognised that there are limitations to this approach. In particular, MLG as currently conceptualised, [1] lacks robust explanation of the specific factors that mediate occurrences of multi-level governance in the field, [2] often displays ambiguity around the nature of ‘power’, [3] relatedly, does not take into account critical interpretations of domestic politics and international relations, and [4] frequently contains implicit normative dimensions.

First, while MLG literature is clear on the reasons why decision-making authority may be transferred (willingly or unwillingly) upwards to the supranational scale, downwards to the subnational scale or outwards to non-state actors (see Chapter 2), there is less clarity around the specific factors that influence the manifestation of instances of multi-level governance. Better understanding these factors allows for a more nuanced interpretation of MLG dynamics, which will in turn feed into a more robust theoretical approach. This thesis has made a first step in this direction, but there is still plenty of work to be done. Section four below sets out areas for further research on this topic.

Second, when studying multi-level governance in practice, it is important to remain conscious of the distinction between participation, influence and power/authority (Piattoni 2010, Perry 2007, Jeffery 2000). There is a risk that scholars may overstate the autonomy of subnational actors (Jeffery 2000). We should not allow our potential research bias to blind us to the realities of the continuing role played by the central state within the policy process. Indeed, earlier claims that the state was being ‘hollowed out’ or even in the process of disappearing completely have been strongly criticised (Jessop 2014).

Third, multi-level governance does not, by itself, offer a critical interpretation of the phenomena under observation. In particular, it ignores the existence of deeper structures of ‘power’ that may be inhibiting the development of fully participatory models of policy-making, or that have served to create, and maintain, inequality among citizens, which has a direct impact on youth unemployment outcomes.

Finally, no theory is ‘value neutral’. Certain observers have argued that multi-level governance scholarship can acquire a normative dimension (Alcantara, Broschek et al. 2016). Multi-level governance’s emphasis on a pluralistic mode of policy-making and implementation does not, and should not, equate to the ‘right’ or ‘good’ way of doing things: It is simply *a* mode of governance. In certain policy areas, MLG may not be the most optimal approach, or even desirable. Here, it may be useful, as this thesis has done, to follow Alcantara, Broschek et al.’s (ibid) ‘*instances*’ of multi-level governance rather than whole-scale *systems* of multi-level governance (as outlined earlier in Chapter 2). Nonetheless, even when conceived as ‘instances’ there are deeper questions that must be answered, namely, which actors are allowed, or enabled, to participate in MLG modes of policy-making, and which ‘voices’ are ignored? This links back to the absence of critical interpretations within mainstream MLG literature.

### **3.2. Europeanization**

#### ***Strengths of the approach***

As an approach, Europeanization is explicitly focussed on the *effects* of EU policies, practices and preferences on the domestic sphere—and visa versa. In this way, it allows us to chart the degree to which policies, practices and preferences on the domestic sphere change (or not), as well as enabling us to identify the precise mechanisms through which change or resistance to change takes place (*mechanisms of Europeanization*), which would not be possible to do in such depth by using other theoretical approaches. Moreover, the inclusion of the six broad categories of mediating factors helps researchers to identify and explain *why* change does or does not happen. Europeanization thus provides a dynamic and nuanced explanation of the processes of adaption or non-adaption in the European Union, which in turn deepens our understanding of the European policy process, and especially its enactment across territorial scales.

#### ***Limitations of the approach***

As with multi-level governance, it is important to be aware of the limits of Europeanization in analysing the impact of EU policies, practices and preferences on the domestic arena—and vice versa. There are four limitations in particular that have a bearing on this, and similar, research: Namely, [1] the difficulties associated with modelling for causality, [2] the broad nature of the current mediating factors set out in the ‘three-step approach’, [3] the potential for normative bias, and [4] the absence of critical interpretations.

First, although Bache (2008, pp. 18-19) and Saurugger (2005, 2008) have taken steps to strengthen Europeanization’s ability to model for complex and non-complex causality, in practice this remains difficult to achieve with complete accuracy. However, given that much of Europeanization (and MLG) scholarship is an exercise in qualitative research, which



involves a large degree of subjective interpretation on the part of the researcher, perhaps it is enough to remain continuously aware of the issue of causality—and to ensure the triangulation of data sources so as to be able to pinpoint where certain activities might be the result of non-EU related phenomena, or, more likely, to be the result of parallel EU and non-EU factors.

