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Research Article

Drifting towards exhaustion? Historical institutionalist perspectives on recent efforts to modernise the EU's partnerships with African states

Niels Keijzer

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Abstract

Since 2016, the EU has introduced several new initiatives to modernise its partnerships with African states. This article analyses endogenous changes in a matrix of institutions governing EU-Africa relations, consisting of budget and cooperation frameworks, by applying historical institutionalist concepts of drift, layering and exhaustion. Following an analysis of the formative decades of EU development policy, it describes how this matrix of institutions has affected two recent policy processes: the elaboration of a Joint-Africa EU Strategy and the negotiations of a successor to the Cotonou agreement. Incremental change in these institutions over time produces (un)intended changes in the cooperation practices and frameworks with Africa, which in turn has affected the extent to which both policy processes can reform Africa-EU relations in the ways desired by the EU.

Keywords

European Union; African Union; Africa, Caribbean and Pacific; partnerships; historical institutionalism; development policy

In April 2000, at the first Africa-EU summit in Cairo, participating heads of state and government committed to strengthening their "co-operation in our mutual interest and make it more beneficial to the two regions" (Council of the European Union 2000: 1). Two months later, the EU and its member states concluded an international agreement with the African Caribbean and Pacific states, the majority of which African, which sought to "reducing and eventually eradicating poverty consistent with the objectives of sustainable development and the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy" (ACP-EC 2000: 7). In the two decades that followed, the EU's development policy sought to reconcile pursuing mutual interest with promoting poverty reduction, or as a recent JCER special issue put it find a balance between its development policy being instrument of foreign policy and an expression of solidarity (see Furness et al. 2020).

In the Von der Leyen Commission, the development policy portfolio is led by a 'Commissioner for International Partnerships', whose mandate considers that 'In an increasingly unsettled world, where different development models increasingly compete, the partnerships of equals we build are essential for our future' (von der Leyen 2019: 4). The Commission President specifically instructed the Commissioner to contribute to the preparations of a comprehensive partnership with Africa, which 'should create a partnership of equals and mutual interest' (Ibid.). A similar level of ambition of radical reform was pursued under the Juncker Commission, yet the past six decades of EU-Africa relations are not characterised by revolution but by continuity and incremental change.

This paper argues that changes in EU-Africa relations over time can be explained and understood by focusing on changes to a matrix of institutions (Ackrill and Kay 2006), with institutions broadly defined as 'formal and informal rules which influence political behavior' (Cairney 2020: 75) or even simply as 'rules' (Steinmo 2008: 159). Its starting point is that the institutions for EU-Africa relations consist of closely linked on- and off-budget legal rules and a mix of cooperation frameworks. Historical institutionalist analysis (e.g. Hacker 2004; Mahony and Thelen 2010) suggests that the timing and sequencing of key moments and decisions, as well as the processes and structures through which these are made are key to understanding policy evolutions over time. Changes may occur through layering new initiatives within these and other existing institutions, by means of existing policies experiencing drift in response to changing circumstances, and by institutions experiencing exhaustion once they cease being effective yet may still be politically sustained (Hanrieder 2014; Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2013).

In order to better understand how this matrix of institutions concretely affects EU cooperation with Africa, the article specifically analyses two recent policy processes: (1) the negotiations and implementation of a joint Africa-EU strategy and (2) the preparation of the negotiations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states as to what should govern their cooperation after the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020 ('post-Cotonou'). The analysis shows that incremental change in these institutions over time produces (un)intended changes in the cooperation practices and frameworks with Africa. This in in turn has affected the extent to which both policy processes can reform Africa-EU relations in the ways desired by the EU, notably a shift from (aid-dependent) donor-recipient relations towards more equal relations. In addition to contributing to recent research on the evolving EU-Africa relations (Langan 2020; Hurt 2020), this article contributes to research on the evolution and governance of the European Union's budget in relation to its resources dedicated to pursuing external policies (Ackrill and Kay 2006; Crowe 2017).

The article is based on a review of literature on the history on EU development policy and on the two cases concerned, in addition to EU policy documents as well as public communication in the form of press releases and selected social media channels. It is structured as follows. It first looks into the literature on historical institutionalism and an analysis of the origins and foundation of EU development policy. This is followed by a brief overview of the various types of EU partnerships that the EU has entered into with third countries and selection of specific EU institutions relevant to EU-Africa relations, after which

the two aforementioned partnerships are analysed in detail. The article closes with overall reflections and suggestions for further research.

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM AND EU DEVELOPMENT POLICY

A wide range of actors is involved in preparing, implementing and scrutinising the European Union's development policy. These actors collectively engage through as well as shape institutions, a concept that features in a variety of research disciplines and thus tends to be defined in different ways. Most of these definitions, though, consider institutions as 'relatively enduring features of political and social life (rules, norms, procedures) that structure behavior and that cannot be changed easily or instantaneously' (Mahoney and Thelen 2010: 4). This article considers institutions as 'formal and informal rules which influence political behavior' (Cairney 2020: 75).

In the context of the European Union, considered an 'unusually well-developed' international regime (Pierson 1994: 7), formal institutions are emphasised and range from legally binding texts to other forms of written agreement that are allotted a high degree of formality. This article's analysis focuses on formal institutions, yet acknowledges that much of the EU's rulebook remains informal and requires dynamic interpretation by the actors involved. It should also be noted that although the Commission, Parliament, Council and other European bodies are commonly referred to as 'EU institutions', they are of course considered as organisations in this article.

Historical institutionalism is an approach to studying politics that distinguishes itself 'by its attention to real world empirical questions, its historical orientation and its attention to the ways in which institutions structure and shape political behaviour and outcomes' (Steinmo 2008: 150). Its main focus is on explaining processes as opposed to outcomes of institutional development, and its main ambition is to describe and explain rather than predict such change (Steinmo 2008; Fioretos 2011). The borders between historical institutionalism and the other institutionalisms (including rational choice and sociological institutionalism) remain subject to debate (De Ville 2013: 620; Thelen 1999). Steinmo (2008: 162) considers that while these types of institutional analysis have compatible views on what institutions are, they differ in their understanding of the actors whose actions are structured by them. Historical institutionalist research observes that actors designing institutions do not do so purely in an instrumental manner, but instead frequently give priority to considerations of appropriateness over effectiveness (Pierson 2000).

As policy activity increases and accumulates over time, unintended effects of past decisions can be expected to increase (Pierson 1994). A key consideration in this regard is that new EU institutions enter a rather crowded field, hence in practice they are designed to add to and complement existing institutions - wholesale replacement is a rare occurrence (Hanrieder 2014; Fioretos 2011; Thelen 1999). A longstanding critique of historical institutionalism observes that it is convincing in explaining continuity, but finds itself at an analytical loss when confronted with fundamental institutional change (Steinmo 2008). This is in part because initial historical institutionalist research - which was adapted from the economics discipline and emphasised path dependence, positive feedback loops and 'lock-in' effects (De Ville 2013: 620) - explained such changes as coming from the outside and resulting from exogenous shocks (Schmidt 2010). The concept of the critical juncture, defined as a brief interval characterised by 'a substantially heightened probability that agents' choices will affect the outcome of interest' (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007: 348), responded to this critique yet retained the idea that disruption of path dependence was somehow externally induced. Research applying the concept of critical junctures was moreover found to be less explicit about how institutional arrangements that are formed at such junctures are sustained over time (Thelen 1999: 392).

Responding to this critique, a group of researchers set out to analyse national economic policy change with a view to endogenising institutional change by describing how powerful actors emerged that challenged institutions from the inside. These scholars distinguished

a total of five distinct types of endogenous change: layering, conversion, drift, displacement and exhaustion (Thelen & Hacker 2004; Streeck & Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Since the authors use slightly different definitions for each, or fine-tuned them in subsequent publications, the following basic understandings provide a starting point (Steinmo 2008: 168-169):

- Displacement: one institution displaces another,
- Layering: new functions are added to an institution on top of existing ones,
- Drift: the environment of an institution changes, but the institution does not adapt in step wise fashion,
- · Conversion: institutions take on new functions, goals or purposes,
- Exhaustion: institutional breakdown and failure.

Critiques of these types (or modes) of incremental change observe that layering and displacement are considered to be closely linked, and that the same applies to conversion and drift, which suggests that the concepts are not mutually exclusive. Exhaustion was seen as the odd one out and is not included in later works by the same leading authors (van der Heijden and Kuhlmann 2017). A different angle of critique observes that the concepts were derived from cases of national institutional change, and therefore may not all be appropriate to international organisations, or in this case to the European Union (Hanrieder 2014). Based on this critique, it was argued that layering and drift are the most pertinent types of institutional change for such organisations, since conversion and displacement requires a more constant degree of control by a central actor or coalition (Ibid.: 5-6). The nature of EU decision-making as described above supports a focus on drift and layering as comparatively less focused/directed types of change. In addition, the concept of exhaustion would seem relevant considering the degree of path dependence that can be expected from an institutional framework that emerged during the 1950s. The following more detailed definitions of the three concepts are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Defining the selected modes of endogenous institutional change

Layering Streeck and Thelen (2005: 31)	'New elements attached to existing institutions gradually change their status and structure'		
	New layers/elements may 'grow faster' than old ones and may weaken support for old layers		
Drift Hacker (2004: 246-247)	'changes in the operation or effect of policies that occur without significant changes in those policies' structure'		
	Can happen more purposefully, but also naturally or even inadvertently		
Exhaustion Busemeyer and Trampusch (2013: 294)	'a significant reduction in the performance and functioning of a given set of institutions that may nevertheless be politically sustainable'		
	May entail involve cutting down on rules, showing an institution that gradually runs out of steam		

Given the long time periods involved, the range of actors involved in EU decision-making processes and the unintended consequences that may occur in result, it is emphasised that these three modes of change do not represent purposeful choices or directions but rather describe possible consequences thereof. These expectations reflect historical institutionalism's central focus on timing and sequence, which Fioretis (2011: 371) summarises is expected to contribute to varying outcomes, difficulties to reverse course as time progresses, lasting effects of 'chance' events and inefficiencies caused by forgone alternatives.

In the case of EU development policy, the importance of timing and sequencing is shown by its evolution over time, 'rooted' in the Rome Treaty's association policy. From these

roots, the EU's development policy gradually branched out in terms of geographic scope, normative orientation and implementation approaches. The next section analysis the foundation of EU development policy and incremental changes over time, as a basis for the further analysis of the associated institutions and the two cases.

THE EU'S STARTING POINT: FROM ASSOCIATION TO DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The 1957 Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC) and created the common market, which the six founding members agreed should extend to their overseas countries and territories (OCTs) in Africa. This 'association policy' represented aims and objectives not unlike development policy today, albeit with OCTs as the intended recipients. The idea of this policy was first proposed during the negotiations of the Schuman plan that preceded the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 (Dimier 2014: 11). Following the adoption of the Treaty, the first European development commissioner referred to a Europe that

(...) approaches Africa afresh as a Community, offering association of the overseas countries with the Common Market – an association which may doubtless be considered as the first global approach to the problems of underdevelopment, since it covers simultaneously institutions and trade, investments and technical assistance (Lemaignen 1957: 2; emphasis in the original).

The year the Rome Treaty was signed coincided with the Ghanaian declaration of independence that triggered a wave of independence and liberation struggles across the continent (Kotsopoulos and Mattheis 2018). Commissioner Lemaignen (1957: 2) noted: 'scarcely had the Treaty of Rome been implemented before it was politically out of date overseas'. The Rome treaty defined the association policy towards the OCTs and served as a basis for financial support provided by the founding members. The association policy was agreed at a late stage during the treaty negotiations and was not strongly supported by all six founding member states, hence it was agreed to arrange for the financing of OCTs through the European Development Fund (EDF) – an intergovernmental fund with its own rules that was placed outside the regular EEC budget.

The Treaty-EDF combination provided the basis to fund capital infrastructure in the OCTs, yet by the early 1960s the EEC members realized that an EEC legal basis would not be appropriate for governing cooperation with independent states. This prompted the negotiations and subsequent conclusion of the Yaoundé Convention with 18 former African colonies in July 1963, while the EDF obtained a dual role of funding cooperation under the new Convention as well as continued financial support to the remaining OCTs. Grilli (1993: 336) referred to this layering of the EDF by linking it to both the treaty and a new international agreement as 'the passage from association octroyée to association negociée' (from granted to negotiated association).

The United Kingdom's accession in 1973 led to negotiations for a new partnership agreement between the EEC and a combination of the existing 18 Yaoundé signatories and those Commonwealth members considered similar by the EEC. In parallel to the negotiations of the first Lomé Convention which were concluded in 1975, the EEC members among themselves determined the size of the EDF. During this period as well as during negotiations of subsequent Lomé Conventions that followed, the ACP would at an early stage 'pitch' the amount of EDF resources they would welcome. This was followed by negotiations among EEC (and later EU) member states that resulted in a lower 'take it or leave it' figure for the ACP (Arts and Byron 1997).

The Lomé Convention stipulated that the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific states were in charge of determining priorities for the use of the EDF. In practice there were real limits to this ownership by ACP states, which was confirmed in research published in the early 80s. (Hewitt 1981; ODI 1983). Moreover, recent years showed that the EU felt it did not need

to seek prior approval from ACP states on using considerable EDF resources to fund new initiatives, which included the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (2015) and the European Fund for Sustainable Development (2017). The non-enforcement of these 'comanagement' rules as enshrined in Lomé, in no small part due to the ACP states' lack of means to enforce them, constituted a form of drift, in terms of neglect of the rules laid down in the institution. The new EU-driven initiatives themselves can be considered forms of layering: EDF resources continued to be disbursed to the 'intended recipients' in ACP states, yet under new decision-making rules and structures set by the EU for both new initiatives. The new layers of decision-making were given greater priority by the EU's leadership, with the unintended effect of marginalising the existing rules for managing development cooperation.

While the long continuation of the EDF as an extra-budgetary fund represents a clear case of a path-dependent process, in the sense that the aforementioned early choices and events contributed to sustaining it over time, this continuation has been as much justified in terms of appropriateness as by effectiveness. Its proponents see it as a reflection of the continuing relevance of the partnership vis-à-vis the EU's relations with other states and regions in the global south, and consider the EDF an expression of the special status of the ACP-EU partnership vis-à-vis EU cooperation with other third countries and regions. The next section briefly further contextualises and defines the matrix of institutions that will be analysed in relation to the two cases.

A MATRIX OF INSTITUTIONS GOVERNING EU-AFRICA RELATIONS

Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union mandates the Union to 'develop relations and build partnerships with third countries, and international, regional or global organisations which share the principles' that inspired the EU's own creation, and which it promotes through its external action. The EU prefers to govern such partnerships by legally binding arrangements covering economic cooperation, political dialogue, trade relations as well as other cooperation areas. These agreements have been concluded between the EU and many individual third countries worldwide and, depending on the areas of cooperation covered, include customs unions, association agreements, and partnership and cooperation agreements.¹ Due to the specific OCT-linked history of EU-Africa relations, as described above, the cooperation with Sub-Saharan African states differs from the rest and is governed by a collective association agreement with the ACP states.

Another key difference between the bilateral cooperation frameworks and the collective agreement with the ACP is that the latter is concluded in the form of time-limited agreements that are renewed over time. Time-limited agreements can be more specific about means of implementation, which as a result are discussed in more detail during their (re-)negotiation process. By comparison, the bilateral cooperation agreements are less specific on cooperation means, with the agreement providing general principles and the actual cooperation being funded through the EU's external financing instruments under its multi-annual budget.

As described above, the ACP-EU partnership is unique in terms of being funded by the EDF as a separate institution that also provides resources for cooperation with OCTs. Since both the partnership and the fund have had to be renewed over time, the negotiation process and timeline are influenced by the EU's own periodic budget negotiations that determine available resources. The EU is funded by means of a multi-annual financial framework (MFF), which determines the maximum expenditure per year for broad policy areas (headings) against an overall annual ceiling on payment and commitment appropriations. The EU's budget is determined through protracted negotiations all the way up to 'high politics' and today appears as 'a "galaxy" of funds and instruments, with variable participation of member states and a diverse range of decision making and accountability procedures' (Crowe 2017: 429).

Among the six rules for the MFF is the principle of annuality, which in part refers to the 'setting of time-limits for preparation, adoption and implementation of the budget' (Strasser 1992: 49).2 The EDF exists outside the MFF and is not bound by this rule. Instead, unspent resources accumulate as reserves and remain available to be spent at any later point in time, such as on the two new EU initiatives introduced in the previous section. Since the early 1960s the successive EDFs were funded in five year cycles, which after 2000 were extended to seven years. This extension allowed the three most recent EDFs (cycles 9-11) to be negotiated in parallel with the EU budget cycles covering the same time periods, while the EDF's rules were also further harmonised with those of the budget. One example concerned the contribution key used to determine EU MS, with the difference between EDF and EU budget keys being reduced when the 11th EDF was agreed (see Kilnes et al 2012). Although primarily influenced by the overall negotiation dynamics within the European Council and the closely watched 'ceilings' of the budget, the Council's July 2020 political agreement on the 2021-2027 MFF agreed to incorporate the EDF into the budget and was influenced in this regard by the incremental institutional changes in the EU's relations with Africa discussed in the previous section (Council of the European Union 2020).

In their historical institutionalist analysis of the EU budget, Ackrill and Kay (2006) consider the EU budget as a 'matrix of interdependent institutions', where introducing new institutions or changing existing ones does not change the overall nature and trajectory of the institutional matrix as a whole. At the core of their argument and approach is that the budget should be viewed and analysed as a series (matrix) of inter-linked institutions, as opposed to as a single entity. Their analysis of the reforms to the budget over time shows that during the past decades, rather than reforming existing budget institutions, new institutions have been layered on top. In view of its historically interwoven financial and cooperation framework, EU-Africa relations can be considered as constituting a matrix of institutions of its own. Table 2 presents this matrix as consisting of EU budget rules including its eligible African recipient countries, which interlinks with the partnership agreements setting out goals, principles and rules for cooperation with these states.

Table 2: selected EU development policy institutions relevant to EU relations with Africa

EU budget related institutions	Partnership Agreements		
 Relevant External Financing Instruments European Development Fund Recent EU development policy initiatives (EU Trust Fund for Africa, External Investment Plan) 	 Joint-Africa EU Strategy ACP-EU Partnership Agreement Bilateral agreements 		

The following descriptive sections will look into efforts to reform two interrelated EU partnerships with African states, respectively those seeking a 'continent-to-continent' relationship and those engaging Sub-Saharan African states as part of the ACP-EU partnership.

THE JOINT AFRICA-EU STRATEGY

In 2005, two years after the Cotonou Partnership Agreement had entered into force, the European Commission published a Communication setting out proposed priorities and approaches for its cooperation with Africa (EC 2005). The formulation of the partnership was prompted by the 2000 inaugural Africa-EU summit in Cairo, as well as the transformation of the Organisation for African Unity into the African Union (AU) in 2002, which in no small part had drawn inspiration from the EU in terms of its structures and

processes. A key outcome of the summit was the launch of a comprehensive and structured political dialogue between the EU and AU member states (later referred to as 'continent to continent'), representing a move away from the previous split between separate dialogues of the EU with ACP and non-ACP African states. Although the initiative to develop such a strategy was welcomed, the EU received criticism for unilaterally adopting this strategy as opposed to preparing it jointly with the region that it addresses (Del Biondo 2015).

The Commission took this criticism to heart, and in 2006 initiated a consultation process preparing a joint strategy with the African Union. The resulting strategy was broad in scope and ambition, sporting eight areas of partnership that ranged from promoting the Millennium Development Goals to space flight. The joint strategy, formally adopted in 2007 at the Africa-EU Summit in Lisbon, provided an overarching consultation framework with the aim to enhance the strategic and political partnership between the two continents. The framework sought to expand cooperation (1) beyond trade and aid to political cooperation, (2) beyond Africa to addressing global issues, (3) beyond official actors towards ensuring broad-based participation including civil society and (4) beyond fragmentation to determining regional and continental responses (Helly et al 2014: 10). In the words of the EU development commissioner, the strategy would allow the partnership to move beyond 'the outdated, threadbare relationship of "donor" and "beneficiary" (Michel in Del Biondo 2015: 7).

Reflecting the 'equal partnership' committed to, the joint strategy refrained from setting out specific amounts of funding to implement the actions agreed to. The statement instead listed a range of EU instruments that would be used, with the EDF appearing first in the list, while complemented by EU and AU member state contributions when 'possible' (JAES 2007: 24). This prominent position of the EDF seems justified in that the large majority of AU members are also part of the ACP group, yet the 'internal agreement' between the EU member states explicitly that the fund serves to 'implement the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement and the Association Decision' (EU 2006: 1). The reference to the EDF in the joint strategy called for resources reserved for a different partnership and resulted in its layering: new roles were defined for the EDF, without changing its overall objective and purpose. Although formally existing to promote the ACP-EU partnership and financing the OCTs, the EU and its MS considered that they could decide independently on the use of the EDF for additional means. This suggests that layering can broaden the scope of a policy without fundamentally changing its direction.

During the negotiations, the African partners appeared under the impression that there was some relation between the level of ambition agreed and the availability of resources on the EU's side to further cooperation. The development of a separate action plan adopted together with the strategy at the second Africa-EU summit in Lisbon perhaps reinforced this expectation. The 2010 follow-up summit showed that progress since the strategy's adoption had been uneven, and registered that 'the African side was surprised by the lack of dedicated funding for the activities in the Action Plan' (Helly et al 2014: 22). The EU's response that the JAES would combine and draw from various existing financial sources and programmes was not deemed convincing as African states were expecting the JAES funding to be additional to these (Aggad-Clerx and Tissi 2012). Several studies noted the discrepancy between the equal footing discourse of the JAES and Africa's expectation of full EU funding (Bossuyt and Sherrif 2010; Helly et al 2014), which can be explained by the path dependence promoted by the earlier Lomé conventions and the Cotonou Agreement where the EU provided the means of implementation.

It however proved challenging for the EU to secure the resources at the level that was expected by its African counterparts, and to ensure adequate involvement of member states on both continents. Africa included 48 of the 78 members of the ACP group, yet also included Northern African states with their own association agreements with the EU (with the exception of Libya). Parts of the considerable resources for ACP-EU cooperation, at that time principally provided through the 9^{th} and 10^{th} EDF, could however not simply be re-routed to the African Union for implementing the strategy. Any resources for the

strategy had to be provided after prior agreement with the ACP states' diplomatic representatives in Brussels, which together with the EU decided on the use of the intra-ACP cooperation budget. The ACP representatives moreover disagreed with the EU's proposal to allocate additional funds for institutional capacity building of the AU from their EDF, despite having earlier agreed to allow the EDF to be used to fund the Africa Peace Facility (APF) in 2003, following the AU's request to the EU (Del Biondo 2015). The use of the EDF to provide substantial funding to the APF constituted another form of layering: the EDF had for historical reasons remained outside the EU's budget, and hence provided a legal loophole to the Treaty's limitation for using the EU's budget to finance military operations. As with the overall JAES funding no formal change in the EDF rules themselves was made or added. The associated objectives to support the African Peace and Security Architecture were instead simply informally added to all other cooperation priorities funded from the EDF, yet were neither foreseen in the EDF rules nor in the Cotonou agreement.

As the resourcing question was now putting the strategy's success at risk, the EU resolved to seek a direct funding source for the strategy (Aggad-Clerx and Tissi, 2012). In its legislative proposal for the Development Cooperation Instrument under the 2014-2020 MFF, the EU proposed a Pan-African Instrument of 1 billion Euro in total for this period. Although this provided a direct source of stable funding, directly linked to initiatives driven by Africa, it was observed that both the general involvement of EU member states and African states and their specific roles in relation to its day-to-day management remained unclear. More importantly, the EU legal basis for the funding was deemed to be at odds with the equal footing spirit behind the partnership (Helly et al 2014), more so than the EDF which according to the Cotonou agreement should be jointly managed by the EU and ACP states. The successful implementation of the joint Africa-EU partnership, which emphasised equal partnership with strong 'beyond-aid' branding, thus became officially dependent on the provision of EU aid.

POST-COTONOU NEGOTIATIONS

ACP-EU Cooperation is currently governed under the Cotonou agreement, which followed the series of Lomé Conventions and is set to expire at the end of December 2020.³ At the start of his term of September 2014, Commission President Juncker mandated the new Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development with preparing a revised Cotonou agreement (Keijzer and Schulting 2018). Following a number of expert roundtables in various EU member states during the first half of 2015, the EU initiated a public consultation titled 'Towards a new partnership between the EU and the ACP countries after 2020'.⁴ Accompanying the public consultation was a paper with the EU's take on the evolution and state of play of the partnership to accompany the public consultation questions, which suggested the following evolution in the relationship: 'The initial emphasis of the ACP-EU partnership was on development aid and trade matters, reflecting a donor-recipient relationship. As circumstances and the relationship have changed, the partnership has come to focus on pursuing common interests' (EC 2015: 2).

The EU's statement sought to put a positive 'spin' on the drift and exhaustion that the partnership had experienced since the turn of the century. Under the Cotonou Agreement that had been signed in 2000, the trade preferences provided by the EU to the ACP countries – and which were challenged in the WTO for discriminating against non-ACP states – were replaced by Economic Partnership Agreements and the EU's General System of Preferences. The Cotonou agreement still includes general provisions on economic and trade cooperation, yet the layering of new trade initiatives reduced the scope of the partnership to one focused on development cooperation (Keijzer and Bartels 2017). An evaluation of the Cotonou Agreement by the European Commission showed limited cooperation results beyond those through EDF-financed development cooperation (EU 2016c), with its findings thus suggesting a degree of institutional exhaustion in the partnership with ambitious political, trade and development dimensions.

Social media posts and statements by Commissioner Neven Mimica and by Director General Stefano Manservisi stressed the need to move away from a 'donor-recipient relationship' to a 'genuine partnership' or alternatively a 'political partnership'. 5 Informed by the results of the public consultation and an ex-ante impact assessment, a joint Communication by the European Commission and External Action Service about a year later set out detailed suggestions for the substance and nature of a new agreement, but refrained from commenting on how it should be financed. Its 29 pages did not contain any references to 'funding', 'financing' or even 'development cooperation', which was in part due to the objective to emphasise a shift in the partnership to a 'multi-level, multi-stakeholder partnership' in support of sustainable development (EC 2016b: 26). At the subsequent publication of the proposed EU negotiating mandate in December 2017, the Commissioner again asserted that '[r]enewing our partnership with the ACP countries is a unique opportunity to shape a true partnership of equals, moving beyond traditional donorrecipient perceptions'. The accompanying press release emphasised that the proposed negotiating mandate set out 'the basis and the main orientations for a modernised political partnership between equals. The Commission's ambition is to strongly focus on common interests and values, and to go beyond development policy only.'6

The European Commission published the proposed EU negotiating mandate a year later and clarified the budgetary implications as follows: 'This initiative is not expected to have significant new budgetary implications – though it should be noted that the amount of resources available to finance EU external action will be decided upon in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) review' (EC 2017: 6). This statement clarified that the negotiating mandate would be limited to the negotiation of the substance of a new agreement, and that its available financial resources would be decided upon through a different process. The final EU negotiating mandate was adopted in June 2018, and only differed on minor details from the EU's proposal, with perhaps the most important difference with the Commission's original proposal being the choice to negotiate a time-limited agreement (Keijzer and Schulting 2018).

The ACP states took a fundamentally different view in their negotiating mandate. In contrast to the EU's push for a different kind of partnership altogether, the ACP states considered the current main objective of the Cotonou Agreement to remain fully relevant.⁷ The ACP states propose the essence of the future partnership to entail EU support to sustainable development within ACP states, as opposed to the EU and ACP promoting sustainable development together. The negotiating mandate is moreover explicit on the financing needs of ACP states, stressing the need for all ACP states to continue having access to development finance, including those that graduate(d) to middle income country status. It further calls for retaining the EDF as an off-budget instrument. In line with this, the ACP mandate calls for the final provisions of the new agreement to specify 'financial protocols every seven years in keeping with the European Union Multi-annual Financial Framework' (ACP 2018: 41). The July 2020 decision by the European Council to incorporate the EDF into the overall EU budget removed this possibility. Along with many other reasons including the Covid-19 pandemic and contentious negotiation aspects (notably migration), the EU's intention to budgetise the EDF was a key factor explaining why the post-Cotonou negotiations which had been launched in September 2018 encountered delays and missed several deadlines suggested by the EU. The chief negotiators eventually reached a political deal on a new agreement on 3 December 2020, which necessitated a second extension of the Cotonou agreement to 31 November 2021 to ensure sufficient time for the subsequent process of approving, signing and ratifying the agreement (EC 2020).

