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The Sociology of the European Union

An Agenda

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ABSTRACT

We seek to shape an agenda for the growing interest in using sociological approaches to study the European Union (EU). In order to deepen and broaden the Europeanization agenda, the article points to how sociology can help reveal the 'social bases' of European integration (i.e. processes of European Union), as well as identify effects on European society that might reconnect EU studies with key comparative political economy debates about the European 'varieties of capitalism' and its models of economy and society. Unfortunately, however, 'sociological' approaches towards the EU have mostly been wrongly equated with the 'constructivist turn' in EU studies, and its characteristic preference for 'soft' qualitative discursive methods and meta-theory. We argue that, rather than turning to culture, identity or social theory for inspiration, an empirical sociological approach to the EU would reintroduce social structural questions of class, inequality, networks and mobility, as well as link up with existing approaches to public opinion, mobilization and claims-making in the political sociology of the EU. To conclude, the article identifies some exemplary studies along these lines.

KEY WORDS

- European integration
- European society
- Europeanization
- EU studies
- sociology

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What can sociology bring to European Union (EU) studies? Sociological claims and argumentation were once at the heart of studies of European regional integration. The classic explanations of integration by Haas (1958), in terms of elite socialization to the EU project, or Deutsch (Deutsch et al., 1957), via increased interaction between the nationals of the continent, were both at their core deeply sociological accounts of the process of European Union. Yet, for several decades after these foundational works, sociological contributions to mainstream EU studies debates have been scattered and marginal. The presence of actual sociologists at conferences of EU studies is low-key if not invisible. In the last few years, however, a sociological imagination in EU studies *has* begun to (re-)emerge – both among the self-styled 'constructivists' turning towards questions of socialization, identity, discourse or political culture, and among various scholars at the margins of EU studies, seeking to push sociological argumentation and methods back into the mainstream. Our brief agenda article here seeks to shape this scattered movement into a useable form, diagnosing the limitations of the 'sociological' turn among political scientists of the EU, and pointing to recent empirical contributions coalescing as a distinct new sociological perspective.

In the first section, we lay out the reasoning for a broader and deeper examination of 'Europeanization' in EU studies, which reawakens a search for the underlying economic and societal processes behind the European Union. We seek inspiration from various comparative historical sociologies of Europe, little referenced within EU studies, that spell out the structural conditions for a regional convergence of contemporary European economy and society. We then offer a diagnosis of the problematic relation of sociology to political science, which lies at the heart of the unsatisfactory 'sociological' turn among some scholars of EU studies in recent years. Building on this, we lay out a number of recent, exemplary works in the empirical sociology of European Union that have operationalized a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches to the subject.

Sociologies of Europe

In a work already recognized as a key contribution to the new sociology of the European Union, Neil Fligstein (2008) likens the EU to an 'iceberg': an amorphous, moving object whose underlying structural foundations in an integrating European economy and society – itself only a regional variant of the international/global economy and society – are rarely studied by mainstream scholars of EU studies (Fligstein, 2008: 9). They remain focused on the strictly *visible* institutions and policies of the EU: what lies above water, as it

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were. To study the EU – whether in terms of parliamentary politics, Court of Justice decisions, the archives of treaty negotiations or the implementation of EU directives – means to study 'Europe' as the mirror of EU institutions. Successive theoretical revolutions in EU studies, in terms of paradigms from neo-functionalism to intergovernmentalism or from rationalism to constructivism (and back), have not fundamentally changed the *object* of study of the EU. The study of the European Union as a political construction, thus, remains largely ungrounded and disconnected from the study of European Union as an economic and societal *process*: a dynamic both producing and being produced by the overt European politics taking place in Brussels, Luxembourg or other European capitals.

