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Research Article

## Moving from EU-centrism: Lessons from the Polycrisis for EU studies and Global South Regionalism

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## Abstract

This article reflects on the responses to global crises in Global South regionalisms and the EU, emphasising the need for disrupting research agendas, strengthening disciplinary and theoretical diversity accounts in the EU and comparative regionalism studies in general. The article collects trends and challenges highlighted by the literature on EU and regionalism in Global South from 2008 onwards, aiming to address as main research question: how EU studies and Global South scholarship developed after multiple global crises to contribute to the theorisation renewal and the disruption of research agendas? Stemming from the concept of global polycrisis, two relevant and multidimensional crises are analysed: the 2008 global financial crisis and the migration influxes derived from humanitarian crises. By studying both the EU and Global South experiences, we aim to contribute to move beyond the Eurocentric foundations of the regionalism studies, emphasising that knowledge production needs to be more empirically sensitive to context and social reality.

## Keywords

Comparative regionalism; EU studies; Global South; Polycrisis; Eurocentrism; Global financial crisis; Migration crisis

Crises open windows of opportunity for policy and institutional change in regional integration, and they may also trigger the rethinking of the epistemology of EU Studies (EUS) and Global South (GS) Regionalisms. This article aims to assess to what extent the regional responses to global polycrisis faced by the European Union (EU) and other regional organisations in the Global South have impacted the development of diversified theoretical and disciplinary approaches to the study of EU and comparative regionalism and allowed to move for a more disrupting research agenda, addressing the multi and interdisciplinarity growing trends in the social sciences. Definitions in literature are broad and sometimes overlap or contrast, but consensual definitions consider multi and interdisciplinary methods the most adequate to approach complex problems/issues (Newell 2001). By multidisciplinary, we mean the study of an issue from the perspective of two or more disciplines, of which insights are separately conceived, without any integration of knowledge. On the other hand, in interdisciplinary studies disciplinary insights are integrated, research is conducted between disciplines, and knowledge transcends the boundaries of each one, forming a new integrated insight (Menken and Keestra 2016: 31-49; Repko, Szostak and Buchberger 2017: 93-115). We contend the EU and regionalisms in general as complex phenomena that can only be scientifically addressed by multi and interdisciplinarity.

To answer the question of how scholarship developed after global polycrisis contributed to the theorisation and the disruption of regionalism studies, we analyse the reflections brought about by literature on two major crises in European and Global South regions - the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migration/humanitarian crisis. With this, we intend to reflect upon the improvement of EU studies and Comparative Regionalism research agendas.

The article is organised as follows: in the first two sections, we go over the mainstream literature of EUS and stress its main limitations and the *centrisms* embedded in the knowledge production practices. In addition, we highlight some of their main theoretical and conceptual contributions of comparative regionalism to disrupt this research agenda. In the third section, we provide an analytical panorama of the scientific literature trends in result of those crises. In the fourth section, we reflect on whether the regionalist studies from both Global North and South regionalisms have surpassed diagnosed constraints and some *centrisms* inherent to mainstream EUS towards the study of global regionalism.

Our empirical study relies on a qualitative analysis of selected articles published in scientific journals and books in the area. In the case of EUS, top ranking journals of the area, according to Jensen and Kristensen (2013) criteria, are analysed, in the period from 2008 to 2021, approaching the two identified crises, and representing the scholarship production in the mainstream EUS. Other journals and books will be used as complementary analysis, to contextualize events and the EU's responses to crises. Given the lack of specialised journals specifically focused on GS regionalisms - despite the existence of journals such as *Third World Quarterly*, and area studies outlets which focused on specific (sub)regions, for instance, *Latin America*, *Southern Africa*, and *Southeast Asia* - the empirical assessment of regional crises in the GS will go over literature (high ranked articles and book chapters) within the same time frame on the two crises.

## **ACADEMIC TRENDS IN EUROPEAN UNION STUDIES**

EUS have been the result of the (re)construction of discourses and narratives, bordering subjects, theoretical views and disciplines that configure the mainstream studies (Rosamond 2016: 32; Manners and Whitman 2016: 4). Although neofunctionalism has been a predominant theoretical account at the beginning, studies explaining European regionalist phenomenon have reached diversity, with

several disciplines gaining theoretical property and approaching different objects of study, with a (re)construction of a series of social and institutional representations of past discourses. Within this process, we argue that EUS have been suffering from three kinds of centrism, that somehow limit the scientific development of the area and the usefulness to address European empirical challenges. The three *centrisms* are: (1) Eurocentrism, which is more commonly pointed out, (2) disciplinary and theoretical centrism and (3) elite-centrism as object of study.