This brief overview shows the difference in expectations between the EU and the ACP states, both in terms of the substance and process of negotiations. This can in part be understood by recent history, given the Cotonou agreement's financial protocol's function to prepare the EU's subsequent EDF financing decisions. Yet the call for financial protocols in the ACP mandate serves to underline both the need for and importance of providing adequate development finance. The EU, in turn, proposed a Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument (NDICI) in June 2018, the same month when it

finalised its ACP-EU negotiating mandate. This proposal (EC 2018) included substantial resources proposed for cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries as part of regional budgets for geographic cooperation, with the effect of incorporating the EDF into the EU multi-annual financial framework. The NDICI proposal's explanatory memorandum in fact states that the proposed EU budget instrument would 'constitute the framework for implementing the successor partnership to the current Cotonou Agreement' (Ibid.: 3). This emphasises the separate process through which the partnership and its resourcing are decided. This separation reflects the EU's apparent desire to 'decouple' the partnership agreement and the EDF, which due to the incremental changes described above had become a less dramatic change in the status quo and was indeed concluded in the form of the European Council's political agreement on the MFF (Council of the European Union 2020) and subsequently reached a joint political agreement with the Parliament on 10 November 2020. Yet similar to the JAES case, the EU's wish for decoupling cooperation means and financial means was not shared by its ACP counterparts, which subsequently complicated the post-Cotonou negotiations.

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from historical institutionalist research, the article presented a long-term perspective and looked into to what extent concepts of layering, drift and exhaustion may facilitate understanding of the incremental changes in the EU's development policy towards Africa over time. It observes that the decision to create the extra-budgetary EDF and the associated partnership agreement has been key in the shaping EU-Africa relations during the past decades. The 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy and ongoing post-Cotonou negotiations were used to further examine how the EU's matrix of financial and partnership institutions affects its cooperation ambitions towards Africa.

In the first case, the lack of dedicated EU financial resources failed to manage African countries' expectations and put the strategy at risk. As a coping strategy, the EU drew on the EDF's resources, despite this fund being linked to the implementation of Cotonou agreement. This drift of the EDF ensured the means of implementation for the strategy until a dedicated instrument was created, yet also contributed to exhaustion of the Cotonou agreement given the EDF's formal role of furthering that agreement.

The more recent post-Cotonou negotiations are held in a setting where evolving circumstances have introduced considerable exhaustion in the EU-ACP partnership. The partnership has 'shrunk' in coverage to an almost exclusive focus on development cooperation, particularly after the Cotonou agreement's role in governing economic cooperation and trade was moved into separate free trade agreements and EU trade frameworks. The introduction of new initiatives that used EDF-reserves while bypassing established ACP-EU decision-making processes particularly caused the institution to further drift from its function to further the Cotonou agreement.

Looking across these two processes, both show that the EU's interlocutors – respectively African states and the larger ACP group – did not reciprocate the EU's discourse calling for a move away from donor-recipient relationships and for decoupling cooperation agendas from (EU) financial means. For the JAES, the expectation was that additional resources to those earmarked under the ACP-EU partnership would be made available to African states. During the ongoing post-Cotonou negotiations, ACP states called for preserving the north-south nature of the partnership by pushing to retain the Cotonou agreement's existing objectives. Both examples show the considerable path dependence generated after successive decades of cooperation, and have themselves also been affected by more recent and short-term focused changes in the EU's development policy in relation to migration and external investment.

In conclusion, rather than EU-Africa relations being directly affected by the introduction of new EU plans and strategies, incremental change in EU-Africa institutions over time produces (un)intended continuity and changes in the overarching cooperation relationship.

Learning more about these unintended changes and accepting these for what they are could helpfully inform further efforts by policy makers to reform EU-Africa relations in the desired direction of change. Finally, although in part appearing in this article as a consequence of drift and layering than a self-standing type of endogenous change, the findings would suggest that there is scope for further exploring the relevance of exhaustion as a specific type of institutional change.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ An overview of existing EU agreements with third countries is available here: https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/
- ² Strasser (1992) defines six rules and one key principle for the EU budget: the rules of unity, universality, annuality, specification, equilibrium between revenue and expenditure, and unit of account, as well as the principle of sound financial management. Discussing these is beyond the scope of this article.
- 3 The agreement was initially set to expire at the end of February 2020, but was extended to coincide with the end of the 11^{th} EDF on 31 December 2020 to ensure sufficient time for concluding negotiations on a new agreement. As part of a political deal reached on 3 December, preparations for a second extension of the agreement to 30 November 2021 were prepared at the time that this article was finalised.
- ⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/public-consultation-eu-acp-new-partnership_en
- ⁵ Twitter search function for "donor-recipient relationship" on @mimicaEU and @europeaid, with results also including other social media accounts (27 February 2018).
- ⁶ Both quotes: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5223_en.htm
- ⁷ This overall objective is 'the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty consistent with the objectives of sustainable development and the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy' (ACP 2018: 6).

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Research Article

Trust, Integrity and the Weaponising of Information: the EU's Transparency Paradox

Mark Field and Sue Roberts

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Abstract

One of the great issues for governments and related organisations everywhere is that of staying close to their citizens and maintaining accountability through the provision of accurate, trustworthy and complete information. The size of an organisation can often impede open and timely information delivery, and the complexity of government structures can cause frustration and suspicion. Given the size and complexity of the EU, it could be considered reasonable to suppose that the EU would have institutional barriers to the integrity of the information provided to the public. Indeed, criticism of the EU is frequently framed in terms of its supposed lack of accountability and the claim that it is out of touch with its citizens (Gehrke 2019). To counter this, the EU makes increasing use of online systems to render its working practices visible to the public to facilitate scrutiny and improve transparency. However, these online systems have frequently been introduced without reliable and consistent quality assurance (QA) processes to ensure the accuracy of the information in the public domain in order to promote the institutional trust that the EU seeks. Furthermore, the EU ministerial declaration of 2005 argues for promoting 'public confidence' in information provision for e-government. Confidence and trust are inextricably linked, as this article shows. Drawing on 22 qualitative interviews with EU officials and representatives of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), this article demonstrates that low QA is in fact a deliberate policy, with the European Commission openly acknowledging its reliance on public control to police the information it provides through its online systems. This creates a transparency paradox by allowing CSOs to take advantage of the weakness in information QA to weaponise their information to attack the EU. This is a key consideration, not only for the EU but for all governments and nongovernmental organisations across the world. A perceived weakness in information provision which subverts the building of trust, particularly political trust, increases the scope for individual or state actors to exploit the internet to weaken and undermine citizen participation. This article tackles the issue through primary research to demonstrate the dangers of weaponised information in the modern political arena.

Keywords

Transparency; Accountability; e-government; Trust; Civil Society

The 2016 Brexit referendum result reflected a crisis of trust in politics and politicians. Abrams and Travaglino (2018) show through their examination of low trust and fears about immigration in the run-up to the referendum that this appears to have driven voter choice. Trust is a significant factor in the way that citizens respond to public institutions and politicians. Political trust can be defined as the 'faith' that people have in their government or institution (Abrams and Travaglino 2018). If this type of trust is an essential part of the relationship between citizens, the state and its representatives, then any damage done to that relationship may be expected to cause disquiet among politicians and resentment on the part of citizens. Metlay (2013) argues that citizen trust provides political legitimacy for democratic organisations and Schafheitle, Weibel, Meidert and Leuffen (2019) state that citizen trust in political institutions is necessary for any political system to function: it is fundamental. Without it, citizen confidence in the quality and accuracy of the information disseminated by political organisations is both compromised and weakened. Schafheitle et al. go on to argue that 'unstable trust in European institutions threatens effective governance' (2019: 1). This is a key point and is further explored in this article by examining the governance processes through which the European Union (EU) provides online information to its citizens as a means of enhancing trust in the EU to strengthen its democratic legitimacy. The article goes on to analyse the unintended consequences of the EU's weak quality assurance (QA) processes, allowing the information produced to be weaponised against them, potentially weakening both trust and democratic legitimacy. In its analysis of the resultant transparency paradox, this article adds to a growing body of literature on political e-governance in large governmental organisations, a topic of increasing importance in the context of a fast-developing atmosphere of distrust in governments across the world (Bannister and Connolly 2012; Field 2019).

In the aftermath of the United Kingdom's (UK) 'Brexit' referendum result and in the context of anticipated electoral gains for far right parties across Europe, the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament convened a public hearing *Restoring citizen confidence and trust in the European Project* (European Ombudsman 2017): a title that could be seen to reflect concerns on the part of the EU to shore up any damage done to the organisation as a result of the events in Britain. Indeed, during the hearing, the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, urged the EU institutions to improve the transparency of law-making as a necessary condition for restoring public trust in the EU. In her comments, however, she acknowledged that the public appetite for detailed information about EU processes is limited:

The EU institutions need to be open not so that every single citizen can be fully informed all the time about the minutiae of what's going on, but rather that their elected representatives or civil society organisations can act in their interests (European Ombudsman 2017).

In this statement, O'Reilly recognises that, although having the means to access and analyse detailed and specific information about activity in the EU's institutions, relatively few citizens choose to do so. Rather, this role is exercised by civil society groups acting on behalf of the public, ostensibly in the interests of transparency, which O'Reilly suggests will promote public trust in the institutions. This article challenges this assumption by demonstrating that the increased availability of information can undermine, rather than increase citizen trust. The article also explores why and how civil society groups scrutinise the activities of the EU institutions on behalf of citizens. In doing this, the article adds to a continuing dialogue concerning the involvement of civil society in matters of transparency and accountability, while considering the notion of promoting trust through information provision (Abrams and Travaglino 2018) and governance (Fung 2015; Schafheitle et al. 2019). Furthermore, the article investigates why, despite a significant growth in the numbers and accessibility of online systems, independent analysis of the veracity of this information frequently identifies errors in both the accuracy of the information provided (Field 2013; Greenwood and Dreger 2013) and of information exposing non-compliant practices within the institutions. With the supposed relationship

between the openness of the EU institutions and public trust identified by the Ombudsman, this article essentially addresses two questions:

- 1. How does the practice of inviting informal public scrutiny of information enhance public trust?
- 2. To what extent does the provision of transparency through online provision of accurate and complete information enhance the trustworthiness and integrity of the EU?

Within both questions lie complexities around context and communication which makes informal public scrutiny of information and the idea of transparency through online platforms a complicated and difficult problem for many organisations, not just the EU (Stvilia 2008). Contextually, there are special issues for the EU which relate to its structure, its resources and its culture. It is a large, complex and well-resourced organisation, with some departments acting in what appear to be independent ways; a point acknowledged by Gornitzka and Sverdrup (2008) who identified 'sectoral differentiation': variations in working processes, norms and routines amongst the Commission directorates general (DGs). A number of scholars have argued that this issue is a function of EU institutional rivalry and administrative power struggles - a feature common to large institutions such as this, especially those with political leanings (Gornitzka and Sverdrup 2008; Ashkenas 2011; Bach, De Francesco, Maggetti and Ruffing 2016; Kassim 2008; Kortelainen and Koeppen 2018). The clear cultural distance between groups and departments causes fragmentation between the different sections of the organisation, which can lead to problems in the consistency of communication with the public. This is significant because inconsistency in information provision on the part of a governmental organisation can affect trust and the provision of information clearly demonstrates non-compliant practices. This may lead the public to question the veracity, and therefore the integrity, of that information. Accurate, timely and rule-compliant information provision is thus inextricably linked to trust. The integrity of the information placed in the public domain must be accurate in order for the public to invest their trust in it and in those providing it.

The notion of engaging with the public through an online platform seems itself to be a proxy for communicating with them directly. An early study by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that it is not necessarily the case that e-government and the provision of information online will improve either public participation or transparency (Tolbert and Mossberger 2006). Merely providing information does not constitute communication. In fact, Habermas's notion of the public sphere characterises the environment in which the public can expect to engage with information provided by the state:

Autonomy from state and economic power. Discourse must be based on the concerns of citizens as a public rather than driven by the media of money and administrative power that facilitate the operations of the market and state (Habermas in Dahlberg 2001).

This reverses the premise that the state should provide information to the public irrespective of its needs. Communicating with the public could instead, and perhaps more profitably, be achieved by first addressing what it is the public wishes to know. It does not necessarily follow that the public will want, or indeed perceive the need, to engage with large amounts of information provided by a governmental institution.

This is an issue for both public bodies and those providers in the private sector that generate online information. Our desire to 'tell' in the interests of transparency is often not matched by the public's desire either to know or listen. The sheer quantity and complexity of information available from the EU is daunting, even to the most dedicated of public scrutineers, and can obfuscate rather than elucidate (Kassim in Featherstone and

Radaelli 2003: 85-86). An increase in transparency is not achieved simply through the provision of more information. Rather, it is achieved through improvements in the quality, accuracy, reliability and completeness of information. This allows for proper oversight of regulatory compliance and it is this that provides the integrity essential to the promotion of public trust (Kim, Dirks, Cooper and Ferrin 2006).

Carter and Belanger (2005: 9) note that trust and citizen confidence in electronic information are significant predictors of the willingness of citizens to engage with egovernment and that integrity in such information is important in the development of trust. In the UK, for example, the obligations for good quality information upon public bodies derive from the Nolan Committee's Seven Principles of Public Life (HM Government 1995) that identify the importance of both integrity and accountability in information provision. In other words, there is a moral obligation upon public bodies in the UK and further afield to ensure the integrity of any information set out in the public domain. However, the European Commission's EU eGovernment Action Plan, 2016-2020 (European Commission 2016), contains no such direct imperative for the EU to conduct e-government morally or ethically, but states that the openness and transparency of information should enhance trustworthiness and accountability in the EU. The assumption, therefore, appears to be that by making the information available to be scrutinised through public engagement, trust in the EU and its information should naturally follow. This is a significant omission. Without the assurance of integrity, trust will not automatically follow and trust is a crucial element in e-government provision, given that '[e]mpirical evidence has also ascertained trust as a salient driver of e-government adoption' (Tan, Benbasat and Cenfetelli 2008:1). But if the information from government institutions is not of sufficient quality to provide integrity, low trust may result. Schaftheitle et al. (2019) point out that there must be a perceived congruence between citizens' and government's values (p.5) and that this congruence helps to promote trust. Hetherington (1998) argues that low levels of trust help to create a political environment in which it is much harder for any political leadership to succeed, and it is confidence in the integrity of information provision that helps support the development of political trust.

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

Van der Meer (2017) described political trust as citizens' support for an institution or parliament in the face of uncertainty about or vulnerability to the actions of both (p.1). This is a significant description of political trust because it includes elements of uncertainty and unpredictability: uncertainty on the part of the citizen and unpredictability on the part of both the institution and the citizen. Other scholars describe trust as something that includes 'faith' (Rosenburg 1956) and it is clear from Van der Meer's definition of political trust that a leap of faith is required on the part of citizens in the face of such uncertainty and unpredictability.

Grimsley and Mehan look at the issue of evaluating public e-information to promote public value and trust in governmental institutions (2007: 134). Public value (Moore 1995) refers to the positive contribution, or value, that an organisation makes to society. This is closely related to the need for communities and citizens to invest in a trusting relationship with the state to establish the 'faith' in government referred to above, and Abrams and Travaglino (2018) show that this relationship is a significant predictor of voter behaviour. In other words, the information produced by a governmental institution must have integrity in order to promote trust, and trust will be a reliable predictor of voter behaviour and preference.

It is trust as a commodity that most private sector companies value in terms of product integrity. Private sector e-companies Wikipedia, Amazon and many other providers rely on public involvement and scrutiny of information to validate their products and promote trust through inviting product or service customer reviews. It is well recognised in the private sector that trust is a cashable commodity, but for the public sector this has no relation to product. Government investment in information provision is related to transparency with a view to promoting public trust in the institution, but this cannot happen without information integrity. It is no exaggeration to say that this is an essential element in governance. Schwartz (in Van Thiel and Leeuw 2002) affirms that large amounts of evaluative information that lack integrity, credibility, accuracy and validity are unlikely to promote public trust.

The need for integrity in information provision has strong connections with both the EU and UK governments' duties to provide good quality information to the public in the interests of transparency, but it is only in relatively recent years that the public performance of institutions has been of any interest to the general public (Hood 2006; European Parliament 2008). Since the advent of New Public Management (NPM), greater transparency has been a fundamental requirement in terms of information provision from the state (Hood 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). NPM seeks to advance the use of private sector practice in the public sector, which includes openness and transparency, both for performance and information provision. The issues discussed in this article review the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the activity of public scrutiny of information produced by the EU.

For the EU, the motive for increasing transparency is clearly rooted in an assumption that enhancing the provision of information available to citizens will result in gains in public trust. There is, however, little evidence that this trust gain is yielding dividends, with only 43 per cent of EU citizens expressing trust in the EU in the winter 2019 Eurobarometer data (Eurobarometer 2019). The article shows that, whilst new transparency tools have been designed and introduced to reduce a perceived gap between the EU and its citizens, poor internal oversight leads to either inaccurate information being placed in the public domain or, frequently, information that - whilst accurate - reveals non-compliant practices. Both create a transparency paradox where the systems designed to increase public confidence in the institutions can be systematically weaponised by outsider civil society organisations (CSOs) to erode this confidence and the trust that derives from it. We argue that this transparency paradox is a function of poor in-house quality control processes and that this constitutes a material weakness in the institutional transparency regime.

The article proceeds as follows. Following a short methodology section, the next section explores the administration and internal oversight arrangements for the EU's online information systems. Such a process is needed for two reasons. Firstly, it ensures the accuracy, and thus integrity, of material made available to EU citizens. Secondly, it acts as a check to ensure that this material does not expose a failure to comply with regulations and guidelines. The section shows that, whilst the EU has limited resources to oversee and check the quality of information, the lack of internal oversight reflects a conscious policy decision to delegate this task to EU citizens, reflected in the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-20, as a means of encouraging engagement with, and knowledge of, the EU. The third section discusses the role of civil society groups acting as a proxy for this public control, and shows that groups frequently use the EU institutions' transparency tools as a weapon in their wider campaigning aims. The nature of this weaponisation is explored in the third section's case study. This charts the involvement of two high profile CSOs that regularly monitor the EU's online registers on behalf of the public and explores the weaponisation tactics they employ to publicise irregularities in pursuit of their wider campaigning aims.

METHODOLOGY

This research project draws on a total of 22 semi-structured interviews conducted: three with officials at the European Parliament, seven with officials at the European Commission and 12 with representatives of a range of EU CSOs. The interviews with EU officials explored the workings of the administrative and oversight arrangements of the electronic registers and captured the institutional view as to the purpose and workings of transparency in policymaking, as well as the links between transparency and related ideas of trust and accountability. The CSO interviews were all with representatives of groups that campaign for increased transparency of EU institutional processes. These interviews were conducted with both insider and outsider groups and investigated the different tactics used by these groups to further their transparency campaigning aims. All interviews were conducted in Brussels between 2012-2015.

ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL OVERSIGHT OF THE ONLINE TRANSPARENCY PORTAL

At around 38,000, the total number of staff at the European Commission is relatively small for a body representing half a billion citizens. With its complex arrangement of 28 (now 27) Commissioners and 53 Departments (DGs) and executive agencies, the Commission has long been portrayed as bureaucratically fragmented, with decisions made in silos (Bauer 2008) and its DGs operating as independent fiefdoms (Kassim 2008).

In an effort to address this fragmentation, the Commission has sought to ensure its processes are 'steered' from an executive centre, with its Presidency and Secretariat (DG-SG) at its heart (Trondal 2012). Trondal found the success of this bureaucratic centre formation varied across DGs and services and showed that the Commission was broadening the role of DG-SG, placing increased reliance on it as a Commission-wide coordinating body. With a staff of 600, DG-SG has a wide remit. This includes ensuring the overall coherence of the Commission's policy proposals, acting as the Commission's interface with the other institutions and supporting the DGs in their contacts with civil society. Additionally, DG-SG has overall responsibility for Commission transparency, including the information provided to the public through the transparency portal: an online citizen resource administered by DG-SG's Institutional and Administrative Policies (IAP) Directorate and accessible through the 'Europa' website.

In order to understand the process of rendering information available through the online transparency portal, seven interviews were undertaken: three with senior personnel at the European Parliament Secretariat and four with the administrative team of the IAP Directorate of the European Commission's DG-SG. These interviews revealed that at both institutions the upkeep of online registers is undertaken by a single individual. At the Commission, the overall responsibility lies with IAP, with the routine maintenance and upkeep of this register conducted by a single administrative assistant within the unit, whilst at the European Parliament, responsibility for the registers lies with the Members' Administration Unit, but with the routine work again undertaken by a single administrative assistant. Shapiro (1999) warned of this, drawing attention to organisations' reliance on a single individual, sometimes through pressure of work, to filter information via the internet, especially in government (p.7). This, he says, is a danger; one that can undermine the integrity and trust crucial for governmental institutions. Information may be viewed as more robust and trustworthy if it were overseen by an independent body or group of people tasked with ensuring accuracy. Credibility is an essential resource for organisations, especially those in government who bear an ethical responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of information. Establishing this credibility helps to develop a reputation for providing correct information (Keohane and Nye 1998: 89). Accuracy encourages and supports the development of trust on the part of the public. The fragility

of relying on a single individual seems therefore imprudent and risky and the issue of trust in that single individual on the part of the organisation is doubly important. Moreover, using an individual to produce, police and update information for an organisation bestows control, and potentially power, upon that individual.

Initial questions to interview participants sought to understand how the portal is administered and the degree of institutional oversight to ensure the data published on the registers is accurate and compliant with institutional regulations and guidance. In each case, participants asserted that their organisations lacked both the capacity and resources to conduct regulatory compliance oversight or to test data for accuracy, stating that responsibility for these issues lay with the individual registrants at the Parliament, and with the *chef de cabinet* of the relevant DG at the Commission.

In addition to this resource issue, Parliament officials mobilised legal arguments to explain the lack of any institutional oversight of the register.

We do not certify the information correct. We cannot. We do not have the means to police it and there is no legal basis for us to do so - we rely on self-control and public control (Parliament secretariat official).

For those involved specifically with the Commission's online registers, the resource issue was again raised, but here there was a view that responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the data and regulatory compliance lay with the institutions, but at DG level, rather than centrally.

It is for each DG to ensure the information is correct. Even if there was time, we could not check the content because only the DGs know about [their expert groups] ... and there are nearly a thousand groups across all the DGs (Commission policy officer).

However, discussion concerning the routine administration of the Commission's Register of Expert Groups revealed an important factor relating to accuracy and compliance of the register. Three interview participants within the IAP Directorate commented that, although responsibility for checking the data provided in the register lay with the individual groups' parent DGs, variations in directorates' internal processes produced uneven results. To illustrate, whilst institutional arrangements require each DG to have a nominated individual with responsibility for the register, DGs interpret this role and its functions differently. As a result, day to day responsibility for the online register may lie with a fairly senior policy officer or coordinator, a relatively junior administrative assistant or, in some cases, a temporary intern (Commission administrative officer). As discussed, trust and accuracy in information provision are inextricable. If the EU desire for increased trust is to be believed, the dislocation between this desire and the inability to 'police' the information will always preclude the development of trust in the organisation. This must be addressed if the EU truly wishes to enhance trust in their organisation.

This is not unusual, particularly in modern public services in the UK and where resources are scarce, but the lack of resources available to 'police' accuracy in information provision in the EU is interesting given the serious implications of producing inaccurate information. When the UK began to consider the possibility of public scrutiny of its information, safeguards, checks and balances were put in place. Yet accurate information provision and its integrity are highly valued commodities, particularly in the private sector, for the purpose of bolstering company integrity with potential customers. Reputation online is valuable, and this view is echoed in the EU eGovernment Action Plan, 2016-2020 (European Commission 2016). A further question is why the EU should *not* elect to put more resources into checking or policing its information provision at this level, especially when the EU itself began the move in 1999 to bring its information to everyone in Europe via the internet (Irani, Love, Elliman, Jones et. al. 2005: 62).

It seems clear then, that the internal QA procedure for the online registers is - at best - inconsistent, reflecting the limited resources available. Generally, however, there is little public engagement with these electronic registers (Field 2013), suggesting that reliance on 'public control' to ensure the integrity of a large and varied array of information is rather ambitious, a point supported by Keohane and Nye's observation that '[a] plenitude of information leads to poverty of attention' (1998: 89). Given this, the role undertaken by those civil society groups that monitor and police the online registers is clearly important in terms of providing a check on the accuracy of the registers. Importantly, however, these groups have limited resources to undertake this monitoring and they are therefore selective in the scrutiny they undertake on behalf of EU citizens, an issue explored in the next section.

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AS A PROXY FOR PUBLIC CONTROL OF INFORMATION

As the European Ombudsman acknowledged in her speech at the European Parliament, in practical terms, the EU institutions' transparency processes are generally used by civil society groups acting on behalf of EU citizens. This section considers the role of civil society groups as both transparency monitors and advocates.

A number of Brussels-based societal groups have areas of activity which particularly focus on the relationship between the EU institutions and the corporate sector. For example, the group *European Coalition for Corporate Justice* (ECCJ) campaigns for tighter regulation on financial disclosure by multi-national companies (ECCJ 2019). To monitor this, ECCJ campaigns for greater transparency of the EU policymaking process. In that sense, transparency is a tool to meet its wider campaign aim to expose the institutional-corporate relationship around financial regulation. Generally, civil society groups have limited resources and expertise to allocate to transparency activities and so exercise this scrutiny function in one of two ways. For a few groups, a specific individual is responsible for overseeing activities in the institutions. For example, both the Madrid based *Access Info Europe* (AIE) and the Brussels based *Transparency International (EU)* (TI-EU) have, within a small team of eight to ten personnel, a single individual solely responsible for promoting and monitoring transparency at the EU institutions. Similarly, the Brussels based *Friends of the Earth Europe* (FoEE) has a former Commission employee responsible only for monitoring the activities of and liaising with the Commission.

However, whilst each of these three groups campaigns for greater EU transparency, there are some differences. FoEE - like ECCJ - campaigns for transparency as a means to further its Economic Justice campaign. In that sense, transparency is the group's ancillary objective: a means to an end. By contrast, both AIE and TI-EU have transparency as a core campaigning aim - an end in itself - with the transparency specialist working across policy areas.

Even amongst the core transparency groups there are significant differences, as some work closely with the EU institutions. The Brussels chapter of Transparency International - its EU liaison office - consists of ten paid staff, augmented by a small number of volunteers (TI-EU 2016). In 2013, approximately 40 per cent of the funding for its EU office was provided by DG Education and Culture (DG EAC) and it has a presence on a small number of Commission expert advisory groups (TI-EU 2016). In 2012, TI-EU was selected as Brussels 'NGO of the year' by the European public affairs community (EPACA 2015).

Despite having approximately the same number of staff as TI-EU, and with a very similar operating budget, the Brussels based core transparency group Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) receives no EU funding. Describing itself as a research and campaign group, CEO's structure differs from that of TI-EU in that it appears to be a stand-alone

organisation, rather than one acting under an umbrella group. Interestingly, however, two of CEO's six-person advisory board are members of the Amsterdam-based *Transnational Institute of Policy Studies* (TNI). TNI, established in 1974, describes itself as a group of 'activist researchers' committed to 'confronting corporate globalisation' (TNI 2015).

It seems clear that these proxy groups have their own agendas in relation to information scrutiny. This creates a transparency paradox as this agenda is at odds with the clear intention expressed in the European Commission's Action Plan (European Commission 2016): that EU citizens should have the opportunity to scrutinise and correct the information provided in order to ensure accuracy, openness and transparency (2:4), which should promote trust. The next section considers this transparency paradox in practice, by exploring how one such group uses the EU's transparency tools to weaponise information in pursuit of its wider campaigning aims.

CASE STUDY: CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS' OVERSIGHT OF DG ENTERPRISE (DG ENTR)

This section examines how a Brussels-based campaigning group - the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) - identified irregularities in the Commission's online register of expert groups and successfully used high profile tactics to force the Commission to address these irregularities.

Although formally separate from the longer-standing campaigning organisation CEO, ALTER-EU and CEO have always been closely linked. CEO itself was established in Amsterdam in 1997 but later moved to Brussels where it currently shares an office building with ALTER-EU. CEO also shares ALTER-EU's campaigning aims, with a stated role to 'expose and challenge the power of corporate lobbying over European Union policy-making' (CEO 2019). The apparent closeness of the two groups is borne out by analysis of the relevant entries on the EU's Joint Transparency Register (JTR). The same individual is listed as the permanent person in charge of EU relations, whilst the financial disclosure section of ALTER-EU's entry lists CEO as its largest funder, providing for more than fifty per cent of its total operating budget (JTR 2016).