Now, everyone is aware there is something else beneath the water; that there is something logically and temporally behind or below the EU, moving the iceberg through time and space. At the peripheries of EU studies, there are, of course, some well-known works that have sought answers in bigger structural or cultural accounts of European Union; for example, the grand geopolitical studies and political economies of Bartolini (2005) or Katzenstein (2005); the anthropologies of Abélès (1992) or Shore (2000); the economic histories of Milward and associates (1992, 1993). An ambitious comparative, historical and transnational sociology of European Union would seem a legitimate goal for a mature interdisciplinary EU studies. It could, for example, ground debates on a democratic deficit in a sociological account of European public opinion and Europeanized behaviour in a regional integrating economy; or EU policy analysis in emergent economic structures of cross-national social class or transnational business networks.

We might summarize our call for a broader and deeper analysis of the EU iceberg in terms of an ambitious agenda for studying the 'Europeanization' of the European economy and society, were it not for the fact that the concept is often said to have been 'fixed' in a much more limited sense (Graziano and Vink, 2006) for fear of 'concept-stretching' (Radaelli, 2000). Mainstream Europeanization scholars prefer the term to mean more narrowly the downstream effects of EU policy implementation on national bureaucratic structures (Héritier et al., 2001; Knill, 2001). They thus focus mostly on questions of legal compliance and the way national policy-makers or institutions adapt differentially to EU pressures (Börzel and Risse, 2003). They explicitly do not grapple with the broader societal processes that might lie behind EU transposition in national contexts; nor do they examine the full range of social consequences of EU laws and directives. Yet, in the same way that policy cannot be understood without politics, politics cannot be understood without society.

For mainstream empirical sociologists – whether working with large-scale surveys to generate aggregate data on values or behaviour in European

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society or seeking to ground studies of Europe in detailed ethnographies of everyday Europeanizing practices – this can be frustrating. Yet there are resources out there, familiar to mainstream EU studies, that might help situate the goal of a broader, structural study of the foundations and dynamics of European economy and society. One starting point might be an old argument about what Milward (1997) called, in an unjustly neglected piece, the 'social bases' of European integration. Milward (1997) makes the very basic, but fundamental, point that European integration ultimately has been driven by the broad wishes and support of the European middle classes: the same median populations that determined national political outcomes in the postwar period ensured the maintenance of the welfare state and pastoral national institutions and represent the cultural core of European national societies. To some extent, the sense of an external grounding to the political dynamics of European integration was a hallmark of the original pluralist accounts of the EU, as well as later intergovernmentalist ones (Moravscik, 1998). In these, the 'bases' were often rather crudely aggregated into national political 'interests'. But Milward (1997) made a basic point that has been re-iterated in Moravscik's (2005) more recent statements about the EU's democratically legitimate 'constitutional compromise'. The cliché of technocratic EU elites freely manipulating a far-off and hostile mass population is neither a realistic nor a viable model of how postwar (democratic) European economy and society has (more or less) stably worked in the last 50 or more years.

Here we see most clearly the poverty of how EU studies lacks interaction with mainstream comparative and historical sociological works. With the exception of work such as Bartolini's (2005), inspired by Stein Rokkan, or the revived interest in regional integration (Mattli, 1999; Rodríguez-Pose, 2002; Warleigh, 2004), there is scant trace of these foundational concerns in works with which mainstream EU studies might be familiar. Yet, to answer the question about the underlying social structure of European Union, one might first ask what, if anything, distinguishes European economy and society from its regional rivals.

In this respect, the work of social historian Kaelble (1987), for example, ought to be essential reading. He was the first to define the criteria that distinguish Europe from non-Europe, zooming in on key structural features: family structure, educational patterns, the role of women, the welfare state, urbanization models, forms of inequality, the structure of the working population and shifts in economic modes of industrialization (see also Kaelble, 2007). Kaelble's original social history of Europe, translated into several languages, was a root text for a broader wave of comparative macro-sociological projects on European economy and society that got going in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Around this time, a handful of comparative