Second, as indicated earlier in chapter two, although Europeanization usefully provides six broad categories of factors that mediate the effect of EU and domestic policies, practices and preferences, they do not indicate *specific* circumstances or components of the policy process that support or hinder processes of Europeanization. This is understandable from a conceptual point of view: broad categories provide researchers with a clear framework through which to organise their work and analysis, and allow for generalizable inferences to be drawn. However, there is a danger that by only using, and then disseminating knowledge on the basis of these broad categories, researchers may miss important nuances within each group. By consistently identifying the precise aspects within the policy environment that support or hinder Europeanization and occurrences of multi-level governance, future research will be able to build a richer empirical picture of the complex dynamics at play, which will in turn feed into stronger academic conceptualisations. In addition, a narrower focus on specific mediating factors allows for complex and non-complex casualty to be more easily diagnosed. Here again, this thesis represents an important first step in this direction and section four, below, identifies areas for further exploration. In particular, there are important questions around how Europeanization effects will alter with the forthcoming withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU. It will be very interesting to see whether the mediating factors identified in the Europeanization literature still hold fast, disappear, or tighten.

Third, similar to multi-level governance, by itself, the Europeanization literature does not account for the deeper, underlying economic, social and political structures that influence

the outcomes of European and domestic policies, practices and preferences—and which engender high levels of inequality between citizens. Fourth, it is likewise important to guard against any potential for normative bias. There is occasionally a tendency within the Europeanization (and MLG) literature to view the effect of European policies, practices and preferences on the domestic environment (and vice versa) as something to be desired—even if only to prove the assumptions made within the literature. This runs the risk of an implicit normative bias. Separate research would be needed to ascertain the *consequences* of EU domestic/effects—and to judge whether these are welcome or not.

It should be noted that many of the limitations listed above are not exclusive to multi-level governance and Europeanization; but apply equally to other theories and concepts of European integration. Nonetheless, action should be taken to minimise them. In some cases, such as the issue of normative bias, it may simply be sufficient that the researcher recognise the danger and guard against it, making sure to check for any bias at each step of their research—or to be open that their research contains a normative dimension. Other limitations will benefit from greater conceptual clarification within MLG scholarship, and notably around the issue of power-participation-influence, as well as a greater emphasis on *instances* of multi-level governance rather than whole systems. The issue of critical interpretation, however, is likely to need a separate field of theoretical enquiry, which would benefit from insights drawn from critical strands of political science scholarship. Such work would also feed into the further development of models of complex and non-complex causality. Finally, identifying, explaining and classifying (additional) specific mediating factors will require further empirical research. It is to this that the thesis now turns.

#### 4. Scope for further research

The governance of EU youth unemployment policy is worthy of further research, especially with regard to the identification of the specific factors that mediate the occurrence of instances of multi-level governance. As a first step, this research project could be extended to take into account more cases. On this point there are four areas of interest:

- a) More subnational cases in England and France to determine whether the extent to which the experiences of GBSLEP and NPdC are replicable across the national territory;
- b) Consider the experience of the UK's Devolved Administrations;
- c) More centralised country cases. In particular, it would be interesting to investigate whether the mediating factors present in the England and France hold true for some of the smaller or medium-sized, strongly centralised EU member states—which are also affected by troubling levels of youth unemployment, such as Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia;
- d) Broaden the research's focus to include all state types present in the EU;
- e) Return to England and France, and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, once the n+3 YEI funding condition has elapsed (i.e. 2018-2020) in order to bring in a longitudinal dimension and compare the situation over time.

On a more long-term note, it will be of great interest to explore how the UK's forthcoming withdrawal from the EU will affect its relationship with the Union, and particularly the potential impact on UK domestic policies, practices and preferences. It is possible that, 'Brexit' may in fact require greater levels of domestic adaptation than those currently seen in

order for the UK to be able to meet the conditions attached to its access to the EU's single market, including, potentially, some of its regional/structural funding programmes. However, this is likely to be a research project for much further in the future given that the full effects of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union will not manifest for many years to come.