Launched in 2005 and composed of approximately 200 societal groups, trade unions and academics, ALTER-EU represents members 'concerned with the increasing influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe' (ALTER-EU 2019). The organisation is open to any group or individual in broad sympathy with its campaigning aims. ALTER-EU has a coordinator who actively identifies and approaches potential members. Its membership is extremely broad and includes consumer organisations, environmental groups and groups supporting the rights of indigenous people. The obvious logic to this arrangement is that it provides mutual benefits. ALTER-EU is able to present itself as a representative of a broad membership whilst even the smallest constituent group has its voice amplified. For both, there are increased access opportunities as this arrangement meets the Commission's long-established consultation principles whereby it prefers to engage with groups that can show that they represent a plurality of views.

In the conduct of their roles, both CEO and ALTER-EU adopt similar high-profile tactics to publicise particular instances of perceived over-representation of the corporate sector in the policy forums. Both groups' websites give access to reports with titles such as *Corporate Capture in Europe* (CEO 2018).

In July 2010, ALTER-EU submitted a complaint to the European Ombudsman in which it argued that the high incidence of business interests within the Commission Expert Groups represented 'regulatory capture' by the corporate sector. To provide evidence for this claim, ALTER-EU presented a detailed analysis of the expert groups in a single directorate: DG Enterprise (DG ENTR). Subsequently, ALTER-EU published the data in a report sub-

titled, *The dominance of corporate lobbyists in DG Enterprise's expert groups.* In its format, this report - with its catchy title and visually striking cover - resembled others published by ALTER-EU and CEO. The report contained analysis of the information ALTER-EU had gathered from the online Register of Expert Groups which showed both non-compliance with Commission guidelines on balanced expert groups and inaccurate information through non-provision of information. The report stated that, of non-governmental expert advisers at DG ENTR, 482 were from the corporate sector compared to 255 from other non-government sectors. The complaint cited this data, arguing that the information provided showed 32 of the 83 expert groups at DG ENTR to be 'dominated by big business'; a finding that it said was probably an underestimate because data on several of DG ENTR's expert groups was missing entirely from the Commission's register (ALTER-EU 2016).

To mark the launch of the report, ALTER-EU held a public event (attended by one of this article's authors) at the Brussels headquarters of the Press Association. The event was coorganised with the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and took the form of a panel discussion of the report. The panel was chaired by a senior activist from the Economic Justice Unit of Friends of the Earth Europe - a campaign group represented on ALTER-EU's steering committee. The three speakers were Yiorgos Vassalos from CEO, Denis De Jong MEP from the Nordic Green Left party and Lluis Prats from DG ENTR. Speakers were given a short time to present their organisations' positions on the report, followed by a panel discussion and audience question and answer session.

At the audience session, virtually every question was addressed to the Commission representative and related to detailed aspects of the report. Whilst it initially appeared surprising that audience members had been able to digest the report in the short time available, it was apparent that those selected for questions tended to be individuals associated with CEO and Friends of the Earth Europe. Although a number of mainstream journalists were present at the event, the only one selected to ask a question was the freelance journalist and transparency campaigner David Cronin. The questions directed to Prats tended to be hostile in tone, with many employing the language used in the report, including the phrases '... puppet of big business' and '... corporate capture'. Here it seemed that the event conveners sought not just to raise the profile of the report itself but also to weaponise its contents by magnifying both the imbalance in the expert groups at DG ENTR and the information missing from the report that had led to ALTER-EU's complaint to the Ombudsman.

Following the complaint, the Ombudsman forwarded ALTER-EU's complaint to the Commission, inviting it to submit an opinion concerning the specific allegations in the complaint. In the opening paragraph of its 75-page response - published on ALTER-EU's website - the Commission's letter stated:

Over the past few years, ALTER-EU has written to the Commission several times on expert group related issues. In its replies, the Commission has always provided ALTER-EU with relevant and detailed information. In addition ... the complainant and officials from the Commission met on 22 September 2009 for an informal discussion on some of the issues raised by ALTER-EU (ALTER-EU 2016).

The Commission's letter seems to demonstrate an informal but ongoing dialogue between the Commission and ALTER-EU, although the expert group complaint discussed above was actually submitted ten months after the meeting described in the Commission's response. In addressing the particular allegation of imbalance in the EGs at DG ENTR, the Commission stated that:

[The Commission] has fully acknowledged that a fair balance of non-industry stakeholders' representation in consultation processes has still to

be achieved. In that respect, the Commission is committed to seek an adequate presence of civil society representative in its EGs in the area of internal market, both in setting-up new groups and in re-arranging the composition of existing ones where appropriate (ALTER-EU 2016).

The Commission's response alerted interested parties to the Commission's apparent undertaking to address the composition of the expert groups at DG ENTR. During the summer of 2012, DG ENTR announced that the composition of thirteen groups would be modified through a single call for expressions of interest. This call was published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (OJEU) on 1 September and a link to the call was also published on the Register of Expert Groups. The deadline for applications was 31 October 2012.

By comparing the archival database with the later version of the register, it is clear that limited changes were introduced in the composition of the expert groups at DG ENTR. Correspondence with the relevant official at DG ENTR provided information concerning the number of responses to the call for expressions of interest, broken down into the relevant groups. Table 1 shows the changes in the composition of the expert groups at DG ENTR following ALTER-EU's complaint to the Ombudsman:

Table 1 - Responses to calls for expressions of interest

Group Name	Orig. No.	Applications Received	No. of New Appointees	Representing
Agrictultural Tractors	56	2	0	
Motorcycles	57	5	2	1 x Consumer; 1 x Research
Motor Vehicles	89	8	4	1 x Consumer; 1 x Research; 1 x Environment; 1 x Road Safety
Gas Appliances	52	1	0	
Forestry and Forest Industries	44	3	0	
Explosives	39	5	1	Research
Mission Evolution	27	6	1	Consumer Organisation
Fertilizers	55	1	1	Research
ICT Standardisation	55	6	1	Disabled People
Raw Materials Supply	62	46	5	4 x Research; 1 x Trade Unions
Eco Design	56	6	0	
Measuring Instruments	47	0	0	

As Table 1 shows, in most cases very few applications were made. Where applications were received but without a subsequent appointment, the Commission considered that the applicant lacked the relevant experience. Just one group received a large number of applications, but most of these came from organisations that were already members of the group. In total, fifteen additional appointments from outside industry and the corporate sector were made to the expert groups at DG ENTR, representing a modest shift of 2.3 per cent representation from business to non-business interests.

DISCUSSION

At one level, the case examined above shows that a high-profile intervention by a campaigning group can affect institutional change. ALTER-EU's complaint to the European Ombudsman resulted in DG ENTR introducing changes to the composition of its expert groups and addressing inaccurate and non-compliant entries on the registers. The nature of this intervention is significant, however. ALTER-EU's complaint to the Ombudsman followed its analysis of the composition of the Commission Expert Groups at DG ENTR only. In its public response, DG ENTR acknowledged that there was a degree of imbalance in these groups, although it argued that earlier invitations issued to NGOs to participate in its Expert Groups had not been taken up. This, coupled with the fact that DG ENTR's raison d'être was to be 'the voice of industry and enterprise in European policy making' perhaps goes some way to explain its reliance on business representatives within its expert groups.

In terms of the extent to which the monitoring groups conduct oversight, it is clear such groups have limited resources, so the degree of scrutiny they can undertake is necessarily selective. This, coupled with the lack of resources in DGs themselves, creates a structural inability to police and scrutinise the large quantity of information produced by the EU. As a result, the aspiration of public scrutiny and correction set out in the Action Plan (European Commission 2016: 4) has not been achieved to date; a situation that seems likely to persist in the context of the ongoing tight fiscal constraints around resource In itself, with adequate resources, selective scrutiny is neither unusual nor problematic and it can be an effective tool to modify behaviour or ensure compliance with regulation - a company that has a random drug testing regime or employs monthly spot checks of expense claims, for example. For the campaigning groups in this case, however, there is a crucial difference: the selective scrutiny is not random. Particular directorates and policy areas are singled out for attention, with this choice reflecting the groups' campaigning interests. Thus, with a logo that includes the strapline We expose the power of corporate lobbying in the EU, it is unsurprising that CEO's institutional oversight tends to focus on those directorates where corporate influence is most likely. Beyond this disproportionate focus on certain directorates, the publicity-maximising tactics by the monitoring groups facilitated by the EU's poor internal QA processes creates a transparency paradox: the information provided by the EU institutions can be weaponised by those accessing this information.

In the management of the public event at the ÖGB, and particularly in the selection and tone of the questions, it was evident that the main purpose of the report's launch event - arguably, of the report itself - was to provide a forum for supporters of CEO and ALTER-EU to maximise the impact of the latter's complaint to the European Ombudsman. Significantly, the group had used the publicly available online Register of Expert Groups to gather the information for its report and to identify instances where information was missing from the register. As one of a number of registers hosted on the transparency portal, it was one of those cited by Commission Officials as a means of enhancing citizen confidence in the institutions. In this case, however, the transparency portal provided the means for ALTER-EU to select data that would reinforce its charge of 'corporate capture' and so maximise the reputational damage to the Commission. The expressed intention for citizens and businesses to correct and control their own information (European

Commission 2016: 4) seems naïve in view of the 'weaponisation' of information for the exclusive ends of campaigning groups. Instead of increasing trust in the EU, this weaponisation has allowed the EU to be subject to targeted and focused attacks, largely as a result of having pursued a policy of laissez-faire governance in relation to accuracy and completeness of information through the online registers.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated that the EU's transparency processes are severely hampered by a lack of resources and internal quality checks allowing inaccurate or incomplete data to find its way into the public domain. This is likely to compromise any attempt to promote public trust, which relies upon the integrity, accuracy and veracity of information provision. It follows that any demonstration that information put out by the EU is unreliable, questionable or inconsistent will not lend credence to any bid for greater trust and integrity. The data provided through the transparency mechanisms are not routinely inspected for accuracy before publication, neither is a spot-check regime in place. Furthermore, citizens are not routinely engaging with EU information either to check or correct it in a way that seems to have been anticipated in the strategies and action plans published by the EU about e-information provision. The EU's desire to tell is not matched by the citizens' desire to listen, and certainly not by an eagerness to check for accuracy and compliance with complex regulations and guidelines. Moreover, the reliance on single individuals to generate and correct information within DGs leaves the institution vulnerable to both abuse and risk. By neglecting to apply standard regulatory management practice in information provision, the EU has abdicated responsibility for ensuring that the data it provides on the registers is accurate, instead leaving this function to the unreliable and unregulated checks and balances of public control. This shows a clear dislocation between the EU's stated wish to enhance public trust and its ability to provide accurate, complete - and therefore trustworthy - information. The article has shown that public checking and control of the information is chiefly conducted by proxy groups with a campaigning interest in publicising inconsistencies and irregularities. The article adds to the existing scholarship on transparency by identifying that placing information in the public domain needs careful management to avoid diminishing, rather than enhancing, public trust. As the case study shows, any transparency breach can be used by campaigning groups to create a transparency paradox. Here, the systems designed to enhance citizen confidence in the EU institutions are instead used by campaigning groups, with the information provided weaponised by these groups to erode public confidence and trust in the organisation.

The case study discussed in this article identifies two aspects to this transparency paradox. Firstly, whilst the case study shows that the scrutiny of public control by a campaigning group can be effective, the selective nature of this scrutiny coupled with the limited resources available to the groups, means that there is no oversight of areas which do not meet the groups' campaigning aims. This leaves some directorates and policy areas virtually exempt from scrutiny and so there is little incentive to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information placed in the public domain. This challenges the clear intention of the EU to provide good quality information that enhances public trust and EU transparency. Secondly, the delegation of responsibility for scrutiny to public control provides an opportunity for campaigning groups to identify and then amplify what might otherwise be considered fairly minor transgressions. In this way, the absence of an inhouse QA process allows the transparency tools that were introduced to engender public trust in the EU to be used to undermine that trust. Given that the EU in general - and the European Ombudsman in particular – link transparency to the restoration of citizen confidence and trust, the provision of inaccurate and incomplete information appears something of an own goal. As such, it seems clear that the lack of an in-house scrutiny process to oversee the quality of the information constitutes a material weakness in the

EU's transparency regime, and a salutary lesson to governments that reliance on public scrutiny of online information can be potentially damaging.

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Research Article

Non-elite conceptions of Europe: Europe as a reference frame in English football fan discussions

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Abstract

Discursive approaches to Europe usually focus on elite discourses and target a narrow political understanding of Europe. Against the backdrop of rising Euroscepticism and the known elite-mass divide on issues of European identity, it seems important to shift the focus toward non-elite discourses on Europe. Given that club football is largely Europeanised (player markets, continent-wide club competitions and broadcasting of matches), we analyse how fans of the English Premier League club Manchester United discursively construct 'Europe' in relation to their sport. Our main research question aims at identifying how identifications of fans have been unconsciously Europeanised in the wake of an ongoing Europeanisation of the game. We explore online discourses on rivalry, competition and player transfers in club football as these areas are strongly influenced by the interplay of national and European inclinations. Preliminary results of our qualitative content analysis demonstrate that Manchester United fans, inasmuch as their club 'goes Europe' on a frequent basis, have developed transnational perspectives on football. Distinctions between 'us' and 'them' are not predominantly based on nationality, even though they remain complex. However, European orientations (not the European Union as such) seem to play more of a prominent role than commonly assumed.

Keywords

European identity; Europeanisation; Football; Lifeworld; England

Analyses of how people imagine, narrate and discursively construct Europe are popular (Schmitt-Egner 2012; Risse and Grabowsky 2008; Polonska-Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi 2011; Maier and Risse 2003; Kaina and Karolewski 2013; Gillespie and Laffan 2006; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Brigevich 2018). This literature usually casts European identity in strictly political terms such as allegiance to the European Union (EU) or its symbols (Gillespie and Laffan 2006; Bruter 2003), attention patterns among politicised citizens and merging news agendas in the media (Risse 2010: 107-174; Polonska- Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi 2011; Koopmans and Statham 2010), or overlapping values, normative ideas or shared self-understandings (Kantner 2006). These approaches cover the formation of conscious political identities, geared towards the institutions and the EU integration project and towards Europe as a space emerging from shared normative convictions.

The recent rise of anti-European political actors and Eurosceptic public attitudes in countries across the continent, with Brexit as its apex, make it more pressing to understand how citizens build their relationship with Europe outside of official politics. Especially the political analyses following the Brexit referendum underlined the severe differences between rich and poor, well and less educated, as well as a centre-periphery divide regarding public attitudes towards Europe (Hobolt 2016; Goodwin and Heath 2016). Against this background, we seek to broaden the understanding of subliminal 'identity work' and discursive conceptions related to Europe resulting from leisure time activities. Linking our interest to the emerging literature on 'social transnationalism' and transboundary forms of activity, mobility and their effects on perceptions and articulations of people across Europe (Mitchell 2015; Mau 2010; Kuhn 2015, 2011), we argue that it is necessary to focus on the Europeanisation dynamics of everyday life (Hanquinet and Savage 2011; Favell, Recchi, Kuhn, Solgaard Jensen, et al. 2011; EUCROSS 2014). We use the lifeworld of football to ask to what degree identifications of fans have been Europeanised. More specifically, our main research question is: what communities of belonging do football fans relate to, and what frames of reference are relevant for them in the context of an ever-increasing Europeanisation of the game? Football provides an ideal field for an alternative approach to study how individuals understand and relate to Europe. It is an arena in which masses of people invest considerable time, effort and emotion. The field also draws in people who are known for rather varied or low levels of cosmopolitanism (Williams 2007; Mutz 2013; King 1997; Davis 2015; Cleland 2018, 2014; Cleland and Cashmore 2016). It hence presents a particularly hard case for possible emerging transnationalised identifications with Europe.

On the other hand, football as a game has been thoroughly Europeanised (Niemann, García and Grant 2011; Mittag and Legrand 2010; Brand, Niemann and Spitaler 2013 Niemann and Brand 2008; Brand and Niemann 2007). The Europeanisation of football exposes football fans regularly to Europe, even if only via their daily consumption of football news. Their clubs compete against teams from other European countries, either on the pitch or in the signing of players and managers. This is likely to affect how fans perceive such competition in the context of Europe in general. Their identification with the game might also influence how they see Europe, but the direction is not necessarily clear: would they perceive it as additional (potentially threatening) competition, or would they consider the Europeanisation as normal and establish Europe as their new reference frame (Millward 2007; Levermore and Millward 2007; King 2004)?

In order to elucidate the extent to which the Europeanisation of format and organisational structures within football has already resulted in Europeanised mind-sets, patterns of identification and articulations among the fans and spectators, we adopt a three-pronged analytical framework, consisting of three guiding concepts: subjective Europeanisation, communities of belonging (COB) and frames of reference (FOR). Much in line with the concept of "subjective globalisation" (Robertson 1992: 9; Steger and James 2011: 57, 62-65) – in its relation to material dynamics of globalisation itself – we put forms of 'subjective

Europeanisation' at the centre of our attention. This term, whose conceptual potential is explored below, allows for an analysis of the scope of ideational change (for example transformed imaginaries or perceptions) in the minds of people, even though such dynamics might be pre-reflexive, and the resulting 'identity work' might cover primarily non-conscious mechanisms of identification.

Whereas 'subjective Europeanisation' denotes the domain of reality towards which our analysis is geared, the other two concepts – COB and FOR –, indicate analytic dimensions where subjective Europeanisation might become visible in articulation and ensuing identity work. Building upon sociological identity concepts (Eder 2009; Brubaker and Cooper 2000), we develop COB and FOR as two dimensions of analysis which provide leverage to capture elements of group identifications (COB) as well as spatial (or scalar) reference frames (FOR). Aspects which can be subsumed under both concepts arguably form an integral part of any fan or citizen's self-concept without being strictly or even consciously political in nature. At the same time, both COB and FOR remain flexible enough to accommodate a host of identification patterns. Even though it is plausible that the Europeanisation of football's governance structures has affected how its fans and followers of the game relate to their outside world, and that their mind-sets have accordingly been Europeanised to some extent, this is not necessarily the case.

In the remainder of the article, we flesh out the conceptual backbone of our analysis. We develop the conceptual apparatus around subjective Europeanisation, COB and FOR into an analytical grid which allows us to decipher Europeanised patterns of identification among football fans. Thereafter, we specify our research design. This is followed by the empirical analysis of online discussion among Manchester United fans about rivalries, competition and transfers

SUBJECTIVE EUROPEANISATION AMONG FOOTBALL FANS

We situate fans' perceptions of football against the background of an increasingly visible Europeanisation of the structures and activities surrounding the game. These material 'objective' changes within this field of social action are referred to as the 'Europeanisation of football'. In contrast, the focus of our analysis lies in detecting subconscious identity work among football fans within this increasingly Europeanised setting. We seek to tackle what could be dubbed 'subjective Europeanisation', inspired by the work of Robertson (1992) on 'subjective globalisation' (see also Steger and James 2011; Mau 2010). Introducing 'subjective Europeanisation' as the main domain of interest in our research enables us to capture the breadth and difference of human reactions to objective cross- boundary transformation, and hence different degrees and directions of change to their perceptions, imaginations and articulations.

Europeanisation of Football

The governance structures of football have been Europeanised considerably over the past two and a half decades. Europeanisation is generally understood as the process of change in the domestic arena resulting from change at the European level of governance (Schmidt 2002). However, actors at the domestic level are not merely receivers of European-level pressures, they also influence policies at the European level to which they in turn have to adjust at a later stage (Börzel 2002). Such a broader notion underlines the interdependence between the European and domestic levels to explain how Europeanisation in football takes place (Brand and Niemann 2007: 4). We distinguish between two different strands of Europeanisation (Niemann and Brand 2018; Brand, Niemann and Spitaler 2013). The first strand comprises the top-down pressure from the

European level, i.e. rulings by the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) or investigations by the European Commission, commonly referred to as downloading. They are accompanied by various attempts to influence such measures from domestic actors and contexts, commonly depicted as bottom-up Europeanisation or uploading (Börzel 2002). They must be distinguished from a second strand of Europeanisation dynamics, which is fed by transnationalising processes, such as the formation of transnational lobby networks (i.e. the former G-14, now European Club Association (ECA) or the creation of a de facto pan-European football league, the Champions League). We call this ubiquitous dynamic cross-loading (Brand, Niemann and Spitaler 2013).

There are four different Europeanisation dynamics and mechanisms which have shaped the game across Europe since the mid-1990s: the Europeanisation of broadcasting rights, the regulation of player markets after the Bosman ruling by the ECJ, the increased coordination of clubs on the European level and the development of European club leagues. Whereas the Bosman ruling has prompted the player markets across European leagues to become more internationalised and considerably more Europeanised, the European-level broadcasting rights debates fostered coordination and lobbying structures among some clubs and associations and finally made the Commission backtrack on its initial ambition to decentralise this domain. Intense coalition-building and lobbying in the wake of the broadcasting debates also helped to bring about the Commission's 'White Paper on Sport' (2007) which enshrined peculiar exemptions of football as a sport from thorough competition regulation. These examples show that EU-level pressure may at times spur only partial adjustment in football governance, while core policies remain intact despite their potential friction with EU legislation (Niemann and Brand 2008: 100-101).

As a side effect of such EU-level pressures, a more intense transnational coordination of individual clubs can be observed since the beginning of the 1990s. As football associations such as the UEFA were built as umbrella organisations of national football associations, individual clubs remained side-lined for the larger part of the 20th century. This resulted in the formation of 'top clubs' from several European countries into what became known as the G14. Their main aim was to influence UEFA (and FIFA) by using pressure and their individual power positions as 'best-selling' clubs in European football (Mittag 2018). It eventually dissolved in 2008, but the transnational club coordination remains intact through the now more encompassing ECA, which, despite its around 200 member clubs, still mainly represents the top clubs and their interests (Keller 2018).

The evolution of the former European Club competitions – European Champions Cup, the European Cup Winners' Cup and the UFEA Cup – into a de facto league system of the Champions League (CL) and the Europa League (EL) is maybe the most visible sign of the Europeanisation in football. As studies have shown, over time, a relatively stable pattern of recurrent participation of largely the same clubs in this continent-wide competition has resulted in a true pan-European 'league mode' (Pawlowski, Breuer and Hovemann 2010; Brand and Niemann 2018). Unsurprisingly, the CL has been dubbed 'an engine that supposedly makes Europe hang together more closely', but also as a 'political myth' that may contribute to more Europeanised mind sets and the European idea in general (Brand and Niemann 2018: 2).

The results of these dynamics of Europeanisation in football can be summarised as follows: The Bosman ruling and its aftermath accelerated a development of increased Europeanisation (and internationalisation) of player markets. Football teams are increasingly comprised of overseas players and there are many indicators suggesting this does not infringe the ability of fans to identify with 'their' team (Ranc 2012). The development of the CL into a de facto European league influences the experience of football supporters: They are frequently exposed to competition between foreign clubs and clubs from 'their' league (either their club or its rivals). This suggests that the elaborated

Europeanisation influences not only the structure of domestic football structures, but also fandom.

Europeanised Lifeworlds and Subjective Europeanisation

The considerable change to the game, its competition dynamics, players markets and more frequent away games across Europe should have left a mark on fans. Earlier studies on football fans (Millward 2009, 2006; King 2004, 2003, 2000) explored the idea of a growing 'European consciousness' amongst supporters of football clubs who regularly played on the European level. These fans began to see themselves as more European. Two mechanisms were propelling such change. First, the increased opportunity to travel across Europe brought about by the greater number of CL games. This brought supporters to progressively see themselves as 'European' in a cultural sense. Second, the increased coverage of European leagues on British television made supporters more aware of other European national leagues and countries, building up a European consciousness (King 2003, 2000). This indicates European identifications through 'societal' ways (Levermore and Millward 2007: 118-119).

In our own research (Niemann and Brand 2018; Brand Niemann and Spitaler 2013; Brand and Niemann 2011), we established anecdotal evidence of changed mind-sets due to the ongoing Europeanisation of football governance. We pointed to the idea that frequent interaction of club officials and high-ranking football functionaries may have altered their perspectives, for example in terms of increasingly looking at European competitors instead of national ones, and by forming interest alliances across Europe. But what about spectators, the regular people following the game? While this evident research gap in the Europeanisation as well as the sport/identity literatures has been addressed to some degree by the multi-year trans-European research project FREE (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe 2015), the everyday aspects of continuously practised football fandom and its impact on the fans' perceptions, identifications and discourses remain largely unexplored.

We locate our interest in the recently emerging literatures on 'social transnationalism' and transboundary forms of activity, mobility and their effects on perceptions and articulations of people across Europe (Mitchell 2015; Mau 2010; Kuhn 2015, 2012, 2011; Delhey 2005). We are particularly interested in the theorised link between increased activity and attention transcending boundaries, and the presumed resulting patterns of attitudinal and/or identity change. So far, existing research has reached ambiguous conclusions on how causality might run. For instance, Mau (and colleagues) aimed to test whether increased transnationality across Europe is accompanied by higher levels of identification with Europe. He found a strong correlation within the German population but stresses causality could run both ways: attitudinal change as a result of increased transnationality, or higher propensity to move across borders resulting from an already Europeanised mind-set (Mau 2010: 118-119). Similarly, Kuhn (2012) has argued that Erasmus programmes might draw in participants which carry an already Europeanised mind set, thus rendering any 'Erasmus effect' on the participants' perceptions negligible.

Our focus on football fans, however, allows us to evade some of these problems. First, by focusing on fandom as a field of activities, we concentrate on truly 'everyday life' activities, not selective participation in student exchange programmes, or job mobility among the more educated strata of society. As the EUCROSS project defined it, 'cross-border everyday activities' resemble 'behaviours that are performed by any possible individual agent in any aspect of everyday life' thus rendering 'mundane social activities' especially interesting (Hanquinet and Savage 2011: 19). Second, we scale back on the 'identity front' in order to avoid taking identity patterns from Eurobarometer data (Kuhn 2015) or surveying people on their conscious identity conceptions only (Mau 2010: 115-123).

Our foray into the increasingly Europeanised lifeworld of football is anchored in the idea that the mind sets of fans have become Europeanised, too. In order to confirm this assumption, we tackle rather subliminal 'identity work' which is arguably prior to identity formation and mostly unconscious, at least regarding any political implications in the stricter sense, including openly articulated understandings and appreciations of 'Europe'. For this effort, we explore such a shift in perceptions and identifications via the concept of 'subjective Europeanisation'. This notion is inspired from Robertson's (1992: 9) term 'subjective globalisation' and in particular Robertson's (2009: 121) criticism of the neglect of ideational aspects of supposedly objective large-scale social change such as 'objective globalisation'. We see a similar dichotomy at play in what we have described above as the objective transformation of structures in the field of football (Europeanisation), and a likely shift of perceptions among those affected by it (grounding such a dynamic in a more 'subjective' dimension). Contrary to Robertson, though, we do not claim that such change in the minds of people need to be conscious. On this, we follow Steger and James (2011: 57) who have hinted subjective renderings of change at the macro level (such as globalisation or Europeanisation) might entail 'imaginaries' and 'modes of understanding' of a person's surrounding lifeworld which are pre-reflexive in nature. In the same vein, Mau (2010: 13) has highlighted the general usefulness of Robertson's distinction between objective dynamics and the 'cognitive level' in analysing cross-boundary social transformation. Following from that, we locate the conceptual potential of the notion of 'subjective Europeanisation' in its capacity to steer our attention towards seemingly trivial, low level and unconscious shifts in perceptions and imaginations among people which occur due to everyday activities in a lifeworld sphere which however happens to be subject to (objective) Europeanising forces. What we seek to elucidate forms an integral part of change in the domestic arena, or more localised settings, which results from changes induced on the European level of governance. It makes clear how changed policies, regulations and governance structures in football have seeped into the perceptions of people and which kind of changes have been affected in such subjective domains.

Conceptualising Subjective Europeanisation

Our interest focuses on how fandom experiences and exposure to football change perceptions, unwittingly and more subtly than can be caught by the language of political integration or 'pan-Europeanism (as a political project). Such a shift of perceptions will materialise in articulations and discourse over time. At the same time, it is indicative of identity work' under way, however subconscious it might be. If mindsets and perceptions of football spectators have become Europeanised to some extent as well, where would we be able to detect such forms of subjective Europeanisation?

In line with Brubaker and Cooper (2000) we ground the ambiguous term 'identity' in more robust concepts such as 'identifications', 'self-understanding' and 'communality, connectedness and groupness'. With Eder (2009) we put emphasis on the narrated character of such understandings, as well as that they function to delineate boundaries between actors. On this basis, we explore an analytical framework with two main dimensions of subjective Europeanisation among football fans and spectators: 'communities of belonging' (COB) and 'frames of reference' (FOR). COB aims to capture group-based forms of identification (in-group/out-group phenomena, perceptions of 'foreignness' and delineations vis-à-vis other groups). FOR highlights spatial or scalar aspects relevant to someone's concept of self. Regarding football, this includes the attractiveness assigned to different forms of competition (national versus European level), the reasons for such orientation and the eventual normalisation of 'going Europe' (Millward 2006) – travelling to football matches and experiencing Europe along the way.