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sociologists initiated the first cross-European collaborative projects on these subjects – involving scholars such as Mendras (1997), Bagnasco, Wright and Pizzorno – a development that shows up clearly in the two most systematic macro-comparative works of this movement, by Therborn (1995) and Crouch (1999). These works documented the structural sources (in terms of class relations) and growing convergence (in terms of social models) of European societies, plus elements of pan-Europeanization (such as consumer behaviour or cultural practices) and their evolving differentiation from the rest of the world. Notably, though, they rarely – if ever – mention the EU as a factor in this. A second generation of projects, pursuing these lines but less bound to nation-by-nation comparison and more attuned to transnational Europeanization processes, is now bearing fruit – particularly in Germany among a wide range of sociologists (Mau, 2009; Mau and Verwiebe, 2009; Immerfall and Therborn, 2009), as well as historians building on the Milward legacy (Kaiser, 2008; Kaiser et al., 2008).

There is a vast missed agenda here – concerning *how* the convergent, but still distinct, economies and societies of advanced industrialized European welfare states map on to the overt political and economic processes of European Union (see Verdun, 2003, for a concurring call). Bizarrely, just as the comparative sociologists barely ever mention the EU in their studies, there is little or no trace of such comparative political economy in the widely debated 'theories of integration' that are supposed to conceive of European integration in the broadest and most ambitious terms (in textbooks such as Rosamond, 2000, or Wiener and Diez, 2003). The best illustration of this missing dialogue is the absence in EU studies of the vast literature and community of scholars studying welfare states and the 'varieties of capitalism' in Europe (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Many of these scholars are political sociologists, and they are probably the biggest single grouping of Europeanists in the US and Europe.

A good example is the debate among these *other* Europeanists, centred on Esping-Andersen's *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (1999), one of the single most important recent works on the future of the European welfare state and a virtual bible for progressive thinkers and policy-makers in terms of the post-Lisbon 'flexicurity' agenda – including EU policy-makers, as the Sapir report (Sapir et al., 2003) and EU mobility reports show (European Commission, 2006). Esping-Andersen's brilliant work barely mentions the EU and the influence it might be having on Europe's economy and society. He appears locked in the nation-by-nation comparative mode: a Europe of 'varieties', indeed 'worlds', of welfare capitalism, in which the explanatory impact of the EU, or transnational European regional integration processes, hardly register. Yet, viewed another way, Esping-Andersen's importance to

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the most fundamental questions of European regional integration is incontestable. The book tackles the complex interlocking relationship between the historical shift from manufacturing to service economies, social and employment legislation, economic growth and unemployment, child birth rates and child care, and the crisis of demography and ageing in European societies, offering an intellectual grounding for the Scandinavian 'flexicurity' agenda as a solution for Europe as a whole. In short, it is a book about the future of Europe in the most fundamental structural sense. We might ask: How can a book about the future of Europe fail to mention the EU? This is certainly a weakness. But the point can be turned around. How can any study that claims to offer a so-called 'theory of European integration' – the body of work central to EU studies – fail to discuss the structural future of the European model(s) of economy and society, as reflected in the debates about the varieties of capitalism and the welfare state? On this score, the dominant theories of European integration are failing to engage with what is, on reflection, *the* fundamental theoretical issue in Europe today.

What this example illustrates is that EU studies can be a ghetto, and that it does not have a monopoly *even* on studying Europe. At the same time, some of the most important Europeanist sociologists are doing work that is not framed in terms of connection to EU studies. On both counts, we need a new sociology of European Union. Our goal here must be then to drag sociological concerns about Europe somewhere nearer to terrain that mainstream EU scholars in political science, law, economics and history might recognize as relevant and necessary to their own. Productive interdisciplinary encounters in this field can and do occur. A case in point is the way political scientists have successfully criticized how economists measure and conceptualize political institutions or political behaviour in economic research, leading to new and better economic models of politics. Similarly, EU studies would seem ripe and ready for an influx of sociological thinking that might constructively push political scientists to reconceive the scope of EU studies and its underlying questions. But there is a further problem. A sub-sect of political scientists calling itself 'sociological' has already colonized the space in which this might take place.