EUS are commonly accused of Eurocentrism, meaning that studies are biased by the almost exclusive European or Western origins of the research, thus reproducing historical and structural relations of political and economic power and hegemony. In this regard, academic analysis on European integration comes almost always from the inside, and the "EU should be looked from the outside too" (Manners 2016: 10). In fact, "mainstreaming has done more than anything to deal with EU studies' 'n = 1 problem' and has helped to ensure that the study of the EU has not become ghettoized as a self-contained and insular sub-field" (Manners and Rosamond 2018: 30). In addition, US and UK based scholarship dominates the academic debates in the field (Rosamond 2007: 8). On the editorial level, the *status quo* remains the same, with main journals in the field with North American or European origins, as well as the respective editors, with English being the *lingua franca* (Jensen and Kristensen 2013: 13, 14). The result is an exclusionary construction of scientific knowledge (Rosamond 2016). Even when political science started to offer alternative analysis to the founding International Relations theories, it did it using the theoretical frameworks from American political science. The American positivist-oriented approach is also present in neofunctionalism, which is proficient in explaining and predicting regional integration concentrated in the analysis of actors and events, but neglects accounts from "systemic context", dispersed in the amalgamation of historical, cultural, and social national political backgrounds of Europe (Kaiser, 1971). With such an exclusionary paradigm, important insights for knowledge may have been lost, which also culminates in a narrowing of the disciplinary and theoretical pillars of the EUS, which supports the second centrism.

Disciplinary and theoretical centrism correlates discipline with theory to argue that EUS has been developed around a few theories which consequently derive from limited disciplinary fields. As the foundational theories of European integration, grounded in the IR field (Rosamond 2006: 450), neofunctionalism alongside intergovernmentalism have been considered the most sounded explanations of regional integration in Europe. But from the 1960s until the 1990s, academic literature diversified objects of study and theoretical frameworks, either approaching the European Community (EC)/EU as a political system, the transnational political dynamics, or the domestic influences of integration, and the international and global role of the EU. Constructivism emerged as an alternative to the realism of IR, tempering rationalist studies (Checkel 1999; Parsons 2002; Christiansen, Jorgensen and Wiener 1999). Under the hat of political science, systems theory started to be applied to study the EC/EU (Lindberg 1967; Scharpf 1999; Schmidt 2013), and in the 90s, comparative politics theorised the EU as a political system (Hix and Bjorn 2011). Along with it, governance studies emerged, to explain the EU as a multilevel governance polity (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Institutions have gained renewed interest in different scientific fields, and new institutionalism developed as a cross-cutting stream subdivided into historical and rational variants (Armstrong and Bulmer 1998). Already in the 1970s (Scheingold 1970), the study of consequences of European integration in domestic politics developed into the Europeanisation literature in the 1990s, evolving as an important subarea within EUS (Ladrech 1994; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Green Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001). Moreover, the rising importance of national politics to the EU opened the end of the permissive consensus era, boosting post-functionalist approaches (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

Nevertheless, the theoretical evolution of EUS has been circumscribed mainly to the field of political science, constituting what we label as “mainstream studies”. These are mainly composed of theoretical debates around dichotomic and “rival” perspectives: intergovernmentalism / neofunctionalism; international relations / comparative politics; constructivism / rationalism – that have been dominant in the top scientific journals of the field (Manners and Whitman 2016; Rosamond 2016).

Of course, science is made of the same structural axioms where core theories are grounded, making, therefore, the epistemology of each scientific area, and the (re)construction of discourses is part of it. But the question here is that if EUS are supposed to be disciplinary diverse, with the top scientific journals assuming it, must be open to contributions of several social science fields (Rosamond 2007:11). Yet, journals focused on EU studies, such as *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *European Union Politics* and *West European Politics*, are very much circumscribed to the IR, Comparative Politics and Public Administration (Jensen and Kristensen 2013). However, the old rationalist debates around the neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist rivalry can be too simplistic (Rosamond 2006: 449). In fact, they reduce the European integration and the EU (after 1993) dynamics of power and politics to an *eliticised* conception of regionalism. Furthermore, explanations provided by those theoretical frameworks always correspond to a partial selection of the EU reality. The 1990s revitalised this debate, with a reconstruction of events, excluding alternative approaches, limiting the development of EUS (Manners and Whitman 2016: 6). Even when comparative politics challenged IR in theorising integration, it did it facing the EU as a familiar phenomenon, with a resource to already known theoretical tools, disregarding the EU as a theoretical novelty (Rosamond 2006: 451), with comparative exercises always around the same objects, unitary states or federal systems (Manners and Whitman 2016: 5).

Even the governance approach was developed mainly around the political science field, with the multi-level governance, europeanisation, and legitimacy/ democratic deficit studies. Although assessments of the economy and the law are found in the work of Jensen and Kristensen (2013) as sub-disciplines of EUS, they are placed in an isolated segment of journals, with little connections with the core network of the top journals, from which disciplines such as history and sociology have been excluded. This leads to the exclusion of some works that are deemed less important or pertinent yet go beyond the conventional methods. Rosamond (2016: 31) gives the example of Etzioni (1965), who combines a sociological approach to IR and treats integration as part of a historical political context. Some studies have called attention to the rise of dissident voices in EUS, highlighting the potential contributions coming from feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to disrupt the ways scholars theorise Europe and the EU (Manners and Whitman 2016; Kronsell 2016; Borg and Diez 2016; Kinnvall 2016), but much work is still needed to break the glass ceiling of what constitutes mainstream EUS.