Communities of Belonging

Communities of belonging (COB) addresses dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, understandings of in-group and out-group, perceptions of community and discord, as well as the process of identification and accompanying narratives. In that sense, we use the term to summarise the different ways people perceive and articulate their 'sameness' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 7) within social groups and networks, thus setting clear boundaries towards outsiders. This is a different notion of COB than that of Verdasco (2019) who reserves the term for strong bonds of commonality and mutual support, or Alm and Martinsson's (2016) analysis of the emotional and affective aspects of community building among political activists. Our usage of COB allows us to approach our object of interest in a more general fashion, It encapsulates three questions which can be translated into empirically oriented research. First, on what grounds is a distinction between 'us' and 'them' forged in a given social group? Second, how are such groups constructed, both through words and non-verbal interaction? Third, what or who constitutes the 'other'? Following from that, we propose to analyse articulations of football fans regarding the patterns and underlying dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, the discursive construction of coalitions and networks among fans and the encoding of outstanding football events in narratives among fans which might contribute to community formation as well as to the drawing of boundaries vis-à-vis other fan communities.

Inclusion/exclusion

The inclusion and exclusion of people into and from a community is perhaps the most essential part of identification. Accordingly, this captures how football fans define their own community and necessitates to investigate the identification process of the in-group and the out-group. What characterises an in-group and what an out-group? How far are the related perceptions shared or challenged among fans? As the discursive inclusion and exclusion forms the core of how the 'we' and the 'them' are constructed, it needs to be stressed that the notion of the 'other' is not necessarily limited to supporters, players or officials of other teams, but can also apply to persons formally belonging to the same team or club.

Linking back to the Europeanisation of the structures of football governance, an obvious starting point here is to analyse fans' reactions to the Europeanisation of player markets. Has there been a normalisation of 'Europeanness', for instance, or is (different types of) "foreignness" still debated, and if so, to what extent?

Relations among fans: coalitions and networks

The second aspect of the COB dimension is the relationship between fans across teams and countries. Despite the strong sense of separation between supporters of different teams, cross-national and cross-team networks, contacts and relations exist. This seems self-evident on the individual level, but it stretches far beyond that. European networks such as Fans Against Racism in Europe (FARE) and Fan Supporters Europe (FSE) demonstrate the transnational dimension of coalitions between fans.

The analysis here seeks to uncover the extent to which the relationship to other fans is shaped by national borders and which cross-national coalitions between groups of fans exist, and why. Are there positive or negative references to other fans or groups of fans across borders (i.e. are they regarded as allies in some interest coalition or as "natural" rivals)? The aim is to grasp knowledge about the interactions, references and allusions between fans (either of the same club across borders or of different clubs) to get a deeper understanding of the communities that these supporters see themselves belonging to.

Encoding of events in narratives

The third aspect of COB is the collective remembrance of events and its inclusion in the narrative of the supporters' communities. The analysis of core events such as World Cups, games against certain opponents and their encoding in narratives has played a role in prior football research (Young 2007; Pyta and Havemann 2015; Meier, Utesch, Raue, Uhlenbrock, et al. 2019; Bishop and Jaworski 2003). It may be expected that these aspects are also relevant for subliminal identity formation in the contexts of communities of belonging.

We seek to evaluate the discourses among fans regarding the role of club-related events (for example certain matches or wining a specific trophy) for their communities. The idea that events help to create community and discord is central to our concept. How do certain events trigger or foster a narrative? How are such narratives shaped by European or solely by national aspects? Our work focuses on the events that are the source for such narratives and eventually ensuing aspects of community-building.

Frames of reference

An analysis of subjective Europeanisation would be incomplete if it was solely focused on group formation and delineation processes. The discussion of spatial (or scalar) reference frames employed by football fans is equally important. The notion of 'frames of references' has received a less stringent treatment in existing scholarship on identity and related sociological literatures, at least compared to the aspects and phenomena summarised under the COB-label above. Eder (2009: 435-438), for instance, addresses the question whether there are reference objects for a collective European identity, and Mau (2010: 116, 119) hints at the importance of a person's perceived affiliation with a particular level of action for subjective identity-formation. Usually 'frames of reference' denotes the existence of several different such frames – local, regional, national, continental, global – as well as the need for more conceptual clarity in depicting their interplay (Pries 2005: 174; Deacon and Schwartz 2007: 292).

In contrast, we employ frames of reference as a container category which allows us to analyse different types of social arenas and accompanying subjective assessments that share one specific trait. References to spatial distinctions such as national/international, home/away, domestic/European, local/national and so on arguably play an important role regarding the perceptions and imaginaries which we seek to elucidate. With a view on our field of study, frames of reference therefore include articulations as well as spaces for action and attention resulting from actions (following football events, travel activities, tourist activities in the context of away games, network building). The focus is on the assigned importance and normalisation of cross-border action ('going Europe'). Beyond this, the analytic dimension of FOR also incorporates an analysis of the fans' perspectives on national competitions, European competitions and the respective degrees of importance assigned to these two.

National competitions

The first aspect of FOR is the perspective on national club competitions. National competitions (usually the first national league and cup competitions) are often seen as supporters' main area of focus. These games are most prevalent and tend to form the core narrative in national media. We seek to capture how supporters perceive the national competitions as their presumably natural field of attention and interest, and how they understand their relevance (for example as pre-eminent over any other competition, or as mere springboard to European-level competition). Such understandings and assessment are to be gathered from their discursive activities in talking about their club. This includes the activities related to match days and the investment that is connected to such activities. The aim is to understand the reference frames of football fans regarding the national competitions and the national competitors.

European competitions

The second aspect of FOR are European club competitions. National competitions have been the norm in the past and competitions on the European level are often seen as extraordinary. But the creation of a de facto European club league could influence the perception of such competitions as rather regular. We seek to capture whether supporters perceive European club competitions as normal or extraordinary, both regarding their own club and in general. It should also be analysed how and why participation in a European club competition is considered important. Do fans see their club as representing their own national league or simply in competition with the best (European) clubs? The aim is to understand the reference to the European club competitions among fans.

Context of national and European competitions

The third aspect of FOR is the context of national and European competition. This aspect focuses on the distribution of attention across the different competitions. It assesses how supporters frame the different competitions regarding the respective potential rivals. What shapes ideas of rivalry between fans? How do fans devote interest to their rivals in other European countries and to national or regional rivals? A connected, albeit distinct, question concerns the attention and the travel activities for different sorts of matches. How intensively do fans travel across Europe to follow their team compared to national competitions and how do they understand these travels? Are their travel activities rather connected with tourist activities or is the focus on the match? These questions are analysed with a focus on the relation between the two levels of competition, national and European.

Table 1: analytical framework with the two dimensions communities of belonging and frames of reference

Dimension	Category	Aspects
Communities of belonging (COB)	Inclusion and exclusion	In-group and out-group phenomena, targeting fans, players and other actors
	Relations among fans	Coalitions and network with fans across clubs and borders
	Encoding of events in narratives	Narrations related to event creating community and discord
Frames of reference (FOR)	National competitions	Relevance and perception of national competitions
	European competitions	Relevance and role of European competitions (representation vs. competition)
	Context of competitions	Rivalries, travel and match attention

Table 1 summarises our analytical grid for making the subliminal 'identity work' among football fans empirically approachable. The categories provided are to elucidate whether, and to what extent, the subjective Europeanisation among football fans – more Europeanised mind sets among regular people in their lifeworld driven by leisure activities in an increasingly Europeanised field (football) – can be said to exist.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The empirical application of the analytical framework builds on a qualitative text analysis of online discourses of football fans of the English Premier League club Manchester United. It focuses on the discussions among the fans about rivalries, competitions and transfers, covering issues that are not explicitly or officially related to Europe, but inherently influenced by the ongoing Europeanisation of football. These texts allow us to uncover subliminal identification patterns and reference points to Europe.

Case Selection

Analysing Manchester United fans provides the case of a club that is a global brand in a globalised league within a country with a rather Eurosceptic public attitude.

The political attitudes in the United Kingdom (UK) are, compared to the EU27, by far the most sceptical towards Europe, both historically and today (Carl, Dennison and Evans 2018; Anderson and Hecht 2018). This scepticism has been connected with the traditionally low level of European identification among British citizens; a high level of national identification correlates with Euroscepticism, and it is exceptionally high in the United Kingdom (Carl Dennison and Evans 2018). The 2016 Brexit referendum revealed that the UK 'had, on the issues of EU membership and immigration, become divided by social class, generation and geography' (Goodwin and Heath 2016). The highest support for leaving the EU was predominantly expressed in English constituencies with higher proportions of older groups, those in low-skilled jobs and the less well-educated. Though age seems not as relevant for the target group of this study, social status and region are. England as country context represents a hard case to probe whether attitudes that emphasise national identity are predominantly reflected in football fans' discourses or if a (subtle) Europeanisation can be identified.

Additionally, sport in general and football especially, has served as a means to express a separate English identity. Gibbons (2014) dates the establishment of the St. George's flag as a symbol of English identity back to the Euro Cup 1996 as England played the Scottish national team for the first time in an international tournament. The fact that the four British countries have separate national teams and separate national football leagues has however fostered such identity before. Both the Premier League and the English national team are generally seen as superior over the football of the other nations, due to the value of the league and the past success of the national team.

In contrast to its national context, the English Premier League is strongly shaped by its European and international focus. It is often dubbed 'the global football league' (Millward 2011) and it can claim to have among the highest influx of players, managers and owners from around the world. It is followed by fans in more than 200 countries and many of its clubs are considered global brands (Ludvigsen 2019; Elliott 2017; Cleland 2015). Recent analysis underlines the Europeanness of the league, where more than 60 per cent of the players are not English and the vast majority of the foreign players are nationals of continental Europe, making it more a "European" than a global league (Poli, Ravenel and Besson 2019).

Manchester United has historically been one of the biggest European football clubs. It has successfully competed both at the national and European level for several decades. It has won more trophies than any other English football team and has been identified as the most valuable football team in the world in 2017 and 2018 (euronews 2018). Despite this impressive background, its recent success on the European level is limited to the Europa League, the second tier of European competition. Though the club is often characterised as global, the dominance of Europe stands out. Almost half of the official supporter clubs outside the UK are located in European countries. The club's global image is not limited to, but dominated by Europe. The club's image might be reflected in the attitudes of fans that

are used to players and fellow supporters outside of England and predominantly from all over Europe. Despite Manchester United's recent 'relegation' to the Europa League, its very globalised and Europeanised brand may, to some extent, soften the 'hardness' of the case.

Identity research in the context of the club needs to take into consideration that the club has a strong image among both its fans and opponents. Earlier analysis of fan attitudes towards the club shows that both fans and fans of rivals have a clear idea of the club: it is considered to be a big club, and its economic dominance engenders explicit antipathy (King 2003: 192). Historical rivalries between the club and its main opponents (Manchester City, Liverpool and Leeds) are generally seen as based on locality and contest between different industrial centres, but also in part due to their rivalry at the European club football level (Taylor 2018; King 2003).

Data and Modes of Analysis

The study is based on an analysis of discussions on an online message board that relate to identity aspects and Europeanisation. A qualitative text analysis is done based on texts produced by fans on club-related online forums that are publicly available on the internet. Such fan-made online publications heighten the discursive dimension of fandom by providing spaces where any fan can leave comments. These forms of 'online talk' (Paulus, Warren and Lester 2016: 2) are forms of communication based on digital media technology and thus part of the 'new media'.

Online communication between football supporters grew together with widening internet availability. Fan forums have been extensively used for communication about the team and the club as well as for planning of travel, ticketing and other organisational aspects of fandom (Pearson 2012; Pearson 2010; Mcmanus 2015). They can be counted as part of activist or alternative media (Waltz 2005; Lievrouw 2011), as they are usually organised bottom-up by a group of fans of a specific club. They are independent of the club and other typical gatekeepers such as editors or journalists. Usually, everyone who registers as a user may contribute to discussions. This makes such forums an open space for discussions. Registration usually does not require credentials. The use of fake names is wide-spread, participants are effectively anonymous, albeit some might know each other in real life (Cleland 2014: 417). Such anonymity might lower the threshold to express sentiments that contradict common social norms.

It must be emphasised that the participation in forums as well as the selection of posts are not necessarily representative of the clubs' wider fan base. Participation in match discussions that take place during the games is possible only for those who do not go to the stadium, thus excluding regular match visitors. The anonymity of participants and the lack of reliable information about characteristics of the supporters such as gender, age and location make it impossible to claim representativeness (Millward 2006; Cleland 2014). Despite these shortcomings, forums provide a valuable data source for prevailing discussions of fans, both those who regularly visit the stadium and those who are emotionally involved but do not participate actively for various reasons. It thus provides broad insights into active supporters' discussion, which is valuable for our research objective.

This article aims to analyse the latent aspects of identification. This aim supports an approach that intervenes as little as possible in the discussions. One major advantage of message board discussions to fandom research has been described as the chance to access supporter discussions as a researcher without intervening in the field. In this study, no notification was given to the forums about the research to avoid bias caused by a researcher's intervention (Millward 2008: 307). Such non-intervening approach means that the publicly available texts from fan forums are used for analysis without asking for explicit consent of each participating poster. Such consent would not only be practically unobtainable, as the number of discussants runs to several hundreds and a lacking consent

of one discussant in a longer discussion could compromise the analysis of the discourse as a whole. The chosen unobtrusive approach is common in discourse analysis of internet texts, for example on Twitter.

Our text base stems from the "RedCafe" (www.redcafe.net), the largest Manchester United message board by number of users and posts. Our pilot studies (Brand and Niemann 2014) suggested that a larger time frame is necessary to generate sufficient data since the density of relevant topics varies over time. Thus, the material covers two league seasons: 2016/17 and 2017/18. From the message board, we purposively sampled thematic contributions. We expected that issues of identification arise most prominently in discussions about rivals, competitions and players. A term search was undertaken using the whole material to confirm that words relating to 'Europe', 'European', 'English', but also football related terms such as 'UEFA', 'Premier League', 'Champions League' and 'Europa League' were mostly found in threads covering three topics: competitions, transfers, and travel/ticketing. Discussion threads with these topics were sampled as material for the analysis (see Table 2):

- Discussions about rivals and competition: Discussions of rivalry take place in forum discussions about matches, both in the national league and the European competitions. The threads have been selected into the corpus based on a random sample of matches across the two seasons.
- Transfer discussions: Discussions about transfers of players to other clubs and from other clubs are prevalent in all forums. Two threads explicitly relating to one particular transfer window during the two seasons 2016/17 and 2017/18 have been analysed as well as one special thread covering discussions about previous players.
- Travel and ticketing discussion: Travel and ticketing both for home and away games in the national league and European competitions is the third type of discussion thread. Each season has a strand where both ticket offers/searches and information about the organisation of travel is shared.

Table 2: list of all discussion threads and posts included into the analysis (as of 30 April 2019)

Rivalry and Competition			
	Season 16/17	Posts	
Nat.	Man Utd 1:1 Arsenal Post-match discussion	711	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs-arsenal.423841/
	West Ham 0:2 Man Utd Post-match discussion	354	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs-west-ham-united.425161/
Eur.	St. Etienne 0:1 Man Utd Post-match discussion	155	https://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs-as- saint-etienne.426666/
	Season 17/18		
Nat.	Man Utd 1:2 Man City Post-match discussion	885	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs- manchester-city.434412/
	Newcastle 1:0 Man Utd Post-match discussion	649	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs- newcastle-united.436488/
Eur.	Man Utd 1:2 Sevilla Post-match discussion	996	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs-sevilla.437260/
	Moscow 1:4 Man Utd Post-match discussion	250	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/post-match-vs- moscow.432758/

Rivalry and Competition		
Transfer		
Most hated ex-united player	387	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/most-hated-ex- united-player.439133/
Season 16/17		
Summer Transfer Window 2017	736	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/summer-transfer-window-2017.429333/
Season 17/18		
Your ideal 11 - 2018/19 and outs (being realistic)	522	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/your-ideal-11-2018- 19-and-outs-being-realistic.438172/
Travel		
All ticket/travel information thread - 2017/18	1826	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/all-ticket-travel-information-thread-2017-18-touting-will-not-be-tolerated-on-the-site.429886/
All ticket/travel information thread - 2016/17	1907	http://www.redcafe.net/threads/all-ticket-travel-information-thread-2016-17-touting-will-not-be-tolerated-on-the-site.417803/
Total	9378	

In total, 9,378 forum posts were analysed using Atlas.ti. The relevant material was marked and categorised into a coding scheme based on the conceptual framework with the two dimensions COB and FOR (see Table 3 for the full coding scheme). The following section analyses general trends of expressions that were coded with the respective sub-categories.

Table 3: full coding scheme for the qualitative content analysis

Dimension & category	Subcategory		Definition/description
Community of belonging			Patterns of identification, inclusion and exclusion as well as event related narrations that form commonality and discord
Inclusion and in-groups	Definitions of	in-group(s)	Expressions of inclusion, definitions of in-groups and
	Fans	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)	positive references to fans, players and others
	Players	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)	
	Others	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)	

Dimension & category	Subcategory		Definition/description	
Community of belonging			Patterns of identification, inclusion and exclusion as well as event related narrations that form commonality and discord	
Inclusion and in-groups	Definitions of in-group(s)		Expressions of inclusion, definitions of in-groups and	
	Fans	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)	positive references to fans, players and others	
Exclusion and out-groups	Definitions of out-group(s)		Expressions of exclusion, definitions of out-groups and	
	Fans	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)	negative references to fans, players and others.	
	Players	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)		
	Others	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)		
Relations to other fans	Networks	National European	Expressions of relations to other fans regarding joint interests and (potential) coalitions as well as networks between fans and/or their associations.	
	Interest groups and coalitions	National		
		European		
Encoding of events in narratives	Creating communality	National	Expressions that hint at encoding of events in narratives that either contribute to the creation of community or discord.	
		European	community of discord.	
	Creating discord	National		
		European		
Frames of reference	1		Patterns of the relation between national and European club competitions, the relevance of each and attention, travel and rivalry.	

Dimension & category	Subcategory		Definition/description	
Community of belonging			Patterns of identification, inclusion and exclusion as well as event related narrations that form commonality and discord	
Inclusion and in-groups	Definitions of in-group(s)		Expressions of inclusion, definitions of in-groups and	
	Fans	Own club Other clubs (National) Other clubs (European)	positive references to fans, players and others	
European competitions European competitions	Perception of European competitions Perception of	Normal Exceptional	References to European competitions regarding the perception and relevance of these competitions both in	
Laropean competitions	European competitions	LACOPHONA	general and with regards to the own club.	
	Relevance of European competitions	Representing the nation		
		Compete with the best		
National competitions	Perception of national competitions		References to national competitions regarding the perception and relevance both in general and with regards to the	
		Exceptional	own club.	
	Relevance of national competitions	Necessary evil		
		Valuable competition		
Context of national and European competitions	Attention	National	References to the context of competitions on the national and European level.	
		European		
	Travel	National		
		European		
	Rivals	National		
		European		

EUROPE IN FOOTBALL FAN DISCUSSIONS

Communities of Belonging

COB are reflected in how fans include and exclude the important actors in football, fans and players, in their discussions. The results show that aspects of in-group and out-group criteria are prevalent within the debates, whereas references to other fans and narrative references to events are not present.

In-group definition and self-understanding

The fans define the in-group (Manchester United as a club, its followers, actors and players) in two different ways; the first defining line is based on success, while the second line is connected to Englishness and the main rival Manchester City.

The success-based understanding of the in-group includes strong references to Europe. Several fans emphasise their aim to be among the elite of European football clubs. Being counted among the best teams in Europe is the dominant self-understanding. They characterise their team as 'one of the most defensively competent teams in Europe' (Thread: Post-match discussion against Man City), and compare team performance with other teams on the European level: 'I was speaking more broadly re 'countless' teams - across Europe, you know the level we aspire to be at' (Thread: Post-match discussion against Arsenal).

Both these comments appeared in discussions about matches in the national league, but their references are European.

A different aspect of self-understanding is related to the composition of the squad. A recurring topic is the discussion about the integration of younger players into the professional team. Though not necessarily needed, it is often connected with the demand that the squad should be feature at least a few English (or at least British) players: 'Are people honestly happy with not having a single British player, never mind English, never mind homegrown (disregarding pogba, who we brought in from france), in our starting XI?' (Thread: Your Ideal 11 – 2018-19).

This self-understanding as a club that incorporates home-grown and English players also serves as distinction from the local rivals Manchester City. Belonging is connected with values such as hard work and local embeddedness through youth football. In a discussion about a game against Manchester City, this is a prominent theme: 'United still tries to promote youth and has a soul and only spends what they have earned through generations of hard work' (Thread: Post-match vs. Man City). This self-understanding is used to differentiate explicitly between their club and their local rivals.

The construction of belonging and the 'us' is based on references to Europe and locality. Europe gets a positive imprint as the place where the adequate competition is found. At the same time, the local connection and Englishness matter as well. This dualism between European and local references regarding the club in general is replicated in how fans discuss the inclusion and exclusion of fans and players.

Who belongs to 'us'? Local fans and players from the continent

Criteria for inclusion into the in-group of fans is match attention, whereas those attending home matches (and paying the high price for a season ticket) are accorded greater prestige on account of their investment in seeing the club play. However, such dominance for local fans is challenged by others not living in the area. They argue that their mobility ('have moved away') does not allow them to attend matches, but they remain strong supporters. This still holds the idea that a 'top fan' should attend all (home) games, but it allows to include those that do not share the locality with the club anymore. Belonging to the group

of fans is negotiated using locality as an argument, since also those who are not living nearby emphasise that they are originally from the area. Within this talk, Europe becomes explicitly relevant as it adds to the problem of money and time, especially because European matches take place during weekdays. For European games, the duty to attend matches is not seen as strong: 'No one does these games [referring to an away match against CSKA Moscow] except people like me who will do everything regardless and have the cash / holiday' (Thread: Ticket-travel 2017/18).

These sequences highlight that mobility to attend games is a relevant factor in the self-understanding of the fans. Once the club plays at the European level, attendance becomes more difficult and costly, leaving it open to only a few fans, while attendance at home matches remains a prominent criterion.

The inclusion of players is related to the self-image of the club as a European top club. This implies the need for world class players, from all over Europe:

So i still say, it's not enough if we sign one attacker who goes par with Zlatan. Real, Bayern, Barca and even Juve are far ahead of us. And last year Chelsea were too. If we are aiming to top of the Europe, signings should be from top of the Europe too. (Thread: Summer Transfer Window 2017)

Playing at the European level is brought in as an argument to attract good players from abroad. The fans discuss players from other European leagues and present some sound knowledge about players, the leagues and how they would fit into their club's squad, implying that they pay a reasonable amount of attention to football in other countries. The Premier League is in this context identified as overpriced and low-quality while (continental) Europe serves as a positive counterpart:

I never understood what Fergie was doing in those years, buying mediocrity from the Premier League when, for a little more money, City and Chelsea were getting top quality from the continent. (Thread: PostMatch v Man City)

The attention of the writers is clearly oriented towards other European countries, focussing on football there. This contrasts with the emphasised self-differentiation from Manchester City regarding the role of home-grown players and implies that local connection as regards players is mainly used as differentiation with the local rival rather than a genuinely important issue for all fans. Yet it is clear this is not a universal feeling among fans, as positive references to local identity occur in few cases without reference to the quality of the players:

why would you want to sell Lingard? We are talking about a player who grew up through the United system. He loves United through and through. You don't sell that for any amount. (Thread: Your Ideal 11 - 2018-19)

The discussion about players shows that the references to aspects beyond the national borders are generally very positive, and that the European level and football in other European countries has a positive image. While some fans emphasise local (and English) belonging as relevant for their team, a widespread attitude is that players from the continent are valuable and necessary to fulfil the club's role as a European top team.

Who is out? Exclusion of fans and players

The exclusion of individuals from the same club is rare, but it happens occasionally as when one fan uses derogatory language against the manager after a defeat: 'And it is your job you worthless Portuguese piece of shit to get your players to play the same way!' (Thread: PostMatch v Newcastle). This posting is not only deleted quickly (as it seems to be against the rules), but also elicits harsh responses from other fans, emphasising that this is not an appropriate behaviour: 'You are not a fan, you are a disgrace' (Thread: PostMatch v

Newcastle). This latter quote was far from unique, highlighting that explicit racist or derogatory vocabulary is not accepted.

A strong difference to other match posts appears in a discussion about a match against West Ham United. This club is rejected based on its fans in a rather strong sense, as their fans are described as 'hooligans' and 'thugs'. While this first seems to be a regular rivalry between fans of different clubs, another post in the same context shows that the cause for exclusion is politically charged. When one Manchester fan expressed sympathy for the opposing fans, this sentiment was harshly rejected, based on the (presumed) political beliefs of the West Ham fans: 'Excuse me? That's like feeling sorry for The EDL or Britain First' (Thread: PostMatch v West Ham 2017). This exclusion of fans happened based on behaviour that is considered as inappropriate. The distinction is in this case connected to national identity as the 'other' is associated with English/British nationalism.

Players from the team are excluded in one special discussion about 'mosthated ex-United players'. One dominant theme is resentment of players that played for Manchester City or Liverpool after they had played for Manchester United, hinting at the relevance of local rivalry. In this sense, local rivalry becomes relevant, but the national origin of these former players does not matter in this criticism.

The player discussions with exclusionary expressions discuss mostly the (assumed) quality of players. Remarkable is a comment about player performance that connects the assumed quality of the Premier League with another league in Europe:

I thought he [Pogba] was absolutely dreadful he needs to wake up to the fact that he is now playing in the most competitive and toughest league in the world, he is not playing in the slow-paced Italian league where he would have space and time. (Thread: PostMatch v Newcastle).

This statement seems to contradict earlier discussions about the quality of players from continental Europe. However, while players from other leagues are generally regarded as potentially good ones, the Premier League is seen as superior compared to other European leagues. Both points of view have in common that knowledge about football abroad is required for these discussions.

To summarise, exclusion of players has both a local (rivalry) and a European aspect. While local rivalry defines 'betrayal' by players, exclusion based on under-performance can be connected with national or European league stereotypes. The latter requires knowledge – or at least stereotypes – about football in other European countries, which is seemingly very present among Manchester United fans.

Frames of References

Regarding FOR, the discussions among football fans illuminates how they relate to the European competitions in relation to the national competition and how they perceive the context of competition.

Perception of the European and national competitions

The dominant perspective on European competitions among the fans is that they consider these competitions as extraordinary. This assessment elevates European football above the day-to-day of Premier League competition. Premier League fixtures, conversely, are downplayed in comparison to European competition, as a defeat against the Premier League club Newcastle exemplifies. A writer comments on a – from their point of view – bad performance prior to an upcoming European competition match: 'Maybe the players are saving themselves for the big boys stuff in the Champions League' (Thread: PostMatch v

Newcastle). This underlines the positive association with the European level and its competitions while the national league is characterised as relatively unimportant.

Qualifying for European competition is discussed as the most relevant goal of the team. The national league is subordinated to this aim, as bad performances on the national level are discussed in the context of this target (the top four places in the league qualify for the Champions League):

I really don't care how shit we were. The important thing at this stage is picking up the 3 points, staying in touch so if anyone fecks up in the top 4, we'll be there to take advantage. (Thread: PostMatch v West Ham 2017)

The need to compete successfully on the national level is seen as a means to claim a qualification spot for the European competition, while success within the national league is, at least in this context, not seen as being valuable as such.

For some fans though, participation in European competitions is considered expected. However, for some only the Champions League is seen as worthwhile, while the (second tier) Europa League is seen as cumbersome and not worth engaging in:

I'd rather not deliberately throw matches away to ensure we don't get Europa League football! If we end up in the EL again and we don't want to take part, just play a reserve team or something. (Thread: PostMatch v Arsenal 2016)

This approach of normality concerning European competitions shows the ambiguity of perspectives on the European competitions. While the Champions League is seen as a competition among the best, the Europa League is not even valued as much as the national league. Here, the club is seen as a good competitor, even as good that they even can send their second-best team to win.

Fans could look at European competitions from two different perspectives. They could consider them either to be competition among the best clubs in Europe or as a place where a club from their national league represents this league or even the nation against a representative from another league. Within the discourses of the Manchester United fans, their perspective is predominantly clear. Most writers consider these leagues to be a competition among the best in Europe instead of the place to represent the national league or the country. After the club lost to Sevilla in the Champions League, the dominant opinion is that the club is not amongst the best in Europe: 'Well this is the level we are at. Not a top 8 team in europe. We basically lost against an average spanish side. Just not good enough' (Thread: PostMatch v Sevilla).