## **5. Lessons for policy**

The portrait painted in this thesis is one of contestation, rivalry, and conflicting interests. What does this messy situation mean for youth employment policy in the EU at a time when something needs to be done? How can we ensure that high levels of youth unemployment do not result in a forsaken generation of young people? There are no easy answers or simple solutions. However, this thesis can offer five lessons for the policy world:

**Deliver what you promise:** either in terms of concrete policy outcomes or in terms of the greater devolution of powers and responsibilities to the subnational level. Broken promises in both England and France have created a toxic political environment, characterised by mutual distrust and suspicion that hinders effective policy action.

**Keep things simple:** institutional arrangements and youth employment policy itself needs to be simplified. There are too many over-lapping programmes and actors, risking duplication and the waste of precious financial resources, as well as providing a fertile breeding ground for institutional and actor rivalry.

**Think long-term and horizontally:** tackling youth unemployment is not a simple challenge. It requires a radical change in current policy and most likely, major structural transformation that goes beyond just ‘employment’ and into areas like education, health, welfare, housing and economic development. Most importantly, tackling youth unemployment effectively requires a long-term perspective that goes beyond immediate political returns. Effective solutions will take *time* to design, deliver, revise and embed.

**Maintain and (if possible) boost strategic investment:** here, investment needs to take into account of three things in particular: 1) ensure that the amount of money spent per individual can actually make a difference to their situation; 2) ensure that the money spent ties into a coherent and holistic over-arching strategy; and 3) recruit the necessary human resources to run programmes effectively and compassionately, not only in terms of appropriate numbers to be able to do the job needed, but also, critically, in terms of the *quality* of staff.

**Give subnational actors the capacity and the space to develop and deliver locally-tailored solutions.** The specific nature of the youth employment challenge varies significantly from area to area, depending on, amongst others, its geographic location, economic activity and demographic characteristics (Lee, Sissons et al. 2012). For example, rural areas will face different challenges to urban conurbations; other territories may have a higher proportion of young people from ethnic minorities, who face specific barriers to the labour market. As a result, a one-size-fits-all approach to youth unemployment is unlikely to be effective. Programmes need to take into account local needs and specificities (Jackson, Rowe 2012).

## **6. A final word**

This thesis has illustrated the complex and highly-fragmented nature of policy-making and decision-making authority around European youth employment policy. The combined conceptual approach of multi-level governance and Europeanization has enabled the research to capture the policy arrangements and actor behaviours that point to shifting power dynamics along the domestic-international, centre-periphery, and state-society boundaries. Shifts that are in turn challenging the way we think of the ‘nation-state’ as traditionally conceived (Piattoni 2010). The United Kingdom leaving the European Union may herald a new political state of affairs. However, one of the few certainties in an uncertain situation is that withdrawal will not alter the fact that the nation-state will continue to operate in a complex web of interdependencies. Its actions will continue to be influenced and constrained by supranational (international), subnational and non-state actors, institutions and organisations. Moreover, pressure for multi-scalar governing is unlikely to disappear. At the global level, the rise in challenges that require multi-lateral solutions will increasingly compel nation-states to cooperate. In parallel, recent waves of popular dissatisfaction are pushing state-executives to focus inwards, and especially on the problems faced by specific regions, localities and groups of individuals. Ultimately, most people live and work in relatively small geographic areas and regional/local challenges are therefore the ones that they are likely to experience most acutely—and for which they will demand solutions. Multi-level governance will consequently continue to provide an invaluable tool for future analyses.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Anonymised list of interview participants

Interview number	Anonymised interviewee details	Location and date of interview
1	Member of the European Parliament for the West Midlands	Solihull, 14 December 2013
2	Member of the European Parliament for the West Midlands	Brussels, 21 January 2014
3	Senior official Unit C2: Sectorial Employment Challenges, Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 23 January 2014
4	Official Unit C2: Sectorial Employment Challenges, Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 23 January 2014
5	Senior official Unit C1: European Employment Strategy and Governance DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 23 January 2014
6	Senior official Unit E1: ESF Policy and Legislation DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 24 January 2014
7	Member of the Commissioner's Cabinet DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 24 January 2014