Being constructed around theoretical dichotomies and subject to narrow disciplinary research agendas, scientific discourse in the case of EUS incurs other dangers: creating pseudo-theoretical novelty and overlapping analytical perspectives. Regarding the first concern, the foundational EUS theories may already provide explanations and frameworks of understanding for current integration issues, excluding the need of new conceptualisations or theories. Those explanations may not be so obvious in the core rationale of the theory, but they are explored or embedded in the causal and consequential inferences inherent to it. For example, while neofunctionalism predicts that pressing effects for integration are made by economic corporations and institutional elites, in a first stage, it also envisages that a cyclical effect reaches domestic politics and interest groups (Haas 1958: 113-239),

opening prospects for the politicisation of European integration and thus the end of an elite issue (Schmitter 1969). This lays down premises for the multi-level governance and Europeanisation studies, that despite having built their own field of disciplinary coherence, are not provided with absolute originality regarding the object of study. That's why a deeper and broader reading of classical theories is advised (Rosamond 2006: 455), to avoid simplistic and stereotyped understandings, that may pose no need for new theoretical frameworks. For example, liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) and neofunctionalism theories, in essence, describe the same dynamics but looking at the picture from different perspectives. LI claims that the result of intergovernmental bargaining is the conciliation of national interests, resulting from the aggregation of domestic preferences, plus the possible response of the integrated institutional system that is conditioned by the liberal international interdependence. Hence, it's worth asking, isn't the conditioning of liberal international interdependence the same as the pressure of transnational economic corporations for integration postulated by neofunctionalism? And aren't the aggregated domestic interests the result of the spillover of institutional elites to national politics, that neofunctionalism also postulates?

The third centrism is a consequence of the two previous ones. It is worth asking, which interests do mainstream studies represent? In the last years, the gap between theory and reality in the EUS has increased (Manners and Whitman 2016: 4), something that seems to be related to the disciplinary and theoretical centrism. As said, scientific discourse is institutionally and socially constructed, and this is halfway to disconnect the objects of study from the multiple interests of the real world. If one looks at the main theories or concepts of study resulting from the development of EUS (Table 1), the conclusion is that the majority focuses on the elite structure of the EU ecosystem, being the general interest of the citizens and minorities misrepresented. This is to say that the targets of EU integration are the least represented in EUS, and the theories that arise from the scholarship have no connection with the lived experiences of the regional communities (Munford 2020: 4). "There needs to be acknowledged that the empirical agenda of EU studies has hidden in plain sight the neoliberal preferences for market economics over the everyday socio-economic concerns of ordinary EU and non-EU citizens" (Manners and Rosamond 2018: 35).

**Table 1**

<b>Theory/concept of study</b>	<b>Object of study</b>
<b>Neofunctionalism</b>	EU institutions, corporate interests; political elites
<b>Intergovernmentalism</b>	EU institutions; governments
<b>The EU as a political system</b>	Institution's competences and power; "constitutional" aspects; politics-political parties
<b>Multilevel Governance</b>	EU institutions; EU agencies; national governmental institutions; regional governmental institutions; national and transnational corporate interests; national and transnational citizens interests
<b>Europeanisation studies</b>	National politics (parties, elections, decision-making); national policies; national public institutions; private corporations; citizens' mobilisation; public opinion.
<b>Politicisation studies</b>	Political parties, public opinion; communication;

Source: the authors, derived from main theories/concepts developed in EU studies

Nevertheless, the multiple crises happening since 2008 have affected mainly the under-represented objects of study: citizens, mostly the economically and socially excluded ones, and minorities. On the other hand, by questioning the success of European integration, these crises have posed new challenges to scholars, while boosting a considerable amount of new research in EUS. Assuming EUS as a form of

regionalism studies, this article aims to analyse scholarship responses to the crises and provide insights about continuation of elite-centred perspectives or if the theoretical *acquis* resulting from the study of crises have altered the previous paradigm of EUS.

### **SCHOLARLY TRENDS OF REGIONALISM IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

Considering that theories of regional integration are mostly translations of European experiences, scholars have put more emphasis on more contextualised parameters to understand other regions of the world, especially in the Global South. Since the 2000s, a growing criticism of Eurocentrism has been observed in regionalism studies (Acharya 2012; Söderbaum 2013; Briceño-Ruiz 2018). The successive crises faced by the EU since 2008 and the Brexit process have raised questions about the EU as a “successful” project, and a model for other regional organisations around the world.