In one exceptional case, a writer considers the European competitions as a place to represent the Premier League, arguing that they would always support an English team. But even this is not without qualification, as the poster apparently also carries a specific antipathy toward the Spanish opponent for personal reasons:

I only caught the second half, and believe it or not I wanted United to win - one for the fact you're still English no matter what, but more the fact I really dislike Sevilla who ruined the only European cup final I've attended. (Liverpool Supporter, Thread: PostMatch v Sevilla)

This position is neither echoed nor does it generate further discussion, however. In general, there is no idea of representing anything other than the club at the European level.

To summarise the attitudes towards the different leagues, 'Europe' and playing in European competition is seen as the norm for the Manchester United fans. The national league is of

limited relevance in and of itself, but commonly viewed in the context of European qualification.

Context of European and national competitions: travel and rivalries

The first aspect of competition contexts is travel to away games. This aspect is potentially very different for national and European competitions, as travelling to a European game requires much more effort than to a domestic game, especially given England's comparative geographic isolation. The travel discussions revolve around the organisation of transportation for both domestic and European matches. Access to official away tickets is restricted to season ticket holders because the demand is much higher than the spots that are available. Consequently, the availability of tickets is a recurring theme, but there is a difference between national league matches and European matches. While travelling to national away matches is common, attendance at European fixtures is seen as exceptional. For European matches, tickets are usually not difficult to get, as there are (unlike for national away games) fewer applications than tickets given the high travel costs and the problem with mid-week games. The amount of money that is needed restricts access to only a few fans. Even those who might be able to cover it are reluctant to do so: 'I am thinking of applying for a ticket, but I am thinking if it's worth paying £400 for a flight ticket. Anyone knows if there's any other options?' (Thread: Ticket-travel 2017/18, Super Cup discussion).

The response underlines the problems of uncertainty and short notice (given the knock- out format in the latter stages of competition) that are connected to European travel:

All the flight options that I have seen require leaving Monday and a night in another European city. Thomas Cook Sport said they are 'expecting' to do a trip but I don't know myself if I'll apply based on 'expecting'. (Thread: Tickettravel 2017/18, Super Cup discussion)

These discussions show that travelling to the European matches is a rare event for a few fans, while national away matches much more accessible. The problems are based in part on the greater distances, but also on the way the competition is organised. Since the European competitions are less planned than the domestic games (due to knock out games and seeding groups by lots), travel is more complicated to schedule.

The second aspect of the competition contexts are rivalries between clubs. The chief rivalry on the national level is clearly directed against the local rival Manchester City. After a home defeat the discussion highlights how differentiation between the clubs is narrated as a different ideology: The opponent is characterised as owned by foreign investors (which is the case for Manchester United, too):

Let's be honest, they are a much better side. But who cares, really? I will always be a United fan. Man City are only having their moment because the club was bought by, essentially, an oil rich middle eastern country. (Thread: PostMatch v Man City)

This perspective connects the local city rivalry to the bigger picture, as the rival is not only seen as a local or national rival but depicted as one of the best European teams. Consequently, rivalry against the club is extended to the European level. A defeat against the local rival gets also connected to success in the European competitions to come, as the discussion after the defeat shows. The defeat is seen as presaging further losses on the European level.

United should never set up that defensively as they did. They could do it against a team like Ajax and get away with it. They can do it against Arsenal and have the luck that Arsenal are perennial bottlers in finishing off their chances. But,

they couldn't do that against City, arguably the best European team right now. (Thread: PostMatch v Man City)

Rivalries with other clubs are not equally relevant in the discussions. The local rivalry emphasises the relevance of locality, but its transfer to the European competitions highlights that the national level is of lesser relevance. This shows that the local rivalry remains an important factor even when the reference regarding competitions is European.

CONCLUSIONS

This article started from the assumption that Europeanisation is an ongoing trend in the governance of football and asked how this context affected fans' perceptions and if and how it influenced their subliminal identification concerning Europe. While most research on European identity refers to strictly political conceptions of Europe with an inherent focus on special strata of society, football addresses the lifeworld within a mass audience context. This makes football an ideal case to explore how Europeanisation of core aspects of leisure and lifeworld might influence individuals' attitudes and identifications beyond the core political identification.

Our research question targets this subliminal, subjective Europeanisation of spectators' identifications. The conceptual framework comprised two analytical dimensions: COB and FOR. These concepts were used to conduct an empirical analysis of online fan discussions among Manchester United fans around the topics of rivalry and competitions. The results show that Europe has left a strong imprint on fan discussions, both related to the way they include and exclude actors within the game and as a reference frame for their understanding of competition. This confirms previous assumptions about the role of Europeanisation of football as a mechanism that shapes football fans' perceptions and identities towards Europe (King 2003).

The ubiquity of cross-border aspects in the fans' discussions supports our assumption of an effect of Europeanisation in life-worldly contexts on individuals' Europeanness, even in a country context where the general attitude is rather Eurosceptic. More specifically, the COB of the Manchester United fans are shaped by a dualism between localism and Europe. While the local reference to the city of Manchester is relevant, both for who is perceived as a good fan and for players, Europe is fans' first reference point for players of high quality. This is contrary to those who perceived Brexit as beneficial for English football, for example the former England and Arsenal defender Sol Campbell stating that "[Premier League] teams load up with too many mediocre overseas footballers, especially from Europe, crowding out young English and British talent" (Gordon 2016). Such a view does not seem to reflect the dominant perspective of fans. Their relation to Europe in this sense is solely positive. It is the benchmark against which they judge the quality of players. Many fans possess extensive knowledge of football in other countries. The FOR of the Manchester United fans are shaped by a dominance of European competitions as their main reference. While the national league is perceived as a somewhat less important playing field, the European competition serves as an ideal goal. In some cases, the national league is even seen solely as a mechanism to reach European competitions. Additionally, even in debates about national competitions, references to the European games are ubiquitous.

The results confirm that football fans are influenced by the Europeanisation of their game. However, our results cannot claim to be representative for all fans of the club under investigation. Some comments on the accessibility of European games hint at a potential divide between football fans, for example based on the financial and time resources they can spend on the game. Further research needs to analyse whether this is an effect that is influenced by how frequently football fans are exposed to Europe through the game and whether the effect is only visible among a certain type of football fans. Due to the nature of

the data, we cannot contribute with an elaborated analysis of the potential conflict lines between fans and their different takes on the Europeanisation of football. But the references to socio-economic factors such as time and money indicate that such resources might also matter for the formation of Europeanness in a life-worldly context.

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Research Article

Integration theories and European education policy: bringing the role of ideas back in

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Abstract

Education policy, traditionally a fortress of state-building processes, is now being challenged by the emergence of a new dimension at the European level. The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 has not only redefined education as a tool for improving Europe's competitiveness within the knowledge economy, but it has also significantly expanded the role of the European Commission as a legitimate actor intervening in education. Although the increasing involvement of the EU in education has been empirically covered by the existing literature, less attention has been devoted to elucidating these changes from a theoretical point of view. This article contends that these transformations raise a theoretical puzzle in terms of the understanding of the two mainstream theories of European integration. This argument is developed in three steps. First, the article examines the historical developments of EU competences in education. It then critically engages with the main theoretical explanations of European integration theories in relation to these changes, namely supranationalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, asserting that these approaches do not fully account for a comprehensive explanation of the drivers behind these transformations. By contrast, the article suggests that broadening the analytical lens to include a more ideas-centred approach provides a more in-depth understanding of European education policy.

Keywords

European education policy, European integration theories, ideas, European Commission

Education and training systems in Europe have been closely linked to nation-building processes (Bartolini 2005) and have always been perceived as a sensitive area of national diversity with the responsibility at the European level being mainly focused on mobility and the promotion of European identity (Verhoeven 2001; de Wit and Verhoeven 2001; Corbett 2005). However, since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the competences of the European Union (EU) in the policy field of education have increased, with the European Commission now being de facto involved in the formulation of a cognitive, normative and regulative model of European education policy (Martens, Nagel, Windzio and Weymann 2010; Jakobi, Martens and Wolf 2010).

The Lisbon summit in 2000 is considered to be a watershed in European education and training policy (Gornitzka 2006). Through the standard setting and monitoring instruments implemented with the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), the European Commission has extended its policy capacity and is now able to recommend to nation states that they should change their education policies (Nagel, Martens and Windzio 2010: 5; Jakobi, Martens and Wolf 2010). Moreover, the Bologna (1999) and Copenhagen (2002) processes for higher education and vocational education and training not only linked education to EU economic policies (Walkenhorst 2008) but also triggered a high degree of transnationality and interactions between experts, networks and civil servants. Education is now one of the main pillars of the 'Europe 2020 Strategy' launched in 2009 and, within the governance architecture of the European Semester, the European Commission provides country recommendations to Member States on their education and training systems with education fully embedded in European economic policies. In a nutshell, we can observe a complete redesigning of European education policy in terms of what to do, how to do it and who is in charge.

This article examines these transformations from a theoretical point of view and argues that they raise some puzzling questions for the 'two families of integration theory' literature (Schimmelfennig and Rittberger 2006): supranationalism and liberal intergovernmentalism (LI). In particular, why did the European Commission increase its role in education policy only after the 2000s and not before? And why have Member States, which still have exclusive competence in education matters, agreed to delegate some aspects of this domain to the EU level? Although a growing body of literature has provided excellent insights into the increasing involvement of the European Commission in education (Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg 2011; Walkenhorst 2008; Ertl 2003), this article contends that these transformations cannot be fully explained by supranationalist or LI approaches.

On the one hand, supranationalist approaches, which explain integration as a path-dependent conduit led by technocratic imperatives and spillover effects (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998), cannot explain why the developments in the European education agenda have taken place without any formal change in the treaty, with the EU still having limited competence in supporting and supplementing Member States' actions.

Indeed, although the idea of European cooperation in education has a long history dating back to the 1960s (see Corbett 2005), it has always been a history of failure in practice, with the European Commission facing considerable resistance from Member States in terms of cooperating in this policy field. Therefore, how the European Commission only managed after the 2000s to overcome the long-standing historical reluctance of Member States to cede any power in this sensitive policy area without any legal change in the treaty is an issue that requires further clarification. On the

other hand, these changes did not arise from Member States' decision to delegate sovereignty to the EU according to their domestically determined preferences, as an LI explanation would posit (Moravcsik 1998; 1993). Education has always been perceived as a strong domestic competence, closely linked to nation-building processes, and as an area of national diversity (de Wit and Verhoeven 2001; Bartolini 2005). It is also a salient issue for policymakers and public opinion. As Beukel (2001: 126) observes, 'the very notion of "Europeanization of education" causes concern in most countries in Europe, one reason being that it is equated with homogenization of the educational system that could imply a loss of national identity'. Accordingly, education is a prominent issue in the eyes of the electorate (see Nóvoa and deJong-Lambert 2003). In all these respects, given that education is not only closely linked to national identity and long-standing traditions of different cultural and social purposes but is also attractive in terms of electoral votes, we should not expect Member States to agree on a coordinated approach based on common pro-market goals to be achieved through benchmarking and indicators.

Put differently, although both supranationalist and LI approaches can be helpful in analysing policy areas where the transfer of competences is more straightforward (such as competition, trade and monetary policy), they are less equipped to elucidate shifts of competences in those sectors, such as education, characterised by shared competences, strong national roots and institutional complexity (Zahariadis 2008). As a caveat, this paper does not deny that European education policy remains intergovernmentally constructed with Member States being the main actors in this policy field. Nor does it deny the fact that the concept of the 'Europeanization' of education also incorporates supranational dynamics. Nevertheless, it does argue that relying exclusively on a supranational or LI approach is not sufficient to fully capture the policy transformations that have occurred post-Lisbon. Rather, drawing from a constructivist epistemology where the basic claim is that interests and preferences are social constructions that are not objectively given (Hay 2002), this article attempts to overcome the dichotomy between these two theoretical strands and to complement it by suggesting that ideas should be brought back in (Béland and Cox 2010) to the analysis of the transformations of European education policy. In doing so, it suggests that an ideational perspective - namely a perspective where specific cognitions guide actors' responses to policy choices (Jacobs 2015: 43) - might be better analytically equipped to account for these transformations.

This article is structured as follows. By drawing from secondary literature and official EU documentation, such as Commission communications, Commission reports and White Papers, the following section briefly illustrates the main developments in EU competences in education, providing evidence of a shift in terms of the institutional responsibilities of the European Commission in this domain. The article then discusses the two main theoretical approaches of European integration studies (supranationalism and LI) and considers the extent to which they can explain these changes. Section four highlights the importance of adopting a more ideas-centred approach to better understand education within the European integration process. The final section summarises the argument and offers some concluding remarks.

THE EVOLUTION OF EU COMPETENCES IN EDUCATION

During the 1970s, the term 'grey area' (zone grise) referred to those policy areas that were not originally mentioned in the Rome Treaty and that were characterised by 'non-economic aims' (Commission of the European Communities 1978). Education policy was one such grey area. Indeed, whereas Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) mentioned vocational training with reference to the drawing up of general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy, there was no reference to education, though within the wider treaties of Rome, Article 9 of Euratom had proposed the formation of a European University. The main purpose of the Community was geared towards promoting economic cooperation and trade through the implementation of a customs union and a common agricultural policy, with education deeply rooted within the competences of Member States under a strong intergovernmental approach (Lawn and Nóvoa 2002).

From the 1980s onwards, EU education policy entered a new stage, identified as the 'supranationalist turn', with education being viewed as a crucial instrument in the political and economic relaunch of Europe (Walkenhorst 2008; Trondal 2002: 9). In addition, because of the broader programme promoted by Jacques Delors which aimed to include social policy as one of the main items on the European agenda, there seemed to be a desire among Member States to add a cultural dimension to the European integration process, in which education was to play an important role (Beukel 1994). The 1980s also marked the beginning of new initiatives and cooperation programmes. Among the factors that encouraged the European Commission to establish its new programmes in the field of education and training. The most significant was the 1985 Gravier judgment with the European Court of Justice ruling that higher education could be covered within the European Economic Community Treaty in the general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy (Article 128) (European Court of Justice 1985) and thus holding that vocational training included 'any form of education which prepares for a qualification for a particular profession' (European Commission 2006: 102). As a result of this ruling – which does not sit in isolation but it was nevertheless preceded by the 1983 Forcheri case on fees for vocational education courses and followed by the 1988 Blaizot case regarding Community citizens seeking access to education systems of other foreign states (see also Gori 2001) - the European Commission implemented a new wave of projects and exchange mobility programmes. This included COMETT, for education and training for technology, ERASMUS, for the mobility of university students, and Lingua, for foreign language learning (Keeling 2006; Ertl 2003). As also argued by Ertl (2003: 9), the impact of the Community policies on national systems of education and training was limited 'because of the modest and fragmented nature of Community projects, and also because the unclear legal foundations allowed the Member States to interpret and implement Community policies selectively'.

1992 marked an important milestone in the evolution of European education policy. Indeed, it was only with the Treaty of Maastricht that education was mentioned at the European level, albeit under the 'subsidiarity' principle. Specifically, Article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty clearly stated the independence of national education policy by arguing that education and training systems and the content of learning programmes were the responsibility of Member States. In addition, the Article 126 emphasised the idea of 'quality' education by suggesting that 'the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member

States'. This cooperation had to be achieved through a wide range of actions; for instance, by promoting the mobility of citizens, designing joint study programmes, establishing networks and exchanging information on Member States' education systems. However, it would be difficult to claim that Maastricht marked a new phase in EU education policy. The aims of the policy remained practically the same and, throughout the 1990s, the Commission continued its emphasis on the 'programme approach' with education still being strongly regarded as a domestic competence (Ertl 2003: 12).

In parallel with these institutional innovations, the 1990s were also characterised by the emergence of a discourse led by the European Commission that emphasised the contribution of education to Europe's competitiveness. The White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment,* which was presented by Jacques Delors in 1993 and referred to as 'the most significant EU policy document with regard to education and training', established lifelong learning as a guiding strategy in EU policies (Field 2006: 7). In a similar vein, the White Paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society* (Commission of the European Communities 1995) and the Communication *Towards a Europe of Knowledge* (Commission of the European Communities 1997) strongly emphasised the relationship between education and Europe's economic growth. Education was indeed framed as a source of 'competitive advantage' that could help the restructuring of European economies in the face of US and Japanese competition (Goujon 2001: 329). What these publications had in common was their approach to education from a perspective of a 'common European problem' to be tackled in order to remain competitive in the global economy.

The Lisbon Strategy represented a policy 'turning point' with education becoming 'a key component of the European knowledge-based economic model' (Nóvoa and deJong-Lambert 2003: 55; Ertl 2006; Corbett 2012). In order to meet the goal of becoming the 'most competitive knowledge-based economy', Lisbon called for an increase in investment in human resources, an improvement in attainment levels, the development of basic skills and competences in the labour force and an increase in European mobility, with knowledge and skills defined as a necessary component of the economic and social reform strategy (Gornitzka 2006). For the very first time in the history of European education policy, Member States agreed on common objectives, benchmarks and indicators to be achieved within the new policy mode of the OMC. The 2002 Barcelona European Council approved a common policy framework for European cooperation entitled Education and Training 2010, with the objective of 'making these education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010' (Council of the European Union 2004: 43). Within this programme, more concrete objectives were formulated together with a detailed follow-up and benchmarks and indicators for measuring progress (Council of the European Union 2004).

Fully embedded in the policy framework of *Education and Training 2010* are the Copenhagen Process and the Bologna Process which focus on cooperation in vocational education and training and on higher education respectively. Launched by the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002, the Copenhagen Process defined a clear set of priorities for (voluntary) European cooperation in vocational education and training (Council of the European Union 2002). The Copenhagen Process also set in motion a number of concrete policy initiatives, including the creation of a single European framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences – Europass, the development of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) aimed at

linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral level and the development of a European Credit Transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET) to enable the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes across the EU (European Commission 2006).

The Bologna Process for higher education, although originally initiated as an intergovernmental initiative among Member States (in 1998, Ministers from France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy signed the Sorbonne Declaration, aimed at creating a common reference framework within a foreseen European Higher Education Area [Walkenhorst 2008]), is also part of the overall EU strategy for cooperation in education and training and linked to the Lisbon Strategy by way of *Education and Training 2010* (Gornitzka 2006: 54). Embedded within the goals of the Lisbon Strategy and framed under 'the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe' (Bologna Declaration1999), Bologna was articulated around the following goals: (i) the adoption of academic credit systems that are comparable and recognisable; (ii) the adoption of a two-cycle system; (iii) the creation of a credit system; (iv) the promotion of mobility; (v) the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance; and (v) the promotion of a European dimension of higher education (Bologna Declaration 1999: 3-4).

The follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020, has confirmed the importance of education as part of the EU agenda and has given further legitimacy to the role of the European Commission. Within the framework of the European Semester – the cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination within the EU – the European Commission provides Member States with country-specific recommendations in relation to the progress achieved vis-à-vis the priorities of the *Education and Training 2020* programme (European Commission 2013). Hence, despite there being no change in the legal competences of the European Commission since the Maastricht Treaty, it can be said that the European Commission has gone beyond its original competence of 'supporting and supplementing' Member States' educational policies in favour of a more active and visible coordination role under the OMC.

In accordance with the overall objective of this article, the next section aims to identify and critically assess the extent to which the two theories of European integration – supranationalism and liberal intergovernmentalism – help us understand the changes that occurred in European education policy with reference to the increasing legitimacy of the European Commission.

EXPLAINING THE CHANGES IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION POLICY

Supranationalism and LI are still the two main theoretical perspectives fruitfully employed to explain the process of European integration. Both deal with the extent to which Member States delegate competences to the EU level in a certain policy field. Supranational explanations draw from the neo-functionalist approaches that were prevalent in the early days of the European Community (Haas 1958) and revived in the 1990s (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998). The main proposition is that supranational institutions are not mere passive agents of Member States but instead have their own interests, preferences, resources and power (Hix and Hoyland 2011). Neo-functionalism predicts incremental and path-dependent conduits to integration,

led by technocratic imperatives (Stroby-Jensen 2003: 88). A core element of supranational approaches is the concept of 'spillover', which accounts for a trend towards increasing integration, holding that integration in one field (e.g. the mobility of labour) inevitably leads to pressure for integration in others (e.g. common immigration and asylum policies; moves towards European citizenship). Therefore, according to this approach, we would expect there to be pressure from spillovers, and the EU institutions themselves to create a common EU education policy, regardless of the explicit domestic preferences in the field.

The second approach that has attempted to provide an explanation for the changes in EU education policy is LI (Moravcsik 1998; 1993). Here, Member States are the main actors. States form their preferences through their own internal political processes, bargain with each other to reach the optimal policy solution and, where it is in their interests to have a durable intergovernmental arrangement, delegate to supranational institutions the administration and enforcement of the mutually agreed solution. According to this interpretation, EU development is the result of an interplay between the interests and preferences of Member States, and supranational institutions are no more 'agents of the EU government than powerful independent actors' (Hix and Hoyland 2011: 16). Put simply, if Member States do not agree on a common EU education policy, they will not get one.

Several scholars have emphasised the supranational role of the European Commission as a key actor in European education policy (Trondal 2002; Pépin 2006; Keeling 2006; Hingel 2001; Field 1997; Ertl 2003; Dehmel 2006). Manuel Souto-Otero and colleagues, in addressing the mechanisms by which the Commission has advanced in the field of education since the Lisbon Strategy, noted how 'the Commission has through previous preparation and framing work and then through the use of the Open Method of Coordination – been very successful in driving initiatives in areas where it previously faced strong opposition and blockages from Member States' (Souto-Otero, Fleckenstein and Dacombe 2008: 244). With reference to the process through which the European Commission has advanced its agenda, Keeling (2006: 208) focused on the Commission's higher education discourse within the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process, pointing out how the Commission has been an 'indispensable player' in promoting a discourse that emphasises growth and employability. Similarly, Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg (2011: 1008), by employing participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, examined how the soft policy mode of the OMC has enabled the European Commission to gain policy capacity without a formal delegation of Member States by influencing the content of national policy agendas for education on educational levels from primary school to higher education. In this way, they borrow the neo-functionalist concept of spillover by arguing that the OMC contributed to socialisation and increased cooperation. By analysing the increase in cross-border activities among universities, faculties and students in higher education, Beerkens (2008: 423) highlighted the ability of the European Commission to act as a policy entrepreneur and to set and channel the discourse in higher education. Finally, Ertl (2003) argued that the establishment of the exchange mobility programmes and the related funding is another factor that explains the influence of the European Commission.

Supranational institutions can strategically exploit the different domestic interests to advance their own agenda as policy entrepreneurs. In this regard, one example would be the highly intergovernmental Bologna Process, in which the European Commission,

which was originally excluded, later became a full member thanks to the spillover effect of already being a legitimate actor in research and innovation (Veiga, Magalhães and Amaral 2015: 85) and to the alignment of the Bologna Process's goals with the EU Lisbon agenda for education (Corbett 2012). Keeling (2006) and Corbett (2012) concurred on the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission. While Keeling (2006) argued that the Commission has been a successful actor in shaping the education discourse Europe-wide, Corbett (2005) investigated the role of the European Commission as a policy entrepreneur in the evolution of higher education policy, and showed a political process shaped by unexpected events and led by the policy entrepreneurship of some Commission officials.

What these studies have in common is a view of the European Commission as a policy entrepreneur that is able to orchestrate socialisation, to shape policy agendas and to create a constituency of support through the development of a European network of experts and stakeholders (Pollack 1995; Laffan 1997). Taken together, this body of research is grounded in those theoretical arguments that view the European Commission as a supranational policy entrepreneur engaging in 'entrepreneurial activity' (Pollack 1995: 138) as a 'purposeful opportunist', referring to the Commission's embodiment of the interests of the Community while representing the sum of the particular interests of Member States (Cram 1994: 6). As argued by Pollack (1995: 124), the Commission can strategically exploit the different domestic preferences to promote its own agenda. Indeed, its agenda-setting influence depends on 'Member State uncertainty regarding the problems and policies confronting them and on the Commission's acuity in identifying problems and policies that can rally the necessary consensus among Member States in search of solutions to their policy problems' (Pollack 1995: 128). This is what Pollack (1995) refers to as 'creeping competence', meaning that the Commission's initial competences creep into other policy areas without formal authorisation.

However, applying a supranational approach to the developments of European education policy is not totally convincing. First, given that education is such a visible policy area in Member States in which the Commission lacks any formal competence, supranational actors could be influential, and hence act as informal agenda-setters, only to the extent to which they can convince Member States and political elites to follow their favoured agenda for educational reforms (Pollack 1995). In other words, the European Commission needs to persuade Member States of the advantages of supranational cooperation in order to shift their loyalties away from their national institutions and towards European institutions. This suggests that a supranationalist approach should at least be supplemented by a more ideas-centred analysis that could elucidate why the issues the Commission was advocating had such broad resonance. Second, is the European Commission the only policy entrepreneur to set the education agenda and shape its content? Even though the literature has without exception focused on the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission, it may be possible that other actors have influenced this process. This is a perspective that has to date been neglected by the literature. For instance, the role of non-state actors, including unions and the world of business and employers, in diffusing education reforms and policy goals has been largely unexplored (Jakobi, Martens and Wolf 2010; Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011). Although non-state actors do not have as much material power as state actors, they can hold powerful ideas, beliefs, scientific evidence and moral principles that give them strength and legitimacy. As Susan Strange (1996: 14) put it, 'politics is larger than what politicians do, and that power can be exercised – as it is every day being exercised – by non-state authorities as well as governments'. This suggests that broadening the analytical lens to include more of the social world would provide a better account of the dynamics and mechanism of the European education policy process.

Furthermore, even though the concept of spillover and the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission might be useful in terms of shedding light on some developments of EU policy, and while it is true that European education has experienced a qualitative and quantitative expansion since Lisbon, it would be difficult to assert that the undisputed need for cooperation has been translated into supranational integration, as predicted by supranationalism. In addition the Lisbon Strategy and the new policymaking formula of the OMC redirect educational policy formulation back to the national ministries and thus further limit the influence of the Commission. Therefore, the concept of 'spillovers' clearly shows its limitations as it cannot explain why more integration has not occurred in education at the European level. As pointed out by Moravcsik (1993: 476), 'neo-functionalism appears to mispredict both the trajectory and the process of EC evolution'.

Other scholars have examined the changes in European education policy from theoretical perspectives more grounded in the LI lens of analysis, on the assumption that supranational institutions are mere agents of the EU system of government rather than powerful independent actors (Moravcsik 1998; Hix and Hoyland 2011: 16). In exploring the evolution, expansion and dynamics of European education policy, Walkenhorst (2008: 571) argued that, since the 2000s, education 'has experienced a paradigm shift in its policy aims'. Through a quantitative content analysis of EU official documents from the 1970s to 2006, he highlighted how the aims of European education policy have progressed from being 'primarily politico-educational goals to a supplementary market and workforce creation tool' (Walkenhorst 2008: 569). In identifying the drivers of this shift, Walkenhorst (2008) pointed to two factors: first, the changes in the economic environment, growing demands for internationalisation and globalisation trends that have triggered more political activity; and second, national reform pressures that have led Member States to make strategic use of the OMC as a tool to implement domestic reforms. In other words, the overall European education agenda and the use of the OMC are helpful to some governments in achieving education reforms that might be resisted on a purely domestic basis, where instead they can strategically take advantage of the EU Commission with its operational infrastructure and resources of information, experience and research capacities (Nugent 2010).

This approach may be useful in illuminating some turning points in the evolution of the policy by which Member States have represented both a negative and positive impetus. For instance, although Maastricht gave the EU certain competences in education, the principle of subsidiarity meant that these competences were quite limited. On the other hand, certain positive initiatives have resulted from intergovernmental agreements, for example, the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration which gave rise to the Bologna Process for higher education. In this sense, Bologna would represent a good case in supporting the intergovernmentalist interpretation of governments using supranational institutions and programmes to pursue favoured national goals that might be politically difficult to promote on a purely domestic basis (Nagel 2010). For instance, the Sorbonne Declaration was used by the original participating governments to 'kick-start domestic reform agendas' in higher education (Knodel and Walkenhorst 2010: 138).

However, it is not enough to assume that Member States intended to increase cooperation in education and that the rise of the EU policy agenda was the consequence. This assumption implies a specific question: under what conditions would an intergovernmental framework be applicable? The answer should relate to the specific nature of education as a policy field, which is characterised by 'ambiguity' and 'high issue complexity' (Zahariadis 2008). While ambiguity refers to a process 'where there is a shifting roster of participants, opaque technologies and individuals with unclear preferences' (Ackrill, Kay and Zahariadis 2013: 871), high issue complexity indicates the degree of interaction (horizontal and vertical) among different policy actors that makes the direction of policy change more unpredictable (Zahariadis 2008). These examples are barely recognised by LI. As also pointed out by scholars, the LI approach based on the 'rational actor model' (Cini 2003: 103) 'wins easily' only in specific fields of EU politics, namely when it is applied to cases in which economic integration is the main concern and where decisions are taken on the basis of unanimous voting by Member States in the Council (Wincott 1995; Scharpf 1999). This suggests that, although the theory might be useful in explaining the more dramatic developments in the EU agenda, it does not seem to be a powerful explanation of many of the observed incremental developments; for instance, the elaboration of the different education programmes or the evolution of the common instruments to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe (e.g. some 'translation' devices such as the EQF).