8	Official Unit F3: UK, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 27 January 2014
9	Senior official Unit E2: France, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission	Brussels, 27 January 2014
10	Policy Officer European Trade Union Congress (ETUC)	Brussels, 28 January 2014
11	Administrator Unit E2: Subsidiarity Network, Europe 2020 Platform, Covenant of Mayors, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Committee of the Regions	Brussels, 29 January 2014
12	Administrator Unit C3: Economic and Social Policy commission secretariat Committee of the Regions	Brussels, 29 January 2014
13	Policy advisor BUSINESSEUROPE	Brussels, 30 January 2014
14	Advisor European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME)	Brussels, 30 January 2014
15	Senior officer Economy Directorate Birmingham City Council	Birmingham, 24 March 2014
16	Senior officer European & International Affairs Division Birmingham City Council	Birmingham, 27 March 2014

17	Board Director (Business sector) Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP	Telephone interview, 4 April 2014
18	Senior official European Social Fund Division Department for Work and Pensions	Telephone interview, 7 April 2014
19	Official Labour Market Interventions Strategy Division Department of Work and Pensions	Telephone interview, 7 April and 17 September 2014
20	Senior official Birmingham & Solihull District Office Department of Work and Pensions	Birmingham, 14 May 2014
21	Senior officer Economic Development Division Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	Solihull, 14 May 2014
22	Senior officer Economy Directorate Birmingham City Council	Birmingham, 20 May 2014
23	Official Cities & Local Growth Unit Cabinet Office	London, 21 May 2014
24	Senior official La Délégation générale à l'emploi et à la formation professionnelle (DGEFP) Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et du Dialogue social	Paris, 19 June 2014
25	Senior officer Direction Europe Conseil régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais	Lille, 24 June 2014
26	Senior officer Direction Générale Développement Territorial Conseil général du NORD (Département du Nord)	Lille, 24 June 2014

27	Senior officer Direction Générale Développement Territorial Conseil général du NORD (Département du Nord)	Lille, 24 June 2014
28	Officer Direction Générale Développement Territorial Conseil général du NORD (Département du Nord)	Lille, 24 June 2014
29	Senior officer Direction eurométropole et partenariats européens Métropole Européenne de Lille (formerly Lille Métropole)	Lille, 24 June 2014
30	Officer Secrétariat Général pour les Affaires Régionales du Nord-Pas de Calais [SGAR] Préfet de la Région Nord-Pas-de-Calais	Lille, 25 June 2014
31	Senior officer Secrétariat Général pour les Affaires Régionales du Nord-Pas de Calais [SGAR] Préfet de la Région Nord-Pas-de-Calais	Lille, 25 June 2014
32	Senior officer Direction de l'Action Economique (DAE) Conseil régional Nord-Pas de Calais	Lille, 26 June 2014
33	Officer Service Marché du Travail et Insertion Professionnelle, Pôle Entreprises, Emploi, Economie Directe Nord-Pas-de-Calais [Direction régionale des entreprises, de la concurrence, de la consommation, du travail et de l'emploi]	Lille, 26 June 2014
34	Senior official EU and International Employment and Social Policy Division Department of Work and Pensions	Telephone interview, 23 September 2014

35	Director Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	London, 4 April 2014
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## Appendix 2: Interview questions – EU-level