Comparative regionalism as a research agenda has been important to this questioning. It features three main dimensions: “(a) an empirical focus on regional identity formation as a way of distinguishing between autonomous regions, (b) decentring Europe as the main reference point of comparative regionalism, and (c) defining what is truly “comparative” about comparative regionalism” (Balogun 2021: 2). The Comparative Regionalism research agenda has aimed to both avoid over-contextualising regional cases and overgeneralizing theoretical assumptions, favouring a mid-way approach to assess regionalist initiatives across the globe. Furthermore, there is a need to insert European integration theories in a comparative perspective, considering that the EU integration is not necessarily a *sui generis* case or a referential model, but simply a comparable case of regionalism.

In fact, there is already much literature on regionalism in other parts of the world, published in non-EU-centred journals that have developed territorial and non-territorial conceptions of regions, region-building and regionness (Riggirozzi 2012; Weixing 2013; Levine and Nagar 2016; Chakma 2018; Deciancio and Quiliconi 2020). They have contributed to providing new understandings of the emergence of regions in these areas through an analysis of state-society complexes and the search for autonomy, development and sovereignty. Studies in these contexts not only provide diverse conceptualisations of regionalism, but they can also facilitate dialogues between studies in regionalism, while acknowledging the importance of knowledge production in and from the Global South.

The empirical insights from the Global South have provided new theorisations that can be helpful for comparative regionalism and especially EUS beyond mainstream theories. Progress has been made in constructing parameters for comparing formal regional arrangements (Acharya and Johnston 2006; Jetschke et al. 2021) and the influence of extra-regional actors (Haastrup 2013; Fioramonti and Mattheis 2015; Gardini 2021), but more can be done to set out parameters for defining the performance, as success or failure of regionalism tends to be comparative, materially, and normatively speaking. Besides, it must be recognised that regions are not isolated in the world and regional organisations do not emerge from the vacuum. Therefore, comparative regionalism studies have accounted for the role of interregionalism (North-South and South-South) and the dissemination of institutional standards and designs (Hoffmann 2016).

In empirical terms - and in contrast to the works on EU regional integration path, studies in Global South regionalism have for example demonstrated that supranational integration is not the most used and desirable model in the world. Moreover, they also show that, even though several regionalist projects have aimed to achieve regional economic integration, economic interdependence has not been a constitutive feature of regionalism across the world (exceptions are the EU and

ASEAN) (Ramanzini and Luciano 2020). Also, regionalism goes beyond solving/reacting to functional problems, which leads to the importance of socialisation factors and construction of regional identity (regioness) (Riggirozzi 2012). Finally, in order to better understand the functioning of regionalism in the Global South, one must go beyond the textual content of Treaties/Protocols and official declarations, which are mostly an expression of Declaratory (Jenne et al. 2017) and Rhetorical regionalisms (Söderbaum and Brolin 2016).

Nonetheless, our assessment of scholarly works on regional responses to crisis will highlight that overcoming the Eurocentrism of studies on regionalism in comparative regionalism is still more a demand than a reality, despite the emergence of relevant works focusing on decentring regionalist studies. When possible and relevant, incorporating the EU trajectory as a comparable case may also be a productive step (Vleuten and Hoffmann 2010). This is crucial for cross-regional comparisons (also called Comparative Area Studies) aim to build bridges between area studies specialists and generalist theorists (Köllner et al. 2018). However, broadening the scope of the field of both the EU and comparative regionalism studies is much more than not taking the EU as a reference model, but it is also about increasing our understanding of regionalism in the Global South.

### **SCHOLARSHIP RESPONSES TO THE POLYCRISIS IN THE GLOBAL NORTH AND SOUTH REGIONALISMS**

Drawing on the concept of global polycrisis as crises entangled occurring in multiple global systems, that interact and produce harms greater than the sum of isolated crises (Lawrence, Janzwood and Homer-Dixon 2022), this section will evaluate scholarship responses to two crises: the 2008 financial crisis and the migration crisis, to demonstrate their responses as covered by EUS and Comparative Regionalism literature. On the one hand, we understand these two crises as global polycrisis, given the scale of their impact, yet their impact is differentiated. Critically speaking, these events have also been framed by political and economic elites - especially in the West - as 'crises' and not simply as 'issues'. "Crises are constituted discursively by both policy actors and academics" (Manners and Rosamond 2018: 28).

#### **The 2008 Global Financial Crisis**

Triggered in 2007 by a huge contraction in liquidity in global markets, global financial crisis emerged in the USA in 2008 as a credit crunch and subprime crisis, which due to the deep global economic inter-dependency spread out to other regions of the globe, spilling over into a banking crisis, a sovereign debt crisis and finally affecting real economy with high rates of unemployment, particularly among youth workers, contraction of public expenditure and subsequent social exclusion. Economies in several regions experienced long periods of near-stagnation, with global financial crisis being considered the worst economic downturn since the 1929-30 great recession, having also political implications.