In this respect, it is legitimate to ask why education became a highly salient issue for Member States, despite the diversity of their education systems and the plethora of strong interest groups in the field (for example trade unions, notoriously representing a strong veto power in most Member States against educational reforms). A plausible answer would be that changes in global and European political economies, the rise of youth unemployment, sectoral changes and the shift from an industrial to a post-Fordist knowledge economy can all be considered reasons why education policy is now conceived as a 'supplementary market and workforce creation tool' (Walkenhorst 2008; Ertl 2003). The evolution of EU policies outlined in the previous section confirms that the economic rationale for broader and deeper EU integration has been a significant factor in the convergence of interests in education. However, this does not clarify what primed Member States to see the problem of education in terms that made, for instance, benchmarks and indicators the solution.

Although an LI explanation aptly points out the economic constraints posed by globalisation, and although it can explain why Member States have pursued the education issue, it does face some blind spots. First, a rationalist explanation offers no theory of preferences. Instead, it deploys exogenous preferences to explain individual and social choice. As Cini (2003: 95) put it, this explanation has 'nothing to do with ideology or idealism, but is founded on the rational conduct of governments as they seek to deal with the policy issues that confront them in the modern world'. Second, as mentioned earlier, it does not account for the specific peculiarity of education as a policy field characterised by 'ambiguity' and 'high issue complexity' (Zahariadis 2008). Third, whereas an LI approach is undoubtedly important in explaining actors' strategic behaviour in their decisions to cooperate at the European level, its focus on a short-time horizon neglects potential long-term factors that might elucidate how the choice was made. In other words, where this approach aptly makes its contribution is at the stage at which the policy has been chosen, but it is less concerned with the stage at which the policy is formulated and debated. Therefore, LI does not clarify what has

persuaded Member States to see the problem of education in terms that made, for instance, coordination around benchmarking and indicators the preferred solution. Hence, to make this explanation more fruitful, it should be at least enriched with a more ideational lens of analysis that is able to capture the process through which specific ideas and beliefs shaped actors' interests.

To summarise, two reflections arise from this critical review of the two European integration theories. First, what has emerged from the literature is an overemphasis on the role of the European Commission in driving these changes. However, a solid explanation of the mechanism through which the European Commission gained (and maintained) its role is still lacking. At the same time, the role of non-state actors in contributing to the formulation and shaping of European education policy has been largely unexplored. Second, under an LI approach, existing perspectives are limited as they fail to elucidate how specific ideas were chosen and how the common consensus around specific problems was constructed given also the ambiguity and institutional complexity of the policy field of education. For these reasons, this article suggests that by complementing these perspectives with an ideational approach, it might be possible to better clarify how preferences were formed and why some preferences mattered more than others.

BEYOND THE SUPRANATIONAL-INTERGOVERNMENTAL DICHOTOMY: BRINGING IDEAS BACK IN

Scholars who have sought to explain policy change through the role of ideas have often been confronted by the scepticism of objectivist approaches, such as those of LI scholars who contend that institutions, power relations and interests are the prevalent causal factors that explain policy change. However, as argued by Dani Rodrik (2014: 190), taking into account the role of ideas in shaping interests 'could provide a more convincing account of both stasis and change in political-economic life'. Providing an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature on ideas in policymaking is beyond the scope of this article (see Béland and Cox 2010). Here, the focus is on the concept of ideas as policy frames (Surel 2000) and on ideas as a policy paradigm (Hall 1989) in order to provide some preliminary thoughts on how these conceptual lenses of analysis might enable a better understanding of the increased role of the EU in education policy.

According to ideational perspectives, actors within policymaking processes often work within a framework of ideas and roadmaps that act as explanatory variables to define their preferences 'by stipulating causal patterns or by providing compelling ethical or moral motivations for actions' (Goldstein and Keohane 1993: 16), and by constraining the cognitive range of useful solutions available to policymakers (Campbell 2002). Thus, ideas can be considered as frames that 'define, in a given field, world views, mechanisms of identity formation, principles of actions, as well as methodological prescriptions and practices for actors subscribing to the same frame' (Surel 2000: 496). Put simply, a frame is a perspective that identifies problems, suggests explanations and proposes certain public policy actions that could solve these problems. In a similar vein, the concept of a policy paradigm refers to 'not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problem they are meant to be addressing' (Hall 1993: 279). Once one idea gains acceptance, it provides a space and a structure for political action,

influencing the way in which actors interpret policy problems, as well as impacting the objectives and instruments of policy that are deemed appropriate (Hall 1993: 279). Ideas thus constitute the interpretive framework within which government officials and politicians understand and communicate about their work.

In Hall's interpretations, a policy paradigm can be of first-, second- and third-order change (Hall 1993: 278). A first-order change concerns adjustments to instrument settings, a second-order change involves the alteration of both the settings and the policy instruments, and finally, a third-order change – the paradigm shift in Kuhnian's sense – occurs when the two aforementioned variables blend with a radical change in the policy goals. While first- and second-order changes are marginal and routine, and are mainly a consequence of technical learning by civil servants and specialists, a third-order change is a general paradigm shift, which is set off by exogenous shocks and policy failures, and is heavily influenced by new ideas and societal learning (Hall 1993). In other words, the adoption of a specific policy paradigm affects the problems that the policymakers should address, the goals to be pursued and the instruments to be used. Thus, once a paradigm shift is established, it becomes the 'magical weapon of wizards' (Hall 1989: 367), influencing how actors perceive the world and the discourse they employ.

Building on these premises, how can we make sense of the changes in EU education policy with an increasing involvement of the European level despite the lack of a specific treaty provision? Could the adoption of an ideational perspective better elucidate the nature and dynamics of these transformations? Following Hall's conceptualisation, this paper contends that there are some aspects of these developments that may suggest how the developments in education policy have led to a paradigm shift intended as the institutionalisation of new principles and beliefs, including the expansion of the role of the European Commission. Recalling the evolution of EU education policy outlined earlier, it can be supposed that specific ideas and frames have emerged. For instance, the idea of European competitiveness linked to education has been a clear leitmotiv of the EU's political agenda, especially since the Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategies. In the discourse advocated by the European Commission, the 'modernisation' of education and training systems has become an appealing catchword to indicate that national systems in Member States are substantially outdated and in need of reform. By borrowing the framing perspective, it is therefore noticeable how a specific problem (i.e. outdated training systems in Europe and a lack of EU competitiveness) has been linked with a particular solution (i.e. modernising them according to the policy objectives formulated by the EU).

In addition, a new educational space has been shaped (Allmendinger, Ebner and Nikolai 2010). Within this space, new actors from the private sector have entered the domain, the use of indicators, benchmarks and externally verifiable texts has become a key feature to measure educational achievements, and addressing Europe's skills gap is now perceived as a crucial element of educational reforms. Most importantly, the 'framing' of education and training as a crucial factor in determining growth and prosperity in Europe has been – and is being – pushed forward by both intergovernmental (Bologna) and supranational (Copenhagen) processes. Indeed, although Member States may or may not agree on the 'intrusion' of the EU level on education issues, the absence of any contestation at Member State level regarding the role of education as a tool to increase the competitiveness and employability of workers must nevertheless be noted.

Core features of this paradigm are represented by the changes in the goals of policy, principles and policy instruments of education (for example, the OMC and the use of benchmarks and indicators to assess the performance of Member States in achieving the EU targets). As stressed by Xavier Pratt Monnè, the former Deputy Director of DG Education and Culture, during a conference in London, 'we cannot tell Member States what to do, but we can tell them how they are doing and what they should do to improve their education systems' (Prats Monné 2013). In addition to reshaping the goals around education policy, the paradigm has changed the constellation of actors in the European education arena. For instance, within the framework of the Lisbon agenda and the policy processes of Bologna and Copenhagen, several European networks of civil servants and experts working in the field of education have been set up with the goal of exchanging information and promoting cooperation at Member State level, for example, by holding content-related discussions on the EU agenda. As also argued by Lawn (2006: 272; 2002: 20), 'a range of particular governing devices, such as networking, seminars, reviews, expert groups' is now embedded in a 'new space for education'. Thus, this view of the paradigm as a cooperation device would confirm Hall's argument regarding its very cohesive function in policymaking, which mitigates or unifies the otherwise dispersed interests in a given policy sector and allows coalition-building and collaboration between different groups of actors, changing the perceptions that actors have of their interests (Hall 1989).

Yet, 'taking ideas seriously' (Rodrik 2014: 205) may open a Pandora's box. Indeed, ideas are ubiquitous, unstable and rarely consistent. Which ideas mattered in the EU's involvement in education and how did they become institutionalised? Through which mechanisms was education framed as a solution to Europe's lack of competitiveness and Member States' interests in EU cooperation shaped? In this respect, further research should be carried out to detect how specific ideas about education acted as 'entry points' to legitimise the EU's involvement in education. In a similar way, scholars have empirically emphasised the importance of Lisbon as a paradigm shift or a turning point in education policy (Walkenhorst 2008; Ertl 2003), but very little is known about how ideational factors intervened in the policy formulation process. Finally, several tools now employed in the EU education agenda and part and parcel of the OMC, such as evaluation mechanisms and the focus on benchmarks and performance indicators, draw inspiration from the ideas and approaches of New Public Management, developed worldwide and contributed to by international organisations, in particular the OECD, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken 2012). Thus, further studies could address in greater depth how non-state actors and international organisations acted as 'ideas carriers' in advancing specific ideas about education. In sum, expanding the theoretical horizon of analysis with the inclusion of an ideational perspective could improve our understanding of education policy and its significance within the European integration process.

CONCLUSION

The motivation for this paper was to explain the puzzle concerning the transformations in European education policy and investigate the shift in the institutional responsibilities of the European Commission since the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. The evolution of EU competences in education has highlighted the transformations in European education policy from a 'grey area' in the 1970s to a 'European educational space' accompanied by a shift in the institutional responsibility of the European

Commission that, through the benchmarking and monitoring tools of the OMC, now performs a more incisive role in Member States' education systems. However, given that education is strictly an area of Member States' competence and a sensitive policy field linked to nation-building and states' identity, what explains the transformations which occurred after the Lisbon Strategy of 2000?

The strategy employed by this article to address this question has been theoretical in nature, with the main argument being that conventional approaches to EU integration fail to fully explain these transformations. Indeed, even though supranationalism and LI can be relevant in explaining some of the stages of the development of EU policies, both have pitfalls. To begin with, a supranationalist approach cannot explain why more integration did not occur or, in other words, why we have not seen the emergence of a genuine common European education policy. Concurrently, this theory does not fully capture how the consensus around a specific educational problem was constructed, considering the limited competences of the European Commission in this policy field. In the case of LI, where interests and domestic preferences represent the *deus ex machina* of policy change, it is not entirely clear how Member States decided to transfer some competences to the supranational level in such a nationally sensitive policy field.

Moreover, while an LI explanation aptly explains the stage at which a specific policy solution for education was chosen, it has little to say about how Member States' interests were (re)defined. Taken together, both lines of explanation emphasise the form of a policy rather than its content. They pay less attention to how a particular policy orientation emerged and why a certain set of ideas was favoured over others. Moreover, both theories seem less suitable when applied to more institutionally complex and ambiguous policy areas, such as education. In other words, by relying exclusively on a supranational or LI approach, the existence of a European education policy risks being taken for granted in lieu of explaining how and under what conditions it was created.

Consequently, against the limitations of these explanations, this paper has suggested that the adoption of an ideational framework of analysis could better elucidate the input side of the policy formation of the European framework for education and further explain the factors behind the increased legitimacy of the European Commission to intervene in education. Drawing upon analytical tools from the ideational literature, namely the concept of frames and a policy paradigm, it could therefore be possible to capture the means by which ideational factors have impacted the policymaking process. To conclude, by considering ideas as explanatory variables, European education policy may emerge as being not only the result of Member States' agreements or the European Commission's policy entrepreneurship but also as the result of the diffusion of ideas – in this case - about the economic role of education in Europe.

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Research Article

Framing the European Fund for Strategic Investments: A Comparative Analysis of the EU's Institutional Discourse

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Abstract

In 2014, newly elected Commission President Juncker pushed to create the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), with the aim of creating jobs and stimulating growth. With quarantees offered by the fund and the involvement of the European Investment Bank, the plan was to use €21 billion to leverage €315 billion of investment in the European economy. The EFSI legislative process was very fast with legislation emerging in just a year, with the first EFSI regulation appearing in mid-2015. Using policy frame analysis, this article zooms in on the discursive patterns of the European Commission, European Parliament and Council, expecting to find transport infrastructure a key theme given the low investment levels in this sector after the financial crisis in 2008. Analysing key documents at two periods in time, and drawing on interviews with officials, it explores the arguments used to make the case for EFSI and how these changes over time, leading to the extension of EFSI through an amended regulation in December 2017. In so doing, it shows the strategic positions of the institutions during Agenda-setting for EFSI. Moreover, the article explores questions of legitimacy and accountability. It reveals how key events including the Paris Agreement on climate change (December 2015) and Brexit referendum (June 2016) increased the persuasiveness of its framing.

Keywords

Framing analysis; European Fund for Strategic Investment; Transport infrastructure; Trans-European Networks; Infrastructure investment; European Structural and Investment Fund

In 2008 the global financial crisis shook international and European capital markets. As a result, average sovereign debt in the Eurozone countries increased from 69 per cent to 90 per cent of total Eurozone gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012. In early 2014 the European economy was still facing both high unemployment rates in the southern European Union (EU) member states and slow economic growth compared to other global economies. Investment levels were not recovering quickly, which had major implications for transport infrastructure building in the EU.

Public spending in the transport sector declined from 2008 (OECD, 2017) with some countries decreasing their investments by up to 25 per cent compared with pre-crisis levels; this combined with already low rates of infrastructure investment in the decades before (Munnell 1992; Aschauer 1989). Yet, high quality transport infrastructure networks are an important prerequisite for strong and sustained economic performance. Arguably, there was a threat to Europe's infrastructure and economy given the member states' propensity to save.

After taking office in early 2014, the Juncker Commission released its ten strategic priorities (European Commission 2014a), one of which was to strengthen Europe's competitiveness by stimulating private investment. The Commission put forward the idea of a new instrument plan to create financial incentives for private sector investment. The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) was quickly created to minimise the risk for investors by providing an EU financial guarantee. Coupled to the involvement of the European Investment Bank, the plan was to use €21 billion to leverage €315 billion of investment in the European economy.

The EFSI legislative process was very fast with legislation emerging in just a year (European Parliament 2015a). In fact, the EFSI instrument was extended through a further legislative process in 2016-2017 (EFSI 2.0), resulting in a second regulation, in force in December 2017 (European Parliament and Council 2017), with a third amendment and restatement of the EFSI Agreement signed on 9 March 2018 to reflect the EFSI 2.0 Regulation (European Commission 2018). As such, there are concerns about the fund's accountability and risk. As Benedetto (2020: 11) asserts:

EFSI 2.0, although in line with the EU's democratic rules for passing regulations through the Council and the EP, therefore committed more public money to guarantee the higher level of credit at €500bn, without a full evaluation as to EFSI's effectiveness or reliability, nor a full financial compliance audit from the ECA.

This was possible because the Council decided to establish EFSI as an EU fund with the participation of the EU budget, rather than as an intergovernmental fund backed only by the Treasuries of the Member States (Benedetto 2020: 13).

In light of such speed, there is very good to reason to look closely at the dynamics of agenda-setting in 2014/2015 prior to the first regulation entering into force in July 2015 (European Parliament and Council 2015). The legitimacy of the policymaking process rests on the notion of Commission proposal being sufficiently consulted on and deliberated by the co-legislators. In fact, as Benedetto (2020: 4) asserts:

The legitimacy of the EU depends more widely on its capacity to ensure collective goods that deliver beneficial outcomes for the economy and society. In the case of the EU, "good delivery" alone is insufficient. What also matters is 'throughput legitimacy' (Stephenson 2017: 1146) or legitimacy of the process, described by Schmidt (2013: 5) as 'based on interactions – institutional and constructive – of all actors engaged in EU governance.

The contribution of this article is to assess the way in which EFSI was projected by policymakers. It aims to enable a better understanding of how the EU institutions link policy problems (economy, security, transport, climate, risk) to respective policy solutions (EFSI-funded infrastructure investment). How was early inter-institutional discourse on the EFSI 1.0 regulation initiated and structured? Which arguments did the three EU institutions use? In short, how did the arguments put forward to justify EFSI's change over time, and which frames were most persuasive? Using policy frame analysis, this article zooms in on the discursive patterns of the European Commission, European Parliament and Council as they took their institutional position. Analysing key documents at two periods of time, and drawing on interviews with officials, the article shows how the Commission actively shaped policy outcomes in the early stages of the legislative process by using tactical discursive manoeuvres to build political support. It reveals how key events such as the Paris Agreement on climate change (December 2015) and the Brexit referendum (June 2016) shifted the discourse and the persuasiveness of certain frames. However, this article does not seek to evaluate the economic validity, nor the political feasibility of the frames brought forward.

This article proceeds as follows. In the second section, the EFSI context is explained from the perspective of transport infrastructure and economic development, EU transport policy and financing. The third section sets up an analytical framework that brings in frame analysis as a method for document analysis, based on the policy context outlined earlier. The fourth part analyses the emergence of frames in the positions of the three EU institutions over time. Ultimately, the frame analysis raises questions regarding the actual importance of EU transport infrastructure to certain policymakers.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

Transport Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cohesion

Transport economics scholars recognise a direct relationship between infrastructure provision and economic performance (Banister and Berechman 2001; Aschauer 1989). The level of infrastructure provision strongly affects the geographical distribution of economic activities; private investment is allocated depending on access to transport networks (Ottaviano 2008). Vickerman (1995: 227) found that 'variations in infrastructure between regions can be seen as a cause of variations in regional performance'. The absence of a harmonised pan-European infrastructure network was recognised as a barrier to development of cross-border transport and economic productivity (Johnson and Turner 1997).

European industry began to voice concerns that the absence of a harmonised pan-European infrastructure network could be a barrier to development of cross-border transport and economic productivity in general (Johnson and Turner 1997). The 1992 White Paper took up these concerns by addressing many market-related obstacles that needed to be overcome (European Commission 1992). At the beginning of the 1990s, these considerations gave an impetus to the idea of a common infrastructure policy that would enable the smooth functioning of the internal market by creating efficient terrestrial networks:

the smooth functioning of the internal market and the strengthening of economic and social cohesion [...] ensuring the sustainable mobility of persons and goods under the best possible social, environmental and safety conditions and integrating all modes of transport, taking account of their comparative advantages (European Commission 1996: 2).

From Trans-European networks (TENs) to the EFSI

Following a Commission communication in 1998, work on 'Trans-European Networks' (TENs) began (van Exel, Rienstra, Gommers, Pearman, et al. 2002; European Commission 1998). On a continental level, interconnection was to be fostered, not only in transport (TEN-T), but also in energy (TEN-E) and telecommunications. However, infrastructure

policy remained a mainly national competence, with most investment planning still taking place in European capitals and regions (Sichelschmidt, 1999).

Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-Ts) policy has been analysed by scholars regarding the emergence of policy in the 1990s (Johnson and Turner 2007; 1997), and regarding their financing (Turró 1999). In terms of EU policymaking, Stephenson examined how EU investment in ambitious transport infrastructures finally rose on the agenda in the 1990s against the backdrop of a failed Common Transport Policy (2012a) and the role of the European Commission in particular in advancing this agenda (2010a). Stephenson also explored the two-level game with regards to executives and how they report to parliaments on TENs policy-decisions (2009) and, insightfully, analysed how the Commission has coped with the problems of TENs implementation, largely due to wavering political commitment and the difficulty of sufficient financial means to pay for cross-border sections, including the experiment with public private partnerships (PPPs).

Other scholars have embarked on initial evaluations of TENs performance. Even a decade ago, after 15 years of TENs, their effectiveness was found to be rather limited in terms of direct integration benefits, even if there are spillover effects from TEN-T cross-border projects (Gutierrez, Condeço-Melhorado, López and Monzón 2011). Maximising the impacts of economic growth requires investment decisions to be guided by the criterion of highest 'European added value', implying – quite politically – that some less valuable projects should be funded by national authorities rather than by EU funds. Yet the reality of policymaking for the TENs priority projects was that each member state has at least one project, thus it was heavy on symbolic politics.

Following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, economic development and cohesion became the guiding principles for structural investment in EU infrastructure projects, aimed at reducing regional disparities in the 'young' European member states and thus increasing their overall economic performance (Short and Kopp, 2002; Faiña, López-Rodríguez and Montes-Solla 2016). After a long and painful ratification process for the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, the EU set itself ambitious targets with the 'Europe 2020' strategy, which became the guiding mantra for a 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a means to overcome the structural weaknesses in Europe's economy' (European Commission 2017). In 2010 the Commission made the case for a €500 billion investment in transport networks, in order to meet the policy goals of the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2011: 55). But how would it raise such vast sums of money?

With EFSI, as with Brexit, 'the capacity to speak with authority about the economy or to draw upon accredited economic expertise is an important source of political advantage' (Rosamond 2020: 1). Clearly, analysis conducted by other international organisations gave legitimacy to the scheme. The International Monetary Funds's (2014: 83) own analysis in 2014 concluded that 'public investment shocks have statistically significant and long-lasting effects on output' and that 'an unanticipated 1 percentage point of GDP increase in investment spending increases the level of output by about 0.4 percent in the same year and by 1.5 percent four years after the shock'. Drawing on this report, Gros (2014) examines the correlation of corruption with the productivity of infrastructure investments, but makes the case that infrastructure investment overall does not increase economic growth, rather, that it is increasing consumption that explains growth.

Experiments in Financing EU Infrastructure

Following the financial crisis in 2008, public spending on transport infrastructure declined significantly in EU member states (OECD 2017). For example, Spanish public expenditure on transport decreased by 25 per cent from 2009 to 2013. Consequently, European public administrations as well as businesses sought to lower their investment risks (Peters et al., 2011). Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) were considered useful instruments at first since they introduced a risk-sharing model. PPPs were often long-term contractual agreements between public and private entities, whereby the private entity took over certain services

normally provided by the public entity (Grimsey and Lewis 2002: 108). As limitations on the public financing of transport infrastructure increased, the use of PPPs became widespread in Europe (Garrido et al., 2017).

Recent figures by the European Investment Bank (EIB) show an incremental increase in the use of PPPs with the bank lending over €4 billion to them in Europe in 2016 (EIB, 2017). In Spain, for example, EU financial support has had positive effects on PPP project performance (Garrido et al. 2017). Nevertheless, systemic problems with PPPs remain: the transfer of risk to private entities seeking to generate profit can have a negative overall impact on the quality of service provided (Grimsey and Lewis, 2002). This has led to several negative experiences with PPPs, TEN-Ts, and consequently, a greater reluctance among the member states to use them as a financing model.

EU policymakers reacted to falling investment back in 2010. The Commission President Barroso proposed the Europe 2020 'Project Bonds initiative (PBI)', where the Commission teamed up with the EIB to 'stimulate capital market financing for large-scale infrastructure projects' (EIB 2012: 1). The target group of these bonds were institutional investors like pension funds or insurance companies, since traditional sources for these investments were constrained by Basel III obligations. European banks at that time were still recovering from the 2008 financial crisis and faced legal obligations to reduce risk in their investment portfolio and expand their own capital base.

The Commission's evaluation of the PBI concluded that such an initiative to attract investment was necessary to 'counterbalance the market volatility or uncertainty by providing long term and competitive solutions to finance crucial infrastructure projects in Europe' (European Commission, 2016d: 11). It is this instrument that would effectively form the ideological basis behind the EFSI (Interviewee 7). In short, given low investment levels after the financial crisis, the history of the PBI and mixed experiences with PPPs, the Commission concluded that a new instrument to foster investments was needed to help achieve the Europe 2020 targets (such as 75 per cent employment rate in the 20-64 age group; 20 per cent of energy coming from renewables).

EFSI alone aimed 'at mobilising investments that rival the size of the Cohesion Policy, while the sum of all funds mobilised by financial instruments could rival the whole budget by the end of the MFF' (Núñez Ferrer, Le Cacheux, Benedetto, Saunier, et al. 2016). A subsequent analysis of EFSI's quantitative impact in its first year and a half of activity provided for encouraging results but put forward several recommendations for policy reform, including regulatory amendments to enhance the accountability and transparency, focus on human capital and social rights, and to develop 'investment hubs' at national level (Rinaldi and Núñez Ferrer, 2017).

Naert (2017: 6) examines EIB-/EFSI governance and also draws on the IMF analysis. He claims, remarkably, that the EFSI is not a proper fund or legal entity and that it does not trade independently. Instead, it is merely 'a label for new EIB assets'. As such, since the EFSI it is enshrined in the EIB, he stresses that its dedicated governance should ensure that it remains focused on its objective of increasing the volume of higher risk projects supported. Indeed, there have been great concerns voiced about the financial accountability of the EFSI, with its 'technical [non-majoritarian] management' with limited political oversight in terms of its appointment and accountability (Benedetto 2020: 13). This is 'a risk that many of the investment functions of the traditional EU budget are crowded-out as EFSI 2.0 transforms into the larger InvestEU after 2020' (Benedetto 2020: 14). The remainder of the paper explores the framing of EFSI by the three institutions.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Agenda-Setting: Institutional Discourse and The Role of Frames

Agenda-setting involves 'creating a situation whereby an issue is in a position to be considered by policy-makers' (Nugent and Birkland 2016: 1200). It is a twofold process, with a pool of issues on the one hand and policymakers on the other. As Princen (2007: 10) asserts, agenda-setting theory stresses that 'what is being talked about depends on who is doing the talking'. Where they talk also matters and the European institutions are seen as 'venues' for policymaking (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Each defines and pursues its own agenda(s) with the differences and shifts being 'important drivers behind agenda dynamics and shifts in the overall EU agenda' (Princen 2007: 11).

The way that institutions speak dramatically influences the EU's collective discourse and shape of policy outcomes (Zahariadis 2008). How exactly the EU's traditional policy initiator, the European Commission, and its two co-legislators *speak about* an issue depends on their composition, mandate, stakeholders and audience. The role of discourse in influencing political action is well recognised by Schmidt (2008) who introduced the notion of *discursive institutionalism*. She made the case for closely examining the discussion of ideas in political spheres (how ideas travel) given that the other three strands if institutionalism can lack explanatory power. Ultimately, she argues that 'discursive processes alone help explain why certain ideas succeed and others fail because of the ways in which they are projected to whom and where' (Schmidt 2008: 309).

In any political arena with multiple actors, the perception of issues can vary greatly. These perceptions – derived from frame 'projections' – are understood as 'a perspective, from which an amorphous, ill-defined problematic situation can be made sense of and acted upon' (Rein and Schön 1993: 146). Put differently, frames are used by policymakers to connect a certain policy solution to the issues on the agenda (Rhinard, 2010). As such, they can have a substantial impact on the whole legislative process, with those frames formulated in the agenda-setting stage wielding particular influence (see Baumgartner, 2008).

Policy Frame Analysis

To better understand the concept and the analytical approach taken in this article, we must distinguish between policy frames and the activity of framing issues. While frames provide a rather 'definitional, static' understanding of a subject, framing should be recognised as a dynamic process used by policymakers (Van Hulst and Yanow 2016: 93). In the process of framing, actors 'intersubjectively construct the meanings of the policy-relevant situations with which they are involved' (Van Hulst and Yanow 2016: 96). Thus, frame analysts ask how frames influence the way issues are processed, how they affect which interests play a role during policy drafting and deliberation, and what type of political conflicts and coalitions are likely to emerge as a result (Daviter 2007: 654).

The way frames are applied has become a prominent subject of research enquiry. Based on Kingdon's (1984) multiple-stream approach, Nugent and Rhinard (2016) developed the notion of strategic framing. Regarding the Commission, Rhinard (2010: 2) questioned the extent to which it can manipulate the political arena, or in his words, the 'ideational framework within which policymaking takes place in order to privilege certain actor networks, alter decision structures, and link specific policy options to broader societal issues'. He asserts that the Commission uses frames as a sort of soft power strategy, enabling the institution to set the tone and shape the outcomes of the policy processes quite substantially.