1.	<b>Opening – background information</b>
	<p><b>Name</b>  <b>Job title</b>  <b>Role &amp; responsibilities</b></p> <p><i>My research looks at how policy makers at European, national and regional-local levels of governance work together / interact with one another around the design and implementation of the <b>Youth Employment Package</b> (Youth Guarantee   Alliance for Apprenticeships   Quality Framework on Traineeships) and the <b>Youth Employment Initiative</b> (€6 bn funding stream)...</i></p>
2.	<b>To what extent and how have policy-makers/actors at the national and regional-local levels been involved in the design (and implementation) of the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)?</b>
	<p><i>Are there specific coordination channels / activities?  (i.e. meetings / committees / working groups...) (annual cycle? Or ad-hoc?)</i></p> <p><i>Who is involved?  To what extent are representatives from the national-level involved? (Just EMCO? Or also Informal channels?)  To what extent are representatives from the UK + French regional-level involved?</i></p> <p><i>Is there a monitoring / feedback process?</i></p>
3.	<b>What role have officials from the UK and France played in the process?</b>
	<p><i>How have UK and French Members responded to the Youth Guarantee, YEP, and YEI?</i></p> <p><i>Obstacles / tensions?      Engaged partners?</i></p> <p><i><u>Do you get the sense that actors at the regional-local level are being involved in the design and implementation of the Youth Guarantees?</u></i></p>
4.	<b>Thinking specifically about the UK and FRANCE...  How would you characterise the relationships between the different levels?</b>
	<p><i>Specifically, how easy is the relationship between:</i></p> <p><i><u>European—national levels</u></i></p> <p><i><u>National—regional-local levels</u></i></p> <p><i><u>European—regional-local levels</u></i></p> <p><i>Engaged partnership? Tensions? Obstacles? What makes it easy/difficult?</i></p>

	<i>Thinking more generally about the idea that governance in the EU takes place across multiple territorial levels (i.e. European—national—regional-local)...</i>
<b>4.</b>	<b>What has been your experience of interaction / coordination across the different levels? Does it work?</b>
	<p><i>To what extent would you say that there is good connectivity / coordination between the European-national-regional-local levels? i.e. extent to which there is an easy flow of information up and down the levels?</i></p> <p><i>What aspects work well? EXAMPLES</i></p> <p><i>What doesn't work so well? (obstacles / pinch-points / conflicts) EXAMPLES</i></p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Do you think that coordination / interaction by policy-makers across the different territorial levels has an <u>impact</u> on policy outcomes on the ground? (i.e. interaction across European—national—regional/local levels)</b>
	<i>What kind of impact? Positive / negative? (i.e. does it make a difference?) Examples?</i>
<b>6.</b>	<b>How can coordination / interaction across the different levels be improved?</b>
	<p><i>Examples?</i></p> <p><i>Is it possible?</i></p> <p><i>What would need to be in place for the improvements to happen?</i></p>

### Appendix 3: Interview questions – UK national level

1.	<p><b>Opening – background information</b></p> <p><i>My research looks at how policy makers at European, national and regional-local levels of governance work together / interact with one another around the design and implementation of the EU's <b>Youth Employment Package</b> (Youth Guarantee   Alliance for Apprenticeships   Quality Framework on Traineeships) and the <b>Youth Employment Initiative</b> (€6 bn funding stream)...</i></p> <p><b>Name</b>  <b>Job title</b>  <b>Role &amp; responsibilities</b></p>
2.	<p><b>To what extent are you aware of EU policy on youth employment?</b></p> <p><i>(such as the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative?)</i></p>
	<p><i>If aware, how does it impact on your work / thinking?</i></p> <p><i>What has been the response at the regional-local level to the Youth Guarantee, YEP, and YEI?</i></p> <p><i>If not aware, is there any particular reason for this?</i></p>
3.	<p><b>How have you been involved in the design and implementation of the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and/or the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)?</b></p>
	<p><i>Part of a nationally-set strategy?</i></p> <p><i>Specific consultation / coordination activities? Who has been involved?</i></p> <p><i>Easy access or obstacles to participation?</i></p>
4.	<p><b>What role has the regional-local level in the UK played in the design and the delivery of (policy) measures linked to the YEP / YEI?</b></p>
	<p><i>Specific consultation / coordination activities?</i></p> <p><i>How has the regional-local level responded to the Youth Guarantee, YEP, and YEI?</i></p> <p><i>Obstacles to participation? Engaged partners?</i></p>