The effects of the 2008 global financial crisis led to distinct regional responses. Most studies on the impact of the financial crisis on regionalism in non-Western regions have focused on the case of Asia, especially in East Asia. In this sense, scholars have emphasised that the crisis hit East Asia in a context of increasing regional financial cooperation in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 (Katada 2011; Grimes 2012), and that Asian countries have pushed for responses at both the global and regional levels:

Although the first order response of Asian countries was to join the broader global effort to contain financial freefall at the world level, there emerged a second order response at the level of regional institutional building,



specifically to “multilateralize” the Chiang Mai Initiative, and to develop a regional trust fund to help strengthen Asian bond markets (Chin 2014: 39).

Regional responses from other parts of the Asian continent have been less visible, since financial cooperation mechanisms in regions such as South Asia are more fragmented and episodic (Tripathi 2010).

In Latin America, analyses seen in the period have presented a distinct outlook. ‘Although financial conditions have deteriorated, particularly since September 2008, the financial shock has been less severe than during the two previous crises’ (Ocampo 2009: 703). Nonetheless, studies have stressed that trade restrictions - particularly border measures - adopted by Latin American countries have affected intraregional trade, especially in South America, bringing about tensions within the subregion’s two traditional economic blocs, Mercosur, and the Andean Community (ECLAC 2009). Studies at that point have often focused on a policy-recommendation approach, urging for stronger and pragmatic intra-regional cooperation among LAC countries as an alternative to reduce the economic effects of the global financial crisis (ECLAC 2009; Ocampo 2009). However, the literature has pointed out that cleavages regarding the economic models adopted by Latin American countries - ranging from neoliberal policies, neo-developmental, to Socialist/Bolivarian ones - have prevented the region from constructing effective economic forums to protect the region from the crisis (Guillén 2011).

On the other side, fewer assessments were seen in the case of African regionalism, highlighting not only its marginal position in the global economy, but also its position in knowledge making. Some attention was given to the recurrent financial constraints of African Regional Economic Communities, which significantly restrained their capacity to implement regional policies aiming to reduce the economic effects of the financial crisis on the continent (African Development Bank Group 2009). Besides, mention is made of the varying impact of the crisis on African subregions. For instance, due to its stronger participation in global trade flows, the SADC region was expected to become more vulnerable to the global financial crisis (Zampini 2008).

In the EU, economic and social consequences of the global financial crisis were particular and severe, specifically in the Eurozone, with soaring unemployment rates and social exclusion. Due to the specificities of financial and economic governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the reflections of the global financial crisis in the EU have transformed into the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis. Unemployment reached 12% in 2013 in the Eurozone, while in Portugal and Greece it went up to 17 and 27%, respectively. In young people, it reached 56% in Spain and 62% in Greece (Eurostat 2013). This was the result not only of the financial impacts of the north American originated crisis, but also to all Eurozone members that recorded GDP growth (Hodson 2017: 121-122).

Regarding EUS, the literature released following the Eurozone debt crisis continues strong in the traditional theoretical frameworks, especially in journals stemming from the political science and IR areas, investigating the influence of intergovernmental power in bargaining and decision-making (Hennessy 2014; Finke and Bailer 2019) and the observance of the neofunctionalist rational (Braun 2015: 422) in the institutional deepening of the EMU. This, in a certain aspect, not only shows the nature of empirical institutional regionalist responses to the crisis, as is also the reflex of an historical theoretical liability, that is part of a constellation of power monopoly of European elite actors governing the Eurozone.

In the field of economic studies, scholars identified the inefficient initial structural design of EMU as causes of the Eurozone debt crisis, linking the economic dichotomies

that it generated to the political cleavages formed in the attempt to find policy responses (Copelovitch, Friedman and Walter 2016; Stockhammer 2016, Krugman 2012). Some economy scholars followed a critical approach to the EMU economic policy, particularly due to the austerity measures responses in a one size fits all manner, creating huge and long-term economic and social consequences (Vlachos and Bitzenis 2019: 1-3), that originated significant political impact, also studied by literature.

In this sense, a great increment of theoretical production based on the politicisation and europeanisation studies is observed, contributing to provide these theoretical frameworks a more prominent role in the EUS. Europeanisation and politicisation studies had a significant increase in EUS scholarship following the Treaty of Maastricht, which unlocked the potential of the electoral basis and political parties as relevant actors in the European integration. Until then, such assumption has been implicitly secondary in the theorisation of EUS.