Indeed, the European Commission has a key role to play in structuring the 'iterative process of policy-making, and policy recommendations' and it is able to 'contribute towards the construction and revision of a policy frame' (Stone Sweet, Sandholtz and Fligstein 2001: 11; Maltby 2013: 437). Such agenda-setting can be highly conducive to securing policy change (Nugent and Rhinard, 2016; Mintrom and Norman 2009: 649) by linking the

supposed benefits of policy action in one field to spillover benefits in another. Bauer (2002: 386) has considered how the Commission's activities equate to discourse framing. With considerable room for manoeuvre during the agenda-setting stage, the Commission is able to 'influence the interpretation of the problem, thereby pre-determining possible answers'. These strategies enable the Commission not only to 'shape the agenda and exert influence in many key policy areas' (Nugent and Rhinard 2016: 1201), but also to gradually expand its legal competences in policymaking.

However, to better understand the dynamics of agenda-setting, Princen (2007: 23) states that 'one has to look beyond the Commission as an actor and turn to the processes and factors that shape the political agenda'. Instead of seeking the origin of a policy idea, as described by Kingdon, it is more rewarding to analyse the framing of issues by other different actors in the political arena, when seeking to explain the political rise and fall of topics (Princen 2007).

The European Commission, Council and Parliament each have their own discourses and their competencies determined by the EU treaties. The Commission is to all extents and purposes the agenda-setter, though the European Council was given formal status at Lisbon to set the agenda. The Commission thus makes proposals (often at the request of the others), after consulting with experts and interest groups. Each EU institution operates its own frames according to inherent or basic interests (representation of the people or the member states), but also to the balance of political power and corresponding ideology.

Both framing as activity and frames as the outcome of this activity are highly significant in the deliberative process, especially bearing in mind the quick ratification of the first EFSI regulation. A policy frame analysis involving all three European institutions actors might thus be constructive to map agenda-setting for EFSI, helping to explain how actors 'constructed' an issue discursively through framing. Moreover, many of the frames that come to dominate the discourse emerge early in the policy process. Policy frame analysis has been applied to a various policy fields in the EU: Dudley and Richardson (1999) for steel, Dostal (2004) for labour and welfare, Lynggaard (2007) for the common agricultural policy, Smith (2003) in common foreign security policy, Verloo (2007) for gender policies, Littoz-Monnet (2012) for EU cultural policy, and Stephenson (2012) for EU space policy.

Radulova (2011: 44) in her work on EU child-related policy defines the objective of policy frame analysis, as 'to examine the general evolution (rise and decline) of the different frames i.e. of the different conceptualizations of the problem and solution at stake'. Morth (2007), in her work on EU defence policy, explored the competing frames operating within the Commission, in the case of the defence industry. Her work on the Commission as a 'multi-organization' found that different frames compete across policy areas – and hence across DGs – often revealing conflicts of interest. She found frames not to be static but changing over time and leading to reframing.

In transport and infrastructure policy, frame analysis has been used to examine the justifications put forward by policymakers for their (investment) decisions. On the national level Frantzeskaki, Loorbach and Meadowcroft (2016) investigate the sustainability argument around Dutch infrastructure projects. Their study shows how actors use different aspects of the (also fairly new) sustainability paradigm in policy programmes. On the regional level Pettersson (2013) uses policy framing to examine infrastructure planning in Sweden. On the European level, Palmer (2015) examined EU transport biofuels policy, indicating policy entrepreneurship by the Commission. Nonetheless, framing analyses of EU transport policy are rare, and few existing analyses of EU Structural Funds and TENs (Gutierrez, Condeço-Melhorado, López and Monzón 2011; van Exel 2002; Sichelschmidt 1999) engage with policy frame analysis.

The original contribution of this article is thus to undertake a three-pronged analysis of EFSI policy discourse during agenda-setting, in order to understand how the EU institutions

link policy problems (economy, security, climate, transport, risk) to respective policy solutions (EFSI-funded infrastructure investment), and how the 'chorus of frames' emerges from their policy discourse, whereby the executive 'speaks' and the co-legislators 'voice' their positions.

Operationalisation

The article seeks to understand agenda-setting dynamics, EU institutional behaviour and the discourse around EFSI, particularly in light of the history of EU infrastructure investment. The overarching research question is: How did the European institutions set the agenda for EFSI? To answer this question, a combination of qualitative methods is used.

Timeframe

Juncker prioritised large-scale investment as a newly elected Commission president (European Commission 2014a). We can arguably conceive of two agenda-setting stages when it comes to EFSI: the first, during the creation of the tool from 2014 to 2015 (first regulation in force 4 July 2015) and the second, during the deliberation on the extension of the instrument beginning in June 2016 (second regulation in force 30 December 2017). This analysis spans focuses on formalised agenda-setting activity over this four-year period. In the 12-month period in-between, only informal deliberations on the effectiveness of EFSI took place, so were excluded.

The first round of policy discourse on EFSI began with Commission President Juncker in his inaugural speech in May 2014 and ended with ratification of the EFSI regulation in June 2015. Juncker initiated the second stage of policy discourse with the State of the European Union speech in September 2016 (European Commission 2016). The respective communication on EFSI was published on the same day, paving the way to the ratification of the regulation in June 2017. These are the chosen timeframes for the analysis, as the three European institutions expressed their views on the policy instrument on both occasions. During these periods, they discussed internally and spoke publicly of their reasons for supporting the fund. By using a policy frame analysis, we can arrive at a better understanding of how the three institutions 'justified' their support for EFSI. To which policy issue(s) (problems) did they link to the solution of a multi-billion Euro investment programme?

Documents

The analysis looks at the 'final' positions of the three institutions after consultation and input from various internal stakeholders. As Entman (1993: 52) asserts, frames can be detected by searching for 'the presence and absence of certain key words'. The documents were sourced via EUR-Lex, scanned for tone and underlying frames with a lens on use of language and metaphor. Three key documents for analysis were selected for each 12month period, one from each institution: for 2014-2015, the Communication by the European Commission (European Commission 2014d), the Parliament committee report or 'draft opinion' (European Parliament 2015b) and the General Approach by the Council (Council of the EU 2015). These documents were then also selected for the second period of EFSI agenda-setting (2016-2017) to enable us to analyse how the framing of EFSI as a policy solution changed in discourse over time. The Commission Communication Document (2016e) accompanies the proposal for the regulation (2016f) and is the result of extensive deliberation within the Commission, therefore has a high significance. The same applies to the Parliament report, where the rapporteurs integrated the opinions of relevant EP committees after a period of comprehensive consultation. In the General Approach by the Council of the EU, we get an idea of how Council negotiators of the Council frame the issues leading to the policy solution of EFSI.

Interviews

The frame analysis was complemented by eight semi-structured interviews with EFSI policymakers to test the findings and identify possible gaps between public statements and

the private (or undisclosed) positions of relevant officials. They comprised two members of the European Parliament, one being the co-rapporteur for both the EFSI regulation in 2014/2015 and the extension of EFSI in 2016/2017, one official of the EIB; three officials of the European Commission (of which, one member of the EFSI Steering Board and another the leading negotiator for the Commission in the legislative procedure for the EFSI regulations), one official of the Council of the EU (Council Secretariat) and a senior economic advisor of BusinessEurope.

ANALYSIS OF EFSI DISCOURSE

Earlier official documents related to infrastructure investments as well as current legislative documents were scanned, leading to the identification and selection of five frames. These dominant frames were deemed the most significant for an understanding of the new policy instrument in light of the research question. The frames were coded F1-F5 and deconstructed into arguments, which serve as 'processable' units for each frame. The documents were scanned again for significant language elements within each frame.

Table 1: Frames and Key Arguments for EFSI

Frame	Key Arguments	
F1 Single Market frame	Single Market	market integration
ŭ	free movement	
F2 Economic frame	job creation	growth
	economic recovery	competitiveness
F3 Transport infrastructure frame	transport infrastructure	mobility
	networks	interconnection
F4 Energy & Climate change frame	renewable energy	energy efficiency
	sustainability	Paris agreement
	climate action	
F5 Risk frame	risk profile	added value
	risk-bearing capacity	market failures
	additionality	

EUROPEAN FUND FOR STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS – LAUNCH (EFSI 1) Context

Following Commission President Juncker's announcement in June 2014, the Commission's proposal for a regulation on the EFSI was published in January 2015 (European Commission 2015). The file was then assigned to the EP's Budgets (BUDG) and Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) committees in February 2015. The Economics and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) developed a general approach by March. The EP committees adopted the draft report in April 2015, paving the way for inter-institutional negotiations in spring 2015.

Interviewees reported that, between the announcement of Juncker's investment agenda and the approval of the new Commission in November 2015, Juncker tried to convince political leaders of the 'old' member states to back the idea and financially contribute to an investment fund on the European level (Interviewees 2, 3, 7). However, Germany and France refused its support, making the designated Commission President already look ineffective before the official term of the Commission had even started.

Juncker continued to promote his idea of an investment programme and ultimately found a partner in the EIB. In agreement with the ECOFIN Council, the Commission and EIB set up an Investment Task force in autumn 2014. The European Council welcomed the idea of the task force in October 2014 'with a view to identifying concrete actions to boost investment, including a pipeline of potentially viable projects of European relevance' (European Council 2014: 12). In the end, the task force identified over 2,000 projects across Europe with an investment value of more than €1.3 trillion (European Commission 2014b).

Language

The first paragraph of the Commission communication directly implies that EFSI is a project of great significance, mentioning the financial crisis and the low level of EU investment 'well below its historical trend' (European Commission 2014d: 4). Describing the purpose of the investment plan, the language adopted an emotive tone: it used words like 'encourage', 'trust' and 'confidence' (European Commission 2014d: 4-5). Moreover, the language switched to first person plural ('what we need is confidence') in several instances to project the issue as a collective problem (European Commission 2014d: 4-5). Throughout the text, the authors call upon the Parliament and Council to act as quickly as possible to make the investment plan work, reminding us of metaphorical language used by Juncker in his first speech to the Parliament: 'jump cables', 'water can' (European Commission 2014c). In several text blocks, the Commission asks to 'move fast', 'rapid' or 'urgently' (European Commission 2014d: 4-6) and therefore creates a sense of urgency.

The Council embarks on this by requesting the Commission 'act without delay' on its jobs and growth agenda (European Commission 2015: 6). The Parliament stresses the importance of including as many stakeholders as possible, a call not found within the texts of the Commission and Council. The MEPs underline the fact that the impact of EFSI is dependent on an effective EU competitiveness strategy (European Parliament 2015b: 9).

Table 2: Frames in the period of creation of EFSI 1.0 (June 2014 - July 2015)

Launch of EFSI	Commission	Parliament	Council of the EU
June 2014 - July 2015	Communication	Draft Opinion	General Approach
Language	emotional: 'encourage, trust, confidence'; sense of urgency & calling for action: 'action is required; 'we have to move fast'; war-like language: 'action on several fronts', 'significant firepower' 'we';	technical language, listing EP's requests for amendments to the features of EFSI; more inclusive than the commission, invites more stakeholders to participate 'a comprehensive approach';	Focus on governance of the EFSI; Calling the commission to act 'without delay' on the jobs and growth agenda;
F1 Single Market Frame	'Special focus on the interconnections vital to our Single Market';	EFSI should be in synergy with existing EU policies and ensure additionality;	Support of investments with aim to 'complete the single market' in the sectors of transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructures;
F2 Economic frame	'reverse downward investment trends'; Job creation and economic recovery	'provide an immediate boost to its economy'	Access to financing for SME's;

Launch of EFSI	Commission	Parliament	Council of the EU
June 2014 - July 2015	Communication	Draft Opinion	General Approach
	(without increasing debt for the MS); Increased competitiveness;	economic, social and territorial cohesion EFSI must be a complement to an overall strategy to improve Union competitiveness;	Strengthening Unions competitiveness;
F3 Transport infra- structure frame	'support strategic investments of European significance in infrastructure, notably broadband and energy networks, as well as transport infrastructure';	Development of new, existing or missing transport infrastructure and innovative technologies 'urban mobility';	'urban and rural development';
F4 Climate change frame	-	Objectives: energy efficiency and energy savings;	EFSI should contribute to the 'transformation to a green, sustainable and resource efficient economy and to sustainable job creation';
F5 Risk frame	Viable projects that would have not received funding otherwise;	EFSI projects should have highest risk in all EU policy instruments;	EFSI projects shall have a higher risk profile than usual EIB investments;

F1 - Single Market Frame

While the Commission asserts that funding should focus on the interconnections 'vital' to the single market (European Commission 2014: 3), the Council speaks of an instrument to 'complete' the internal market, especially in the fields of transport, energy and telecommunications (Council of the European Union 2015: 5). Yet these are sectors with a long history of state control with national governments traditionally very reluctant to open up their markets to external competition. The Parliament stresses the importance of 'additionality'. EFSI should provide additional resources for the completion of the single market, but without watering down other policy instruments already in place (such as the structural funds or the TEN-T/TEN-E). The interviewee from the Council (Interviewee 7) stated that these additionality concerns were strong from the beginning, which made negotiations in the trilogue somewhat harder.

F2 – Economic Frame

All three institutions project a desire to strengthen/boost/increase the Union's competitiveness. However, elites diverge when it comes to how to achieve such goals, and moreover, precisely what those goals should be. The Commission puts job creation first as a pathway to economic recovery, and way of reversing the downward investment trend. The Council advocates improving access to financing for SME's ('and other entities having up to 3,000 employees' (Council of the European Union 2015: 6), while the Parliament supports a combination of the two options, but also stipulated that the EFSI should be complementary to 'an overall strategy to improve Union competitiveness' (European Parliament 2015b: 3).

F3 – Transport Infrastructure Frame

Given that some of EFSI's EU guarantee mechanism was to be re-allocated from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) – i.e. the EU budget – MEPs pay significant attention to plans for transport infrastructure spending. In the TRAN committee, in particular, there is

evidence of considerable reluctance regarding EFSI in case it jeopardises the CEF (Interviewee 2). The Parliament report places the 'development of new, existing or missing transport infrastructure and innovative technologies' among the core objectives (European Parliament 2015b: 23). MEPs thus see using EFSI funding for supporting innovations in the mobility domain as an opportunity. They also call for 'smart and sustainable urban mobility projects' (European Parliament 2015b: 23), a call not backed by the other institutions. Instead, the Commission seeks to support the development of transport infrastructure 'particularly in industrial centres' (European Commission 2014: 4). As for the Council, there are few references to transport or infrastructure, seen rather as a feature of 'urban and rural development' (Council of the European Union 2015:6).

F4 - Climate Change Frame

There are clear differences in the attention policymakers give to climate change. The Commission mentions 'renewable energy' and 'energy efficiency' among their many projects to be funded, but barely speaks of using EFSI funding for sustainable development. In the Parliament draft report (European Parliament 2015b: 23), energy efficiency and energy savings are mentioned more prominently with regards to EFSI's objectives, yet there lacks a detailed description of projects considered worthy of EU funding. In the EP, climate protection is only discussed explicitly in the amendments of the ENVI Committee. Of the three institutions, the Council – perhaps surprisingly – places the strongest emphasis on sustainability, ultimately stating that the EFSI should 'contribute to the transformation to a green, sustainable and resource-efficient economy' (Council of the European Union 2015: 7).

F5 - Risk Frame

One of the core features of EFSI is the risk-bearing capacity that it offers public and private investors. In its communication, the Commission explains how the low risk feature is designed to attract private investors, facilitating viable projects 'which would not have happened otherwise' (European Commission 2016e: 6). In theory, this would support SMEs for whom this financial instrument was particularly meant as a driver for job creation. When reviewing the Council position, one should bear in mind that some member states (Germany, The Netherlands and other net contributors that had survived the financial crisis better than others) express concern about the governance structure of EFSI from the beginning. Indeed, the Commission appears to have found a way to bypass national governments in the development of the fund by partnering up with the EIB (Interviewee 7). This accounts for their rather modest mention in the additionality clause: 'The projects supported by the EFSI [...] shall typically have a higher risk profile than projects supported by normal EIB operations', and 'the EFSI portfolio shall have overall a higher risk profile than the current portfolio of investments supported by the EIB under its normal investment policies' (European Commission 2016: 18). Due to its strong demand for 'additionality', the Parliament goes one step further, claiming that EFSI's average project risk 'should be higher than under any other available investment portfolio in the Union' (European Parliament 2017: 11)

EUROPEAN FUND FOR STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS - EXTENSION (EFSI 2)

The entry into force of the 2015 regulation was followed by deliberation on an extension of EFSI. As an EP official stated when interviewed: 'It's always easier to extend a policy compared to introducing a new one' (Interviewee 2). As such, the Commission was quick to communicate first results of EFSI guarantees granted to investment projects, for example in Juncker's state of the union speech in 2016. First monitoring reports indicated that EFSI was set to achieve its objectives in terms of securing financial allocations close to the target figure of €315 billion (EIB 2016; Ernst and Young 2016).

However, what we also see is the EP expressing doubts regarding EFSI's effectiveness, especially examining the geographic distribution of funding. The evaluation of Ernst and Young (2016) found that almost 90 per cent of funding for EFSI went to the EU-15 member

states, whereas the newer member states received only a 10 per cent share. Although designed for all member states, policymakers were confronted with an undesirable geographical imbalance. One interviewee (Interviewee 7) stated that EFSI was 'designed for southern countries like Italy and France from the beginning'. With EFSI's capability to finance projects with low interest rates, countries that had a lower debt rating were benefitting much more than countries with a high creditworthiness. Additionally, newer member states often did not have the necessary capacity to apply for EFSI funds, the interviewee claimed.

Context

In June 2016, the European Council propels EFSI back onto the agenda, stating that 'the investment plan, in particular the EFSI, has already delivered concrete results and is a major step to help mobilise private investment' (European Council 2016: 6). In its conclusions, the heads of state reveal that the Commission intends to continue to pursue EFSI, urging members of Parliament and the Council to treat the referred proposals 'as a matter of urgency' (European Council 2016: 6). It becomes clear that EFSI is, and will remain, one of the key undertakings of the Juncker Commission. Juncker then revives the discourse with his State of the Union Address on 14 September 2016, when he officially announced the Commission's intention to extend the Investment Plan (European Commission 2016c), the respective proposal being published on the same day. The Council agrees on a negotiating position on 6 December 2016. In the Parliament, the regulation is again assigned to the Budget (BUDG) and Economic Affairs (ECON) committees, with corapporteurs putting forward a draft report in April (European Parliament 2017) followed by a vote on the amendments in May 2017.

Language

The language in the Commission communication of 2016 is positive and features affirmative wording. Commission officials claim contentment with the results of the first year of financing activity and encouraged the promotion, extension and increase in the capacity of the fund, as reflected in the most used verbs ('reinforce', 'focus even more', 'gear'). The Commission promotes predictability and continuity, in order to attract investors for future investments with the risk-bearing capacity of EFSI. However, this positive tone is not fully shared in the other institutions. Whereas the Council acknowledges the positive performance of EFSI in its General Approach, the Parliament is more critical, indicating in the report and amendments that the instrument has not met its expectations in terms of scope, geographical distribution and range of domains that should receive funding. Both Parliament and Council advocate major changes to the governance structure of EFSI, resulting in more technical language in the respective texts.

Table 3: Frames in the extension period of EFSI 2.0 (June 2016 - July 2017)

Extension of EFSI	Commission	Parliament	Council
June 2016 - July 2017	Communication	Draft Report	General Approach
Language	Confident, lifted by the positive results of EFSI 1.0: results, success;	Less confident/positive than the Commission about EFSI results;	Calling for sectoral and geographical diversification;
	Stronger partnership with the EIB; Assuring: showing continuity to investors & stakeholders;	questions the direct impact of EFSI on the European economy; strong focus on EFSI governance;	strong focus on EFSI governance;
F1 Single Market frame	'Cross-border projects vital to the single market';	-	-

Extension of EFSI	Commission	Parliament	Council
June 2016 - July 2017	Communication	Draft Report	General Approach
F2 Economic frame	'Leveraging scarce public resources'	Unemployment still above pre-crisis levels;	'Address remaining market failures'
	'Deliver tangible results for jobs and growth';		Need to boost investments;
			'Encouraging private investor participation';
F3 Transport infrastructure frame	Footnote: Combination with CEF and CEF/TEN-T Guidelines to focus EFSI more on EU political priorities;	Avoid overlaps with CEF programme Include core corridors in additionality provisions for the completion of TEN-T; Dedicated target of 20% share for transport; 'the development of transport infrastructure [], in particular rail infrastructure and other railway; projects'	Combination with ESIF to enhance geographical coverage ('blending');
F4 Climate change frame	Increased focus on sustainable investment to meet COP21 targets 'Helping transition to a zero-carbon economy';	To support the climate targets agreed upon at COP21;	'EFSI operations should, as much as possible, contribute to achieving the objectives of COP21';
F5 Risk frame	'reinforce' additionality;	'the drive to meet the quantitative target should not prevail over the additionality of the projects selected';	

F1 - Single Market Frame

Instead of focussing on the 'special interconnections' for the internal market to work (first period of EFSI), the Commission chooses the term 'cross-border infrastructure projects', which might be to appease the EP's additionality concerns (European Commission 2016e: 3). It favours not only a thematic shift, but also one towards projects involving at least two member states. When reviewing the documents of Council and Parliament, it is noteworthy that they no longer mention the 'single market' specifically in their rationale for EFSI, which equally suggests a change of scope and direction.

F2 – Economic Frame

In 2016, jobs and growth indicators for the European economy show a positive development. Yet, the Council notes in its General Approach that market failures are still apparent, with substantial investment gaps remaining (Council of the European Union 2016: 7). Thus, the 'need to boost investment' and 'encourage private investor participation' prevail in the discourse. Rather than taking the angle of the investor, the Commission views the economic issues and objectives from the perspective of public authorities: the enhanced guarantee mechanism should help to 'leverage scarce public resources', ultimately delivering 'tangible results for jobs and growth' (European Commission 2016e: 2). The European Parliament stresses the importance of employment,

mentioning persistently high unemployment rates in several Member States (European Parliament 2017: 6).

F3 – Transport Infrastructure Frame

In this second period, MEPs become more assertive in their opinions. The TRAN Committee proposes a 20 per cent target share of EFSI funding, opposing the principle of no sectoral allocation in the first EFSI regulation. In addition, they pay particular attention to TENs: the (overdue) completion of TEN-T core corridors is to be included in the additionality provisions, so that they become a political priority (once again). The Commission also seeks to combine EFSI with the CEF and TEN-T guidelines to improve the quality of European infrastructure. However, it is striking that the Commission's remarks on infrastructure financed by EFSI only appear as a footnote in the Commission's communication (European Commission 2016e: 3). The Council, however, advocates the blending of EFSI money with the existing Structural Funds as a means to improve transport infrastructure, as confirmed by an interviewee (Interviewee 6), who confirmed that such as an approach would be adhered to in future.

F4 – Climate Change Frame

While only briefly discussed in the first period, climate change secures much greater attention in the second agenda-setting stage. After the conclusion of the Paris Agreement in December 2015, for which the EU delegation played a major role (Andresen, Skjærseth, Jevnaker and Wettestad 2016), tackling climate change becomes a top priority for European policymakers. This has a big impact on EFSI: all three institutions put meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement at the top of the agenda regarding EFSI funding. The Commission stresses its political goal to bring about a zero-carbon economy (European Commission 2016e: 3) and EFSI is considered a vital instrument in this endeavour. The Parliament asserts that the EIB should use its experience as a loan provider in the field of climate action, in order to identify and fund eligible projects (European Parliament 2017: 8). Meanwhile, the Council states that EFSI funding should 'as much as possible' contribute to the achievement of climate targets.

F5 – Risk Frame

'Additionality' remains a key issue in extension debate. As the evaluation by Ernest and Young (2016) indicates, some of the funded projects involve very few risks, casting doubt on the consequent application of this principle of additionality. As one of the interviewees put it simply: 'How to make sure that where the money goes is where the money is needed?' (Interviewee 6). The parliament expresses its concern that, in order to reach the quantitative target of €315 billion investments, the Commission and the EIB might end up watering down the previously stipulated risk profile. The co-rapporteur for the ECON (Interviewee 2) committee reiterates this matter during the interview. Aware of political concerns – a key element of negotiation during the creation of the EFSI – the new Commission communication claims to 'reinforce' the additionality of the projects (European Commission 2016e: 3). However, for the other institutional actors, this does not go far enough. For the EP, a more thorough application of this principle in the period from 2017-2020 was made a condition for its support, with additionality one of the key topics for the trilogues, the co-rapporteur claimed (Interviewee 2). In short, 'additionality' rather than 'risk' (as last round) comes to dominate the discourse.

CRITICAL DISCUSSION

The Frames Brought Forward

Scrutinising the frames, there was generally a high degree of repetition among the key documents, indicating a strong level of consensus. In the Parliament, all parties agreed that the EU had to take action in order to close the investment gap ('it didn't need much persuasion', Interviewee 2). As the co-rapporteur stated, the social democrats in the EP had asked for an instrument to tackle investment shortages even before the start of the

EP's term in 2014. However, there was no agreement on how to tackle this issue at first. Instead, MEPs were rooting for the integration of the Investment Plan and EFSI within the landscape of existing Structural Funds and policies. This is in line with an MEP's claim that EFSI 'must be a complement to an overall strategy to improve Union competitiveness' (European Parliament 2015b: 7), i.e. it must build on what has already been tried.

Reviewing the Council positions, it clearly took a strong stance on competitiveness and the growth of SME's, arguably the main issue driving its support for EFSI. Additionally, reducing emissions and enhancing a sustainable economy were salient arguments. In this regard, comparatively speaking the Council placed a stronger focus on these matters in both periods, which might be explained by EU leaders' ambitions to be at the forefront of the green movement (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010). Both the publication of the Energy Union strategy and the Paris Agreement happened between the legislative processes for EFSI 1 and EFSI 2. EFSI was soon identified as a policy instrument capable of delivering on the Energy Union objectives, for example by investing in clean energy infrastructure. The Council found support in the EP, where environmental protection and climate change have always played a great role, especially after the ratification of the Paris Agreement.

Remarkably, the analysis reveals that this political shift in focus came at the cost of the single market. Indeed, the single market frame appeared much less in the discourse around EFSI's extension. Only the Commission continued to justify its support for EFSI in terms of market integration, an argumentation pattern that is often used for the introduction of new policy instruments (Littoz-Monnet 2012). Instead, there was a high degree of overlap in the frames used by the three institutions, especially when it comes to the economics and climate change frames. The recognition of a major investment gap in the EU united policymakers, persuading them to put EFSI on top of the policy agenda. Yet the rapid setup of EFSI in 2015 created distrust amongst the Parliamentarians, which then encouraged a stronger focus on governance structures in the discussions on the extension.

EFSI and Transport Infrastructure

During the first period, the need for transport infrastructure investments was only rarely mentioned as a justification, mainly in combination with the completion of the single market and the attached freedoms of goods and people. Only MEPs devoted more attention to the issue of the 'missing links' in transport infrastructure. In the second period, the EP made an even stronger case for transport infrastructure investment, demanding a target share of 20 per cent in overall EFSI funding and a stronger focus on the completion of the TEN-T networks. The EP's position on transport infrastructure investment was influenced by international targets to tackle climate change with MEPs favouring an increase in ecofriendly rail transport.

The Council did not offer much political support for EFSI as a means to develop infrastructure investments. In both periods, transport appeared as a side issue in the respective General Approaches. For EFSI 2.0, this could be explained by the emergence of a new frame in summer 2016: Brexit. The referendum result meant that the biggest opponent of the European Defence Union was leaving, enabling the member states to cooperate more closely on security and defence matters. Consequently, during the extension phase, the Council added a paragraph to the General Approach that included an important new objective: to make EFSI fit for funding security & defence projects (Council of the EU 2016: 6).

Thus, rather surprisingly, transport infrastructure played a minor role in agenda-setting for EFSI. Although EFSI could have benefitted investment levels in transport infrastructure significantly, it appears that focusing events in fact led to the deprioritisation of transport-related themes by the Commission and Council. This becomes even more apparent when looking at the quantitative data: to date only 8 per cent of EFSI funding has gone to transport infrastructure projects (EIB 2018).

Two-Stage Agenda-Setting

The speed with which the Commission made a case for EFSI was remarkable in both periods. The language of the first communication put pressure on the EP and Council to rapidly introduce a new policy instrument. They decided to do so a year later in 2015. According to the co-rapporteur from ECON Committee (Interviewee 2), the process was not sufficiently transparent to allow for the EU institutions to really play a part in the development of EFSI's structure. The complexities of EFSI's governance and financing should have made it harder to secure to a political agreement. However, the trilogues were 'very intensive' (Interviewees 2, 4, 6, 7), implying that meetings were heated but that conflict was largely overcome.

In the second agenda-setting stage (extension of EFSI), the co-rapporteur suspected that the Commission intended to use surprise tactics for its own procedural advantage (Interviewee 2). This put the other two institutions on their guard, and consequently in discussions on EFSI's extension, Council and Parliament sought more influence on its governance design and on the projects that would receive funding, both in terms of countries and sectors. Interestingly, the Commission found another way to create support for its respective policy manoeuvre: The European Council (see European Council Conclusions from June 2016) backed the Commission in its activities, making clear its expectation that Parliament and Council of the EU would facilitate EFSI's implementation. Interviewee 7 claimed that the 'Commission has managed to push the European Council to take this statement on board'; in turn this raised the political stakes for EFSI.