5.	<p><b>What channels are available to you to influence youth employment policies at EU-level?</b></p> <p>at <u>EU</u>-level?</p> <p>at <u>UK national</u>-level?</p>
	<p><i>Are there specific coordination activities? (i.e. meetings / committees / working groups...) (Regular schedule? Or ad-hoc?) Who is involved?</i></p>
	<p><i>Thinking more generally about the EU and the idea that governance takes place across multiple territorial levels (i.e. European—national—regional-local)...</i></p>
6.	<p><b>From your general experience, how do you sense that interaction across the European—national—regional-local levels is playing out?</b></p>
	<p><i>To what extent would you say that there is good connectivity / coordination between the European-national-regional-local levels? i.e. extent to which there is an easy flow of information up and down the levels?</i></p> <p><i>Positive experience?                      Aspects that work well? EXAMPLES Tensions?                                      Obstacles?</i></p>
7.	<p><b>How would you characterise the relationships between the different territorial levels?</b></p>
	<p><i>Specifically, how easy is the relationship between:</i></p> <p><i><u>European—national</u> levels</i></p> <p><i><u>National—regional-local</u> levels</i></p> <p><i><u>European—regional-local</u> levels</i></p>
8.	<p><b>Do you think that coordination / interaction across the different territorial levels has an impact on the ground?</b></p>
	<p><i>Does interaction change the way policy-makers think / act?   does it change policy?</i></p> <p><i>In what way specifically? EXAMPLES</i></p> <p><i>For the better?</i></p>



<b>9.</b>	<b>In your opinion, how can coordination / interaction / engagement be improved?</b>
	<p><i>EXAMPLES?</i></p> <p><i>Is it possible?</i></p> <p><i>What would need to be in place for the improvements to happen? (i.e. specific resources)</i></p>

## Appendix 4: Interview questions – UK subnational level

1.	<p><b>Opening – background information</b></p> <p><i>My research looks at how policy makers at European, national and regional-local levels of governance work together / interact with one another around the design and implementation of the EU's <b>Youth Employment Package</b> (Youth Guarantee   Alliance for Apprenticeships   Quality Framework on Traineeships) and the <b>Youth Employment Initiative</b> (€6 bn funding stream)...</i></p> <p><b>Name</b>  <b>Job title</b>  <b>Role &amp; responsibilities</b></p>
2.	<p><b>To what extent are you aware of EU policy on youth employment?</b></p> <p><i>(such as the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Employment Initiative?)</i></p>
	<p><i>If not aware, is there any particular reason for this?</i></p> <p><i>If aware, how does it impact on your work / thinking?</i></p> <p><u><i>What has been the response at the regional-local level to the Youth Guarantee, YEP, and YEI?</i></u></p>
3.	<p><b>How has the regional-local level been involved in the design and implementation of the Youth Employment Package (YEP) and/or the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)?</b></p>
	<p><i>Part of a nationally-set strategy? Or opportunity to develop own local strategy?</i></p> <p><i>Specific consultation / coordination activities? Who has been involved?</i></p> <p><i>Easy access or obstacles to participation?</i></p>
4.	<p><b>What channels are available to you to influence EU youth employment policies...</b></p> <p><b>at <u>EU</u>-level?</b></p> <p><b>at <u>UK national</u>-level?</b></p>
	<p><i>Are there specific coordination or consultation channels or activities?</i>  <i>(i.e. meetings / committees / working groups...) (Regular schedule? Or ad-hoc?)</i></p> <p><i>Who is involved?</i></p>

	<i>Thinking more generally about the EU and the idea that governance takes place across multiple territorial levels (i.e. European—national—regional-local)...</i>
<b>5.</b>	<b>From your general experience, how do you sense that interaction across the European—national—regional-local levels is playing out?</b>
	<p><i>To what extent would you say that there is good connectivity / coordination between the European-national-regional-local levels? i.e. extent to which there is an easy flow of information up and down the levels?</i></p> <p><i>Positive experience?                      Aspects that work well? EXAMPLES</i> <i>Tensions?                                      Obstacles?</i></p>
<b>6.</b>	<b>How would you characterise the relationships between the different territorial levels?</b>
	<p><i>Specifically, how easy is the relationship between:</i> <i>European—national levels</i> <i>National—regional-local levels</i> <i>European—regional-local levels</i></p>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Do you think that coordination / interaction across the different territorial levels has an impact on the ground?</b>
	<p><i>Does interaction change the way policy-makers think / act?   does it change policy?</i></p> <p><i>In what way specifically? EXAMPLES</i></p> <p><i>For the better?</i></p>
<b>8.</b>	<b>In your opinion, how can coordination / interaction / engagement be improved?</b>
	<p><i>EXAMPLES?</i></p> <p><i>Is it possible?</i></p> <p><i>What would need to be in place for the improvements to happen? (i.e. specific resources)</i></p>