It was the tremendous economic and social impact of the Eurozone crisis that had definitely awakened citizenship awareness for the domestic consequences of the EU policies, shortening distance between electorate and institutional EU elites. Literature elaborating on that is a significant contribution to consolidating post-functional studies. Works pointing out that EU integration can restructure the way parties and voters position themselves in economic issues (Katsanadiou and Otjes 2015) on pro and anti-EU attitudes and according to territorial preferences regarding EU policies (Kriesi 2016; Hutter and Kriesi 2019) are an example. Some studies in the scope of politicisation of the Eurozone crisis attempted to find out the formation of counter-narratives to EU economic policies in the elite discourses, that challenged the predominant ordoliberal economic political rational, notwithstanding concluding the mismatch between the existence of those counter-narratives and the EU policy outputs. This incongruity between delivered policies and electoral demands are explained by the constellation of power actors (Kutter 2020), in the framework of the intergovernmentalist theoretical ground (Graziano and Hartlapp 2019), reflecting the asymmetry of intergovernmental power in the EU. One sees here the rebuilding of traditional theoretical *acquis* to provide explanations for the dealignment of the EU with democratic grounds.

Democracy approaches are directly or indirectly inspired in systemic theories applied to the study of the EU, conceiving it inherently as a political system, and providing ground for normative orientations. Normative and accountability studies elaborating on the democratic implications of the Eurozone crisis come in this line, reinvigorating the critical approach of the democratic deficit in the EU. Studies in this sense find out that while the gain of power by the non-legitimized supranational or intergovernmental EU institutions tends to aggravate the democratic deficit, the politicization of EU issues seems to attenuate its technocratic nature, although politicization was also brought about by Euroscepticism growth, which is an indicator of legitimacy concerns (Kratochvíl and Sychra 2019). As said before, the perception and impact of the Eurozone crisis in population gained special focus on research after the crisis, demonstrating the negative effects of bailouts on satisfaction of citizens and turnout, proving that economic policy outcomes have a stronger influence on satisfaction with democracy and electoral turnout than quality of the democratic process (Schraff and Schimmelfennig 2019).

Some studies call for an historical comparative exercise that argues the potentiality of economic crisis to threaten democratic regimes, providing the pertinence for recalling other disciplines as history, to fully understand the EU contemporary dynamics. The work of Arnemann, Konrad and Potrafke (2021) is such an example.

Relying in economic psychology, it tries to understand if memories of the crisis evidence systematic differences between borrower and lender countries.

In sum, a significant part of the literature produced after the crisis reflect the historical liability of hegemonic theoretical models in the EUS, focusing on the study of institutional and political elites, and thus conceiving it as a top-down process mainly. Nevertheless, the social and political impacts of the crisis turned it difficult to ignore bottom-up dynamics, which were addressed by scholars with an expressive presence of europeanisation and politicization studies. What is evident in this trend of EUS is that theoretical production has been more reactive than predictive in the EU, and the question is whether knowledge construction can side the logic of institutional building or the other way around. Whether it a reflection or not of this scholarship trends after the crisis, the fact is that EU political and institutional actors have been putting more frequently and emphatically in the political agenda the debate on democratic deficit and the need to democratically legitimize the EU.

### **Regional Migration**

While regionalism studies have recently put strong emphasis on assessing immigration in the Mediterranean, and their effects on the EU and Member States' policies and politics, less attention has been paid - especially in English-language publications - to migration influxes in the Global South, especially the humanitarian crisis of Venezuela and its migratory implications to South America (Brumat 2020). This is particularly striking as most of the international migration flows occur and directly impact countries of the Global South, which led to the increasing engagement of regional organisations of the Global South in the construction of regional migration policies (Schneiderheinze et al. 2018). Despite much attention being given to the EU's comprehensive model of regional mobility (Zaun 2018; Servent 2018; Menéndez 2016), other regional bodies such as ECOWAS and Mercosur have also established broad regional policies aiming to foster free movement (Brumat, 2020; Arhin-Sam et al., 2022). In fact, ECOWAS was the very first regional project to set up a regional policy on that matter, with the signature of the Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment in 1979. When it comes to South America, significant human mobility policies were set out in the 2000s, particularly the Mercosur's Residence Agreement, which was implemented by most South American nations.

Interestingly, studies such as Brumat's (2020), contrast the EU and US more securitised approaches towards irregular migration with South American experience of putting more emphasis on its human rights dimension and the 'right to migrate', favouring migrant regularisation instead of incarceration/deportation. Nonetheless, migration governance in some cases such as Asia has received less attention, given the low participation of Asian countries in international migration conventions and the prevalence of bilateral and informal consultation mechanisms employed by Asian nations to address this topic, such as the Bali Process, the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Process, which have been criticised due to their non-transparent and selective approaches (Shivakoti 2020).

Regarding EU-focused studies on the migration crisis, not only do we notice elite-centred responses by the EU, but also elite-centred approaches as objects of study in scholarly works. Some studies adopt a critical perspective, with the securitisation/humanitarianisation dialectic in migration and borders management (Moreno-Lax 2018), others focus on the politicisation, electoral impact and political preferences following the refugee crisis (Van der Brug, Harteveld 2021; Conti, di Mauro and Memoli 2019), on the assessment of responses to the crisis and policy analysis (Grech 2017; Angeloni 2019; Trauner 2016; Morsut and Kruke 2018). Contribution of the crisis for integration is another perspective found (Scipioni 2018),

with the use of the theoretical framework of traditional integration theories (Niemann and Speyer 2018; Zaun 2018). Discourse analysis and political conflict (Maricut-Akbik 2021; Wolf and Ossewaarde 2018) are other perspectives identified in the mainstream literature on EU studies.