The EP expressed its strong disapproval of the Commission's modus operandi (Interviewees 1, 2) because the process of developing EFSI was seen as a 'black box' and unaccountable. EFSI and its results were communicated very positively in print and social media, particularly before the second agenda-setting stage in 2016/2017. MEPs and other interviewees (Interviewees 5, 8) made critical remarks about the overly positive picture that the Commission had painted of EFSI's effectiveness in its external communications. Here again we see the Commission using language strategically to gain support and secure further political commitment. The EP also criticised the Commission for excluding it in very early stages of agenda-setting.

CONCLUSION

The analysis has shown how the European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the EU discussed and justified both the creation and extension of the EFSI. The frame analysis reveals which strategies the policy actors used to convince the counterparties of their argumentation.

The frames of single market, economic growth and risk in the first stage of agenda-setting were overtaken by frames on climate change, sustainability and additionality in the second stage; the latter frame owing to the EP concerns about the legitimacy of the Commission's early policymaking approach. One might even argue that an astute Commission, very much aware of the progressive political leanings of many MEPs, and the high issue salience of climate change, shifted the emphasis of its discourse purposively to a climate and environmental frame in order to project EFSI more convincingly as a policy solution. Indeed, the dominant frames shifted after major political events such as the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and the 2016 Brexit referendum.

Surprisingly, the use of the transport frame in EFSI discourse was limited and the subsequent share of investment projects in the field fairly low. Despite previous political commitments going back to the 1990s, the Council seems unwilling to evaluate transport infrastructure investments importantly enough to justify the creation of a new policy instrument able to complete the 'physical' links to complete the single market. Among other factors, this arguably underlines the imperative to *finally* establish a common view

of EU member states and their governments as to how to provide transport infrastructure for EU citizens for a truly interconnected and integrated Europe.

The speed of legislating for EFSI ultimately raises questions about transparency, financial accountability and good governance. It highlights the need to ensure appropriate evaluation at the early and later stages of the policy-cycle, and to safeguard calendars and protocols for consultation and deliberation, in order to uphold the throughput legitimacy of policymaking for MEPs and, by extension, taxpayers and citizens.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTNERS

Nr.	Name	Institution	Function
1	Lambert van Nistelrooij	European Parliament (EPP)	Member of REGI Committee in the EP, shadow rapporteur
2	Udo Bullmann	European Parliament (S&D)	Member of BUDG Committee, Rapporteur of EFSI file 1&2
3	Lucas Lenchant	European Investment Bank	Policy Advisor
4	Florentine Hopmeier	European Commission	DG ECFIN, Team Leader – Investment Plan for Europe
5	Irmfried Schwimann	European Commission	Deputy Director-General DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW); Member of the EFSI Steering Board
6	Benjamin Angel	European Commission	Director of DG ECFIN, Negotiator of EFSI in the trilogue procedure
7	Miroslav Stoyanov	Council of the European Union	Political Administrator at the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU
8	Joana Valente	BusinessEurope	Senior Advisor

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Research Article

What is the European Union? A Cultural Shared Risk Community!

On the Research Agenda of European Union Cultural History

Peter Pichler

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Abstract

In this commentary, the author continues his first reflections on European Union cultural history, which opened up this field and introduced the theory of 'paradoxical coherence'. Revisiting sociological and cultural-historical works by Ulrich Beck and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, he argues that the EU can be seen as a 'cultural shared risk community', the sources of identity-building and sense-making consisting of the European citizens' shared cultural risks and fears. From this he suggests a new agenda for cultural-historical research on the EU.

Keywords

European Union cultural history; cultural shared risk community; paradoxical coherence; research agenda; commentary.

WE NEED TO DEFINE THE EU (AGAIN)

On 31 January 2020, 'Brexit' closed the longest chapter of the relationship between the European Union and Great Britain (Geddes 2013; Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley 2017; George 1998). It is the first time that a member state has left the Union. Over the last few years, political debates in the EU have centred on the rise of nationalism and populism (Krastev 2017), migration (Betts and Collier 2018; Chaichian 2014), terrorism (Schmale 2016), climate change (Lewis and Maslin 2015; Kersten 2014) and most recently the 'Covid19' pandemic. We live in an era of fear of threats, sometimes real and sometimes fictitious (McIntyre 2018). Indeed, the thinkable dissolution of the EU is a frightening vision, because it would lead to an even more uncertain future. This situation is the reason to once again pose an 'old' question. It has to be asked once more, but in a new form. The debates on the European Union's future depend on answers to the question of what the EU is. What it is at the moment determines the range of possible future developments.

In this respect, recent European Studies have stressed the reversible and paradoxical character of EU history. Scholars have started to deconstruct the EU centric bias of earlier works (Kaiser and Varsori 2010; Patel 2013, 2018). Older works up to the 1990s included widespread interest in comprehensive EU theories. In contrast to that, from the 2000s until the time around the 'Brexit' referendum, scholarship no longer attempted to give a full or more comprehensive answer to the title question (Wiener, Börzel and Risse 2019; Bieling and Lerch 2012). Recent surveys of integration theory (ibid.) make me suppose that the 'pre-Brexit' period was a time in which society and politics seemed to not need a global theoretical concept of the EU. However, this has changed quickly over the past four years. In the current crisis after 'Brexit' and in the midst of the 'Covid19' pandemic in Europe, we have an urgent need for theoretically knowing what the EU actually is.

In this commentary, I take up my research in European Union cultural history (Pichler 2018, 2019, 2020) and suggest a new research agenda derived from it. So far, my focus herein has been the introduction of the theory of 'paradoxical coherence'. This theory interprets the EU as a distinct cultural system, which has produced a new form of cultural sense-making and community-building. Negotiating the ever-present conflict between nationalism and supranationalism, the EU established a new mode of coherence-building. It can be described as paradoxical coherence. I think that this perspective can give us a fresh answer to our question. It is my hypothesis that the EU has emerged as a 'cultural shared risk community' around the key risk inherent in the paradoxical coherence constellation. This puts new aspects at the top of the research agenda.

Subsequently, this agenda is developed in three steps: First, I discuss the history of the characterisation of the historiographic subject of the EU since 1968. The next section takes up research on the 'risk society' (Ulrich Beck) and 'latency' (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht). I take inspiration from both when then defining the notion 'cultural shared risk community'. In a third step, the 'nature' of the EU as such a community is analysed. My conclusion gives a concise formulation of a new research agenda.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHARACTERISATION OF THE EU A HISTORIOGRAPHIC SUBJECT

European integration history emerged as an independent field in the late 1960s. In 1968, Walter Lipgens published a seminal edition of World War II resistance fighters' plans for post-war European integration, written in German (Lipgens 1968). It was followed by an expanded, English edition that included various sources of European integration history in four volumes (Lipgens 1985-1991). These works sparked off an international research

debate on European integration history (Kaiser 2010; Seidel 2010). That first phase of European integration history was characterised by the initial description of the European Community as a historiographic subject (Pichler 2018, 2020). The construction of the EC as such a subject was closely linked to projective utopias of finality. This alleged characterisation intersected with the projection of an 'ever-closer community'. Frequently, discourse drew a picture of the EC as the initial de facto realisation of what had been imagined in pre-1945 Europe by the resistance fighters – a clearly teleological and EC-biased narrative.

Then in 1982, the EC supported the establishing of a network of scientists, the 'European Union Liaison Committee of Historians' (European Union Liaison Committee of Historians 2019). The committee has been editing the *Journal of European Integration History (JEIH)* (European Union Liaison Committee of Historians 1995-2020) since 1995. This marks the beginning of the period in which European integration history has encompassed an intersectional sphere between EU institutions and science. Hence, since the installation of the *JEIH*, European integration history moved on to become European Union history, in a narrower sense. European integration history, understood as EU history, has become the mainstream. This led to an even stronger, affirmative teleology of the 'ever closer union'. In short, the EU had been 'invented' historiographically in a rather uncritical and biased way.

The most recent development saw a critical shift in perspective, probably even a shift in paradigm. Articles and books by scholars like Wolfgang Schmale, Kiran K. Patel, Guido Thiemeyer, Isabel Tölle, Michael Wintle, and the author of this commentary have seriously questioned the older narrative. In his seminal works, Schmale introduced a concept of EU history as a 'hypertext', seeing it as discursive and contingent construction (Schmale 2001, 2008, 2018). Even more critically, Patel has stressed the EU's 'synecdochic' qualities (Patel 2013, 2018). According to him, the EU has only been one of a number of different forms of institutions involving international and supranational cooperation in Europe after 1945. Of these, the EC/EU would have been only the one that has most successfully self-fashioned its appearance in the discourse. Thiemeyer and Tölle empirically questioned the EU's novelty in history (Thiemeyer and Tölle, 2011; Tölle 2016; Thiemeyer 2010). Also, Wintle has used a non-teleological, cultural notion of the EU (Wintle 2009, 2016; Wintle and Spiering 2011). On balance, today the EU appears as a historic phenomenon, the nature of which is being critically questioned. Its scientific characterisation and definition are open again.

The question 'What is the EU?' is ripe for a new answer. The question is key in the research agenda of European Union cultural history (Pichler 2018, 2019, 2020). I defined this history as '[t]he cultural history of the way the conflict of nationalism vs. supra-nationalism is handled in EU discourse. It is the way coherent meaning is produced in this discursive network of historical poly-directionalism in post-1945 decades' (Pichler 2018, 7-8). The novelty lies in the attempt to go a crucial step further than previous critical research. First critical EU research brought forward the aforementioned breaking-up of the established EU centrism and bias. What discourse did not do is bring in a more comprehensive, theoretical view of EU history in cultural-historical terms. Such a view must maintain distance from EU biasing, and moreover it must ask for the role the EU played as a distinct phenomenon in history.

This is where the agenda of EU cultural history comes into play. The examination of the EU starts as a distinct cultural entity, which is theorised as having produced the novel form of cultural sense-making of paradoxical coherence. Crucially, the balancing of the threat inherent to the interactions between nation-state and supranationalism implies the ever-

possible reversibility of EU history. This should avoid teleology and assumes a constantly dynamic interplay of integrative and disintegrative aspects. Paradoxical coherence is

(...) a description of the form of coherence which is produced by the EU cultural system, emerging from the oscillation between nationalism and supra-nationalism in history; as a spatially and temporally transformative, contingent 'freezing' of conflicts in historical time between both discursive forces. (Pichler 2018, 9)

This line of thought has to be seen before the backdrop of the discourse of the classic theories of European integration, such as federalism (Große Hüttman and Fischer 2012; Kelemen 2019), functionalism and neofunctionalism (Nieman et al. 2019; Wolf 2012) and (liberal) intergovernmentalism (Bieling 2012; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2019; Steinhilber 2012), as well as in relation to more recent approaches like network theories (Schmale 2008) or (multi-level) governance theories (Börzel 2019; Knodt and Große Hüttmann 2012) of the EU. The notion of paradoxical coherence is not a substitute for these theories. Conversely, in many ways it is heuristically complementary to them, as it theorises the cultural-historical sphere. It grasps the cultural flux in the economic, political and governance structures of the EU. However, I am highly critical of the strongly teleological narratives of EU history that were derived from the classic theories, most of all in the early years of integration history up to the 1990s (Schmale 2001, 225-226; Ziegerhofer 2012, 52-55).

In contrast, I see the EU as a phenomenon that has a cultural 'sui generis' form (i.e. paradoxical coherence). Yet it should not be viewed as a teleological explanation or even the 'best' form of European integration. This EU history is open-ended, reversible and pulsating. This perspective implies posing the title's question in a modified way. If we assume that, first, EU integration gave birth to a distinct cultural-historical framework of sense-making; and that, second, this new mode of sense-making is moreover paradoxical coherence, then the question of the EU's 'nature' is in fact a question of how the risk-handling between nationalism and supranationalism has made a cultural community of the EU.

Consequently, this lets me presume that it has been *exactly* that management of the risk of the loss of coherence between nationalism and supranationalism that has been the EU's community-building force. It is this *shared cultural risk*, the potential loss of national identity and/or European identity, which has made the EU a cultural community. Hence, my hypothesis is that the EU is a *cultural shared risk community* in this sense. My approach looks at the EU as a cultural community, whereby risk shapes its potential for community building because risk can establish coherence; risk causes disintegration in the case of the loss of coherence. Elaborating upon this view, I revisit Ulrich Beck's influential theory of the 'risk society' and Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's concept of 'latency'.

THE DEFINITION OF 'CULTURAL SHARED RISK COMMUNITIES'

Beck's influential book 'Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne' (English: 'Risk society. On the way to another modernity') was published in 1986, in the context of the disaster of Chernobyl (Beck 1986). In it, the author introduced a framework of modernisation, claiming that his contemporary world of 1986 would have been on the way towards a 'new' form of society. In that new society, the structuring factors would be no more class differences and the related social perils of hierarchic class systems (such as unemployment, or the disparity between wealth and poverty) but global invisible risks (like environmental harms, pollution, new illnesses, and atmospheric degradation, including

today's global warming). Beck's works struck a nerve in the culture of the 1980s and 90s, during the final phase of the Cold War (Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael 2012). Furthermore, Anthony Giddens contributed to the risk society debate (Giddens 1990, 1999). It makes sense to focus on Beck's work because it was the root of this discourse. Beck's understanding of risk was developed neither strictly deductively and logically, nor purely inductively and empirically. More, his key book is a narrative of the risk society, conceptualised in the context of his time. Due to this eclecticism, Beck did not give a concise definition of the risk society. The following quote from a lecture, which he gave on 'Weltrisikogesellschaft, Weltöffentlichkeit und globale Subpolitik' (i.e. 'Global risk society, global public sphere and global sub-politics'), comes most closely to a defining statement:

Risk society – thought through – means world risk society because its axial principles – its challenges – are perils produced by civilisation that cannot be delimited, neither spatially nor temporally nor socially. In this way, the general conditions and foundations of the first, industrial modernity – class antagonism, nation-states, moreover of linear, technical-economic rationality and control – were undermined and neutralised. (Beck 1997, 12. Author's translation).

Hence, a risk, according to Beck, can be a social one (like unemployment) as well as an ecological one (like the global spread of environmental contaminants). His risk society was a social system structured by tentatively invisible and latent, fear-inciting global and equalising risks, e.g. air pollution or nuclear energy. Beck put that 'new' world of 1986 in sharp contrast to nineteenth century industrialised societies, which in his view would have been structured by the distribution of wealth. However, I am to suggest that the differences, historically, had much more nuanced forms (Osterhammel 2014; Radkau 2014).

In Beck's view, the risk society is one in which risk forms a community-building factor. Risks are collective, at the same time real and discursively constructed, threatening latencies that structure the social world. A risk gives a community socio-cultural patterns of invisible and fear-inciting threats, resulting in attempts to control the risk through risk anticipation (Rosa et al. 2015). Using the notion of the risk society, Beck and his successors constituted a new realm in discourse, i.e. the discourse of the risk society. Until today, his notion has thus worked like a highly functional terminological 'jar'. The term produces an outer semantic boundary, like the walls of a vessel, containing and constituting a new space-time, that of the risk society. This theory-as-jar notion is driven by a well-known force: collective imagination (Schmale 2001, 2008).

Within the demarcated space-time of Beck's risk-jar, people could imagine the risk. It was imagined as patterns of threats, perils, fears and the attempt to control them through anticipation of the future. All of that together formed the community around the risk. All risks within the jar are cultural ones. Unemployment, the pollution of our environment, and also modern global warming and the EU's multi-facetted crisis are fear-inducing, culturally effective threats, countered by modes of (attempted) risk governance. In their global and European cultural totality, they have triggered a discourse of a re-evaluation of the 'Western' cultural model and its associated modes of community building; this includes liberal democracy, of which the EU is the primary European version. Hence, the urgent question is this: How is the EU such a 'jar' that holds a specific risk?

In his work after the turn of the millennium, Beck also focussed on the EU (Beck and Grande 2007). Being written from a turn-of-the-millennium point of view, the 'cosmopolitan Europe' described by Beck and Grande of course does not reflect recent

European crisis history. Their concept integrated the theory of the global risk society and a cosmopolitan view of the nation-state in Europe; however, it still restricted itself to Beck's older notion of risk (Beck and Grande 2007, 197-213).

Taking up the interpretation of risk as a force of community building, I now want to theoretically penetrate beneath the surface of its mode of how risks affect collective imagination. How do risks constitute communities as 'imagined communities' (Anderson), of which the EU is also an empirical example (Anderson 1983; Schmale 2008)? The crucial matter is the threat that a risk imposes upon cultures. Risks cause a massive discourse of constructed yet real cultural threats. Today, their key quality is their invisible, global latency. Demarcating one's own community from the 'others', this latency constitutes the space-time within the jar, also in the case of the EU. The latency of the risk gives the jar its distinct internal patterns. We therefore need to better understand how such latencies work.

Here, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's work on latency provides us with the necessary insights. Gumbrecht is a German literary and cultural scientist. His studies on cultural moods, presence, materiality and aesthetics touch on periods from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century (Gumbrecht 2013, 2011, 2006, 2004). In his more recent works, he put a special emphasis on the idea of latency, which was already theoretically worked on by thinkers as varied as Freud, Bloch, Parsons and Weber. According to Gumbrecht, the time after 1945 gave birth to a specific form of a *Gegenwart*, a contemporary time in which the always present, paradoxical latency of the hidden yet perceptible past of the Nazi era had been prevalent.

In the twentieth century, the notion of latency, respectively the German term *Latenz*, was used to generate theories covering an immensely broad spectrum of different phenomena. Freud used it to describe 'children's sexuality' (Mayer 2016), whereas philosopher Bloch understood it as part of his framework of a philosophy of utopias as not-yet-realised resources of the past and present (Bloch 1978). Sociologist Parsons gave the notion a more distinct reading. He described a social system's ability to maintain and renew central values as 'latent pattern maintenance' (Parsons 1970). The influential social scientist Weber mentioned it more peripherally (Weber 1980). In this context of latency/*Latenz* as such a polysemic theoretical term, Gumbrecht re-introduced it as a cultural-historiographical notion:

When I speak of "latency" instead of "repulsion" or "oblivion" I mean the kind of situation the Dutch historian Eelco Runia calls "presence", which he uses the metaphor of the stowaway to illustrate (...) (Runia 2011). In a situation of latency, when a stowaway is present, we sense that something (or somebody) is there that we cannot grasp or touch – and that this "something" (or somebody) has a material articulation, which means that it (or he, or she) occupies space. (Gumbrecht 2013, 23)

Analytically, Gumbrecht's latency is a risk-theoretical notion of culture. Illustrated by the metaphor of the stowaway are situations of cultural risks in which history is defined by latent threats that we are more or less aware of. The potential threat and cultural harms that the remembrance and *Aufarbeitung* of the Nazi past did (or also could have done) in the post-war period made a situation that this notion of latency accurately analyses as cultural risks: risks of pain, of social upheavals, of re-traumatisation, of confusion and of 'disturbing' the quiet and comfortable present of post-war life when reintroducing Nazi history. The Germans and Europeans in general, as well as other communities of the Cold War era, faced such cultural risks. They had to measure them, had to prevent and

anticipate their potentially harm-causing consequences. Finally, they had to deal with them or not deal with them. In this sense, latency describes something that is there while being not there. The notion encompasses theories of how cultural risks integrate communities and construct cultural identities – or in cases of failed risk governance, disintegrate communities and threaten identities.

How can cultural risks work historically as community-building forces? The answer lies in the ambivalent character of risks, which Beck was already aware of. In each contemporary time, a cultural risk, imposing a possible threat to our community, forces us to imagine possible harms together as we try to anticipate the future, commonly in the form of scientific predictions (Beck 1992). The major cultural implication of this form of collective imagination is that it constitutes building blocks of communal identities. Let us think of some empirical examples from twentieth century European history. The identities of the communities built by green political parties since the 1970s depended on the communal anticipation of an increase in environmental pollution in a probable future (Dobson 2007). As another example, feminist communities in the post-war period were also kept together by communal images of possible dark times ahead, in which patriarchal structures would still hold power in Europe (Freedman 2002). On a supranational legal level, the establishment of the EU in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 explicitly mentions a vision of a common European future in its preamble, in which democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity are contrasted with another menacing, sinister future to avoid (Council of the European Communities and Commission of the European Communities 1992, 3-6).

These examples illustrate the fascinating community-building force of cultural risks. In their latency, they make us think of the future together and imagine ourselves as a cultural community. Hence, such cultural risks, above all, are *shared cultural risks*, making the hereby-constituted communities *cultural shared risk* communities. It is only the seemingly contradictory but in fact coherence-producing presence of the risk that causes our common images of the future. Cultural shared risk communities can be both stable and fluid. In cases of successfully coping with their risks, they have a tendency to grow to become more stable forms (e.g. nation-states, international organisations, or *the EU*). At least, as a minimum requirement, persisting communities discursively produce a shared identity that has the envisioning of the future as its narrative.

Times of crisis are the most likely periods for history to stabilise such communities. The more threatening or the more existentially fear-evoking the crisis appears, the more probable is the historical stabilisation of such communities. Those are the periods when the fluidness of their common utopias has the best chance to crystallise into a more stable framework. Conversely, in non-successful cases, the community can be lost to disintegration. However, there is no historic law of teleology that must lead to 'ever closer' communities. Hence, I define cultural shared risk communities as communities that are structurally built for the biggest threat(s) they communally face and/or fear.

THE EU AS A CULTURAL SHARED RISK COMMUNITY

I now turn to the EU as such a cultural shared risk community. Let us apply the concept to the union as a community. So far EU cultural history research has brought forth two results. First, a structural hypothesis on the character of the European Union describes its cultural system as a historically distinct one. Its key feature is the need to permanently balance the latent core conflict between nationalism and supranationalism. Secondly, I suggested that this system established a new mode of cultural sense-making, i.e. paradoxical coherence. Hence, we have a theoretical hypothesis on the EU's structure as a culturally

institutionalised system of the production of meaning. Moreover, we also have a theory on the specific mode of sense-making. What we do not have is an answer to the once more urgent question 'What is the EU?', namely as a cultural community.

I suggest that in the framework of the paradoxical coherence concept, the EU can be seen as a cultural shared risk community. My definition of shared risk communities proposes to see them as the communities, which most probably become consolidated in times of crisis. The more pressing the crisis, the more likely is the stabilisation of such communities, or dissolution should they fail. Structurally, the communal good, in fact the cultural wealth and key resource of such a community, is the imagination of the perils their members face together. The fears and sometimes shocks they are forced to deal with produces the cultural material from which to imagine in discourse their common pasts, presents and, most importantly, futures. Indeed, it is always the biggest and most existential threat(s) of such a crisis setting that decides the success or failure of the whole endeavour of community building.

What does this imply for the European Union? In EU cultural history, we think of the union, going beyond earlier critical research, as a distinct cultural system. At its heart lies the permanent need for balancing the relationship between nationalism and supranationalism. Thus, the biggest threat – threatening to destroy the whole system of the successful production of meaning in community building – is the worst thinkable case inherent to this constellation. This is its shared cultural risk. Now, what is this shared cultural risk for the union? When we interpret the EU as such a community, its shared cultural risk, arising from its systemic character established and institutionalised in more than six decades of EU integration history, is the total loss of paradoxical coherence, i.e. failing to balance the conflict between nationalism and supranationalism. All cases of crisis in EU history were cases in which the EC/EU acted as such a community.

I have to put this argument in clearer form. A cultural shared risk community is not a community which must *a priori* and fully consciously know about or fully intentionally and methodologically attempt to deal with its shared menace. Rather, it must be a community with communal operations that *in fact* target this menace. Hence it is not an issue of purely enlightened thinking, but instead an issue of delineating, cultivating and finally facing this community-building risk together. Usually, this has as many explicit layers as implicit layers. Looking at the EU through this lens, its existential threat and menacing vision of the future is the always-possible inability to balance the core conflict of nation-state vs. supranationalism.

If the EC would not have had found the 'Luxembourg Compromise' in 1966 that safeguarded coherence between nation-state and supranational bodies in the form of the agreement on veto rules, the common agricultural policy, and a weakening of the European commission, the threat would have become real (Gehler 2018, 116-123; Loth 2014, 120-162; Schmale 2008, 105-130). The threat was the disintegration of the paradoxical coherence established in the first one and a half decades of integration. The menace was there as the latent, culturally shared risk and at the same time potential cultural wealth. That was the paradoxically coherent structure of early European integration culture.

If the EC of the mid-1980s would not have been able to come out of 'Eurosclerosis' by adopting the Single European Act with its agenda setting for the single market, the European political cooperation, and the common foreign and security policy, the menace also could have become a painful reality (Gehler 2018, 280-284; Loth 259-309; Schmale 2008, 121-130). Again, the threat was there; in fact, it formed the cultural-historical landscape that had to be measured, imagined and visited communally. In that case, the

whole cultural concept behind the concept of 'Eurosclerosis' illuminated and embodied the paradoxical coherence of the situation of the 1970s and early 1980s. The 'patient' Europe was seriously ill, but the 'cure' was present as a resource to grow healthy again.

As such a community, the EU was and is a community that evidently works with and on its biggest fear and threat. The communal imagination of this menace constitutes its cultural wealth. Its cultural wealth is not being the world's largest economy in terms of global trade; much more it is the discourse on fears and futures – they are the EU's characteristic and distinct building blocks of identity. In this sense, as a half consciously and half subconsciously institutionalised collective of threat imagination, the EU is a cultural shared risk community.

Let us come to the most recent history of the contemporary EU. In a thought-provoking essay, Ivan Krastev (2017) recently asked what would come 'after Europe'. His narrative perfectly captures the EU's current situation as a cultural shared risk community. Asking what would come after the EU should the EU disintegrate means systematically and methodologically thinking of our shared future in face of this threat. The current topics that stand for the shared risk in discourse are migration, climate change, terrorism, the rise of populism and dealing with the 'Covid19' pandemic. The good news is that today's crisis might be the most fundamental since 1952, but structurally it is not a new one. Again, in all concerned discourses of crisis (migration, climate change, terrorism, the rise of populism, financial stability after the pandemic) the task to solve is to re-establish the paradoxical coherence of the nation and supranationalism. There is good reason to stay calm and optimistic, because the EU already has almost seven decades of experience in playing this game. At this point of crisis history, coherence is still far from being safeguarded, but such an understanding of the underlying cultural processes is perhaps helpful.

CONCLUSION: A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

I come to my conclusion, a concise formulation of the research agenda of EU cultural history. Considering the EU a cultural shared risk community, the crucial issue is not strictly measuring its history in terms of integration or disintegration. To gain a more accurate view, we must above all ask how the EU's shared risk has been managed in fruitful or non-fruitful ways. So, the history of the emotion of fear and the imagination of the future in past integration history in the EU are the most urgent aspects. This adds to current research, in a specific and – I think – clarifying way. If we interpret the EU as a cultural shared risk community, the cultural wealth of which is its shared discourse on the fear of a menacing future, then the mentioned two aspects ought to be at the top of the research agenda.

Regarding the first theme, the history of emotions is a dynamic one in the new cultural history (Matt 2011; Wierzbicka 2010; Reddy 2009). Both EU cultural history and the history of emotions could benefit from asking whether and how fear, being together and communally frightened in terms of anticipated dystopias for Europe, was significant at different stages of EU integration. Very likely, shared fear characterised the EC/EU and influenced both its development as a distinct entity and its balancing of integrational and disintegrational forces. At this point, this is a fundamental desideratum.

Concerning the second topic, more recent research has already explored imaginations of the future in European integration history (Greiner 2014; Hauser and Schachner-Blazizek 2015). Lipgens' classic editions of sources fundamentally collected imaginations of European utopias and contrasted them with potential dystopias. Examining how such

mechanisms worked in the EU as a cultural shared risk community appears to be a rewarding endeavour. It could empirically clarify how images of the future influenced the EC/EU's distinct development and the interplay of integration and disintegration. The history of the future in the EU will be of utmost importance for its factual future in the time after 'Brexit' and the 'post-pandemic' period.

Combining these two pivotal subjects of research, we can precisely formulate the research agenda of EU cultural history. In this new field of research, the EU is seen as a *cultural shared risk community*. The *paradoxical coherence* of the EU as a distinct community comes from how the EU managed or failed to balance the key conflict between nationalism and supranationalism. The *shared risk* is the permanently possible loss of paradoxical coherence. This shared risk-management is the EU's cultural heartbeat. To understand this history, EU cultural history aims to thoroughly research – for the period from the foundation of the ECSC in 1952 to the present – how this happened. The *history of European fears and the history of both European utopias as well as European dystopias* are the fundamental cultural patterns for inquiry.

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