## Appendix 5: Interview questions – France national level

1.	<b>Informations générales</b>
	<p><i>Dans ma thèse j'examine la façon dans laquelle les acteurs politiques aux niveaux Européen, national, et régional/local interagissent autour de la planification et de la réalisation de la politique européenne concernant l'emploi des jeunes—en particulier, autour du «<b>Paquet emploi jeunes</b>» (la garantie pour la jeunesse   un cadre de qualité pour les stages   l'alliance européenne pour l'apprentissage) et de «<b>l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes</b>» (dotation de 6 milliards d'euros)...</i></p> <p><b>Nom :</b></p> <p><b>Intitulé du poste :</b></p> <p><b>Rôle &amp; responsabilités :</b></p>
2.	<b>Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous conscient de la politique européenne concernant l'emploi des jeunes?</b> <i>(notamment du «Paquet emploi jeunes» et de «l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes»)</i>
	<p><i>Si vous en êtes conscient, quelles en sont les conséquences pour votre travail ? A-t-elle affectée la politique française concernant l'emploi des jeunes?</i></p> <p><i>Si vous n'en êtes pas conscient, y-a-t-il des raisons particulières pour ce fait?</i></p> <p><i>Quelle a été la réaction des acteurs nationaux au «Paquet emploi jeunes» et de «l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes»?</i></p>
3.	<b>Dans quelle mesure avez-vous été impliqué dans la planification et la réalisation du «Paquet emploi jeunes» et de «l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes»?</b>
	<p><i>Est-ce une stratégie déterminée principalement au niveau national?</i></p> <p><i>Comment se déroule la planification et la réalisation de ces initiatives?</i></p> <p><i>Qui est impliqué?</i></p> <p><i>Y-a-t-il des activités de consultation et de coordination?</i></p> <p><i>Y-a-t-il eu des problèmes?</i></p>

4.	<b>Dans quelle mesure on été les niveaux régional et local impliqués dans la planification et la réalisation du «Paquet emploi jeunes» et de «l’Initiative pour l’emploi des jeunes»?</b>
	<p><i>Dans quelle mesure ont-ils été consultés?</i></p> <p><i>Quelle a été la réaction des acteurs régionaux-locaux au «Paquet emploi jeunes» et à «l’Initiative pour l’emploi des jeunes»?</i></p>
5.	<b>Quels moyens avez-vous à votre disposition pour influencer la politique européenne concernant l’emploi des jeunes?</b>
	<p><i>Les questions suivantes portent plus généralement sur l’idée que la gouvernance dans l’UE prend place à travers plusieurs niveaux (Européen—national—régional-local)...</i></p> <p><i>C’est- à-dire, la gouvernance à multi-niveaux...</i></p>
6.	<b><u>D’après votre expérience, comment se déroule l’interaction à travers les niveaux européen—national—régional-local?</u></b>
	<p><i>Dans quelle mesure diriez-vous qu’il y a une bonne connectivité / coordination entre ces niveaux?</i></p> <p><i>L’information circule-t-elle facilement entre ces niveaux?</i></p> <p><i>Est-ce une expérience positive? Y-a-t-il des aspects en particulier qui fonctionnent bien?</i></p> <p><i>Existe-t-il des obstacles à cette coordination ? Ou des tensions?</i></p>
7.	<b>Comment caractériseriez-vous les relations entre les différents niveaux territoriaux?</b>
	<p><i>Facile / difficile?</i></p> <p><i>Européen—national</i></p> <p><i>National—régional-local</i></p> <p><i>Européen— régional-local</i></p>

8.	<b><u>D'après votre expérience, la coordination à multi-niveaux a-t-elle un impact à la base?</u></b>
	<p><i>Si oui, de quelle manière? Est-ce pour le mieux?</i></p> <p><i>Si non, pourquoi pas?</i></p>
9.	<b>A votre avis, comment pourrait-on améliorer la coordination / l'interaction à multi-niveaux?</b>
	<p><i>Est-ce-possible? Est-ce-voulu?</i></p> <p><i>Qu'est-ce-qui devrait être en place pour que des améliorations se produisent? (c.-à-d. de quelles ressources a-t-on besoin?)</i></p>