In the Africa context, the literature has tended to focus on the characterisation of a continent of large-scale forced migration, identifying the root causes of involuntary displacement (Bayar and Aral 2019; Schmidt et al. 2019; Nyaoro 2019; Mpedi 2019; Mudawi 2019), and the precarity of protection of displaced people according to the international protection standards (Mpedi 2019: 80-84; Schmidt et al. 2019: 5-7). Towards this context, some literature argues that the EU externalisation approaches of asylum management raises concerns regarding human rights compliance (Scherrer 2019; Fotaky 2019), denouncing the resurgence of the "fortress Europe" idea, that falls at risk of breaching international conventions, as some third countries fall short of the criteria to be considered a safe country for an asylum seeker.

Although there's a close interdependency of migration in Africa with asylum policy in the EU, and the perspective of the externalisation of asylum management is studied, EU-Africa relations in migration policies have been usually approached separately and dichotomously, considering the EU as the active actor *versus* the passive role of Africa, as the target continent of EU policies. Although this is an important and empirical reasoned perspective, it urges studies that face Africa as a potential region with agency on international migration and refugee protection policies, in order that Europe and Africa are regarded by principle as equal to equal actors in the research.

### **DISRUPTING EU STUDIES AND GLOBAL SOUTH REGIONALISMS AGENDA**

By examining how scholarly works have assessed regional developments in European and GS regionalisms in times of polycrisis, we aimed to respond to whether the multiple crises faced by the EU and regions in the Global South led to theoretical renewal and more diverse disciplinary dimensions of knowledge production about regionalisms and the overcoming of some centrism's previously identified.

Our analysis on how the 'crises' have been covered in the GS aimed to contribute to the attempt to move regionalism studies beyond EU/Eurocentrism (1). By equally observing regional crises in both the EU and the GS, we aim to move the comparative regionalism research agenda towards a more de-centred and non-Western approach, favouring the understanding of regionalism as a comprehensive and global phenomenon. Despite the predominance of studies on EU reactions to the polycrisis, Europe was not the only region that passed through turbulent times and achieved regional responses. In fact, some regions - such as Latin America - have learned through crises that their path is not/should not necessarily be the same as Europe:

Apparently, the time has come to recognize that the region's integration model is far removed from the European one, and will remain so for a long time. This in no way signifies that the region should renounce goals as ambitious as those attained in Europe. What it does mean is that proposals for integration in the region should be consistent with the real strengths and weaknesses of the existing integration schemes. The European route is not necessarily the only way to move forward on regional integration, and the sooner the realities of Latin American and Caribbean integration are made explicit, the easier it will be to agree on the road towards deepening it. (ECLAC 2009: 83)

While for EUS' scholars the focus of the 2008 financial crisis is more on understanding the balance of the market's interests and political institutions' dynamics of power, for GS studies the question is about understanding the relation with a hegemonic global

economy in a continuous struggle process for development (Deciancio 2020). This difference requires a primacy for considering contextual differences that should be structuring different empirical objects and theoretical frameworks. Although, it's important that scholars go beyond the structural historical insight of their region and essay a look from the outside.

This requires certain disruption in terms of a redefinition of research agendas, by, for example, considering longitudinal changes that regions themselves have overcome, and diversifying objects of study. In response to the Eurozone debt crisis, EUS somehow have strengthened its focus on bottom-up dynamics of power influence, but not significantly changed the focus of study in the mainstream literature. An example of this is that the gap between the EU institutional responses and the demanding reality of the most affected by the crises was not filled by scholarship. If one observes that in the financial and refugee crises the responses of the EU were mainly elite-centred, scholarly outputs were also predominantly focused on institutional and political elites as objects of study, despite some exceptions and the growing trend of europeanisation and politicisation studies. Hence, if comparative regionalism can advance through lessons from European regionalism, it has as much to learn with the EU leftovers and mistakes, and not only with its achievements.

Thus, there is a need for topical comparisons to fully understand the performance of regionalism both in the Global North and South in dealing with crises and delivering regional public policies, in order to fill the gap between theory and reality. In contrast to the theoretical and disciplinary centrism (2) of EUS - which remains majorly based on the traditional disciplinary trends (political science and IR) - analyses on the regional responses in the GS regionalism seemed much less theoretical and more focused on contextual and policy analysis from the reactions of GS agents in the crises evaluated. This is aligned with some of the assumptions of Comparative Regionalism and Cross-regional analyses - which tend to favour more context-sensitive observations - but it falls short of their expectations on the development of mid-range conceptual frameworks, considered as central aspects of theory-building. A middle-ground approach is desirable, and one may find room for mutual learning between EU and Global South studies.

