

Political Science: Multi-layered Governance in Europe and beyond (MLG)

Start programme: 2001

Programme leader: Prof.dr. Henk Overbeek

Bringing together researchers from various sub-disciplinary backgrounds – Comparative Politics and International Relations in particular – the central idea of the research programme is that politics cannot be studied purely at a national or international level anymore. Instead, national and international politics and policies have become increasingly intertwined and form systems of multi-layered or multi-level governance. While the original concept of multi-level governance was focused on the dispersion of authoritative decision making across multiple territorial levels, we have chosen the somewhat broader notion of multi-layered governance that does away with the idea of clearly demarcated territorial layers and also takes non-territorial actors into account.

The concept of multi-layered governance expands and radicalizes trends that were already present within International Relations and Comparative Politics. In both sub-disciplines the assumption that the unitary state operates as an effective and exclusive gatekeeper between the domestic and the international realm has been challenged. Both have come to realize that political processes at one level (regional, domestic or international) can only be understood if one takes into account the other levels. At the same time, we recognize that publicly binding decisions are not the product of state action alone, but that other, non- state actors can play a defining role. This is expressed by replacing the concept of ‘government’ with the more encompassing concept of ‘governance’.

In essence, then, the central thrust of the concept of multi-layered governance is that state-centric theories of European integration, policy-making within the EU and global governance fail to appreciate that national governments are no longer the ultimate powers in control and that supranational institutions, to which competences have been delegated, no longer always or automatically function in the interest of national governments. Based on the theoretical integration of Comparative Politics and International Relations, the programme’s mission is to understand better the causes and consequences of the declining monopoly of power and policy-making capacity of national governments in an era of Europeanization and globalization.

The growing complexity of policy making that goes hand in hand with the emergence of multi-layered governance in Europe raises three main questions which are combined in our overarching research question:

How does the emerging system of multi-layered governance in the “New Europe” operate in terms of its

- I. *Origins and Development: Which intra- and transnational political processes have led to the emergence of a multi-layered polity and how do they affect its development?*
- II. *Conceptualisation and Approach: Which are the defining features of this system of governance and how do these interrelate?*
- III. *Effects and Substance: What impact does the system of multi-layered governance have on intra- and transnational political processes with respect to public policy-making, democratic accountability, responsiveness and performance?*