## Appendix 6: Interview questions – France subnational level

1.	<b>Informations générales</b>
	<p><i>Dans ma thèse j'examine la façon dans laquelle les acteurs politiques aux niveaux Européen, national, et régional/local interagissent autour de la planification et de la réalisation de la politique européenne concernant l'emploi des jeunes—en particulier, autour du «<b>Paquet emploi jeunes</b>» (la garantie pour la jeunesse   un cadre de qualité pour les stages   l'alliance européenne pour l'apprentissage) et de «<b>l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes</b>» (dotation de 6 milliards d'euros)...</i></p> <p><b>Nom :</b></p> <p><b>Intitulé du poste :</b></p> <p><b>Rôle &amp; responsabilités :</b></p>
2.	<p><b>Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous conscient de la politique européenne concernant l'emploi des jeunes?</b></p> <p><i>(notamment du «Paquet emploi jeunes» et de «l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes»)</i></p>
	<p><i>Si vous en êtes conscient, quelles en sont les conséquences pour votre travail ? A-t-elle affectée votre politique concernant l'emploi des jeunes?</i></p> <p><i>Si vous n'en êtes pas conscient, y-a-t-il des raisons particulières pour ce fait?</i></p>
3.	<p><b><u>Dans quelle mesure avez-vous été impliqué dans la planification et la réalisation du «Paquet emploi jeunes» et de «l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes»?</u></b></p>
	<p><i>Avez-vous eu la possibilité de développer votre propre stratégie régionale/locale ?</i></p> <p><i>Ou est-ce une stratégie déterminée principalement au niveau national?</i></p> <p><i>Dans quelle mesure avez-vous été consulté?</i></p> <p><i>Comment se déroule la planification et la réalisation de ces initiatives?</i></p> <p><i>Qui est impliqué?</i></p> <p><i>Y-a-t-il des activités de consultation et de coordination?</i></p> <p><i>Y-a-t-il eu des problèmes?</i></p>

	<i>Quelle a été la réaction des acteurs régionaux-locaux au «Paquet emploi jeunes» et à «l'Initiative pour l'emploi des jeunes»?</i>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Quels moyens avez-vous à votre disposition pour influencer la politique européenne concernant l'emploi des jeunes?</b>
	<i>Les questions suivantes portent plus généralement sur l'idée que la gouvernance dans l'UE prend place à travers plusieurs niveaux (Européen—national—régional-local)... C'est-à-dire, la gouvernance à multi-niveaux...</i>
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>D'après votre expérience, comment se déroule l'interaction à travers les niveaux européen—national—régional-local?</u></b>
	<i>Dans quelle mesure diriez-vous qu'il y a une bonne connectivité / coordination entre ces niveaux?</i>  <i>L'information circule-t-elle facilement entre ces niveaux?</i>  <i>Est-ce une expérience positive? Y-a-t-il des aspects en particulier qui fonctionnent bien?</i>  <i>Existe-t-il des obstacles à cette coordination? Ou des tensions?</i>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Comment caractérisez-vous les relations entre les différents niveaux territoriaux?</b>
	<i>Facile / difficile?</i>  <i>Européen—national</i> <i>National—régional-local</i> <i>Européen— régional-local</i>



7.	<b><u>D'après votre expérience, la coordination à multi-niveaux a-t-elle un impact à la base?</u></b>
	<p><i>Si oui, de quelle manière? Est-ce pour le mieux?</i></p> <p><i>Si non, pourquoi pas?</i></p>
8.	<b>A votre avis, comment pourrait-on améliorer la coordination / l'interaction à multi-niveaux?</b>
	<p><i>Est-ce-possible? Est-ce-voulu?</i></p> <p><i>Qu'est-ce-qui devrait être en place pour que des améliorations se produisent?</i>  <i>(c.-à-d. de quelles ressources a-t-on besoin?)</i></p>

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