Whilst EUS have been too much centred on theoretical development and legitimising a predictive theory of integration, it has neglected contextual analysis and prescription-driven policy analysis, in line with what Manners and Rosamond (2018) already diagnosed, something that is predominant in non-EU regionalism studies. Moreover, the incorporation of dissent scholarship, such as historical materialism, critical theory and post-structural perspectives (Manners and Whitman 2016), would contribute to a more multi and interdisciplinary authenticity of EUS. In turn, the complement of contextual analysis with a theoretical stance by GS regionalism studies could contribute to the development of more solid and scientifically grounded interpretations.

However, the empirical assessment of major developments derived from the crises beyond Europe also highlights the same trend of elite-centrism (3), given their main attention to elite-driven framing of contemporary dynamics as 'crises', which ultimately shape the subsequent responses to the crises. As shown in the previous section, most of the assessments of crises faced by the EU are centred on the policies and the polity itself, with the prevalence of policy-making and institutional implications. Nevertheless, one must recognise that there was a significant increase in europeanisation and politicisation studies, focused on public opinion and electoral preferences, as well as some works on critical economic and social impacts in the EU following the crises in mainstream journals. Meanwhile, studies on regional reactions to the two crises in the GS have also concentrated their attention on the responses

coming from national - and sometimes regional - political agents, particularly on the dynamics and interactions between national governments, also marginalising the agency of economic and social actors within the crises, merely treating them as implicit victims of the negative effects of the crises analysed. This means that the way knowledge is produced continues to be hegemonic in both EU and GS studies, and that EUS remains to some extent paradigmatic for comparative regionalism.

While we have acknowledged that EUS have paid particular attention to institutional-building analysis, we also contend that an excessive institutionalist focus has been exclusionist of other approaches, reinforcing elite-centrism as an object of study. The EU as an object of study must be considered as something beyond the institutional and power relationships to decentre within itself. Likewise, GS regionalism studies must decentre from EUS as a paradigmatic standpoint. If the definition of research agendas and theoretical development is dependent on the degree of institutionalisation of regional cooperation, the decentralisation of comparative regionalism studies becomes unlikely (Chakma 2018) and biased by the beginning. Scholarly works need to be more empirically sensitive and go beyond the scope of institutional responses to both the EU and GS regional practices to fully understand global and multidimensional challenges.

A more proactive and prospective research agenda that considers the extra-institutional dimensions of regionalism must be built. This leads us to the rich scholarly debate of what to consider a region. If one considers the constitution of regions based on the degree of institutional cooperation, this will automatically bias research, either leading to euro-centred GS or elite-centred EUS. On the other hand, understanding regions as something beyond a trade-inspired model of integration and as patterns of relations and interactions at various levels, including inter-state cooperation (Riggirozzi 2012, Chakma 2018), has the potential to turn the literature more disciplinary and theoretically inclusive. Disciplinary diversity can have a role in comparative regionalism studies towards a more empirical and less theory-driven research, leading scholars to ask research questions that concern the communities of the region (Munford 2020:3). Another interesting suggestion is made by Favell and Guiraudon (2009) towards the development of a sociological empirical driven agenda of EU research. Moreover, and specifically concerning the EUS, a more normative-oriented research agenda would also have the potential to approach non-elite objects of studies (Manners 2009; Manners and Rosamond 2018).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This article aimed to contribute to the literature of EUS, regionalism and especially comparative regionalism by comprehensively identifying the disciplinary developments within the analyses of two topical crises faced by European and the GS regionalisms, namely the 2008-9 financial crisis and the humanitarian crisis derived from recent migration flows. By assessing how scholarship has understood these crises and the responses of regional actors in Europe and the GS, we aimed to broaden the awareness of regionalism as a global and less EU-centric phenomenon. While topical studies on the impact of the crises on the EU have presented more theoretically driven implications - demonstrating the theoretical centrism of EUS - assessments of responses from the GS seem to be more empirically and contextually focused. Moreover, even though the crises substantially affected ordinary citizens, with huge social consequences, mainstream EUS scholarship - as well as studies examining developments in the GS - continues to focus on elite-based processes and responses from institutional and political elites.

We have argued that these crises need to be seen as multidimensional to be fully understood by scholarship. In fact, they cannot be seen as geographically separate, as they are interconnected, leading to the global scope of the concept of polycrisis,

which can be a powerful concept for disrupting research agendas. Furthermore, polycrisis cannot be fully assessed through single-disciplinary approaches, which necessitates the inclusion of diverse disciplinary perspectives in future regionalist studies. This stems from asking unfamiliar questions at the outset of a research project, e.g. is economic interdependence or trade-led integration essential to the study of regionalism? What about other areas of interstate cooperation? In addition, more inductive rather than deductive research projects would contribute to a theoretical and disciplinary decentering of European experiences within regionalism studies, which could be seen as a step forward in moving comparative regionalism away from the hegemonic standpoint of the EU.

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