Sociological wrong turns

To understand this problem, we need to go back to the origins of the historical parting of the ways of political science and sociology as disciplines. There was a time when sociology was the master theoretical paradigm for political science – back in the 1950s and 1960s, when the influence of the

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functionalist sociology of Parsons was at its highest. It was an era whose end was famously signalled in a particularly bloody culling of 'sociological' accounts of democracy, such as famous works by Easton or Almond and Verba, and by political philosopher Barry (1971). His book *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* acutely analysed the deep shift in the master paradigm then taking place: from a political science in which democracies functioned as self-regulating, holistic 'systems', political action was guided by 'norms' and 'values' and cross-national variation was understood in terms of reified 'political cultures', to one now driven by economistic assumptions based on strictly defined rational action, interactive games and mathematical aggregation. It was a decisive shift, but disciplines, of course, are prey to the swings and cycles of fashion. It took nearly two decades before a curious revisiting of 'sociological' styles of thinking started to appear again at the edges of political science.

The full intellectual scope of this 'sociological' turn in comparative political studies and international relations (IR) – which also encompasses a revival of various forms of 'institutionalism' in political science (Hall and Taylor, 1996) – cannot be discussed here. But perhaps the key issue to which it turns is the question of 'socialization': the springs of action of political actors who, notoriously in economistic models, are assumed to be motivated only by narrow instrumental interests and whose 'preferences' (and hence their social determinants) are only ever 'revealed' in political expression, such as voting. A political science based on these assumptions ignores the societal or cultural determinants of politics as beyond its scope – as long as the models are able to predict outcomes. It was then Katzenstein (1996) – famously 'rummaging in the graveyard of sociological studies' – who, via a cultural and theoretical turn in IR, initiated a 'sociological' revival in international, then EU, studies. As he emphasized, a political science dominated by economistic assumptions, methods and models not only signals the death knell of political sociology, but also cuts the study of politics off from concerns about the historical and contextual roles of culture, values, identity or social norms as determinants of politics and political change.

One by one, all of these possible explanatory variables have been re-inserted into conventional studies of EU politics (see Checkel, 2006, for a literature survey). For theory-driven IR scholars, as for qualitatively minded comparativists frustrated by their exclusion from the 'hard core' mainstream of mathematical political science, the 'sociological' turn has been an attractive 'softer' option. On the whole, though, this 'sociological' turn has been a wrong turn for sociology. One aspect of this that needs mentioning is that ever since political science and sociology parted company – and Barry's confirmation to political scientists that sociology could be safely

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ignored – there has been a dominant perception among political scientists that equates sociology exclusively with social theory. In the case of EU scholars, this was again an import from IR theory, particularly the work of Wendt (1999), as well as from normative political theory. Social theorists such as Giddens and Habermas have become synonymous with sociology as such, despite the fact that neither of these archetypal 'grand theorists' practises empirical sociology. A similar observation could be made about the speculative, concepts-driven style of work practised by Bauman or Beck, who have occasionally turned to Europe and the EU as a congenial playground for their ideas (Bauman, 2004; Beck and Grande, 2004). Historian-philosopher Foucault or discourse theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe, who have massively influenced critical theorists in parts of EU studies, also get wrongly identified as somehow epitomizing a 'sociological' approach. There are rich sub-fields of EU scholars developing social theory, and we would invite scholars of EU studies to investigate the best ambassadors of this kind of work, whether normative Habermasian and post-Habermasian discourse analysis (as practised, for instance, at ARENA – Centre for European Studies at the University of Oslo, but also widely in Germany and the UK: Delanty and Rumford, 2005; Eriksen, 2005; Trenz and Eder, 2004); Foucauldian work on 'governmentality' in the EU (Barry, 2001; Bigo, 2002; Walters and Haahr, 2004); and a variety of other 'critical' approaches (for a sympathetic review of these, see Waever, 2004; Manners, 2006). Yet, for the most part, these are theory- and not data-driven works. The ensemble of works inspired by social theory mentioned here does not much concern itself with operationalization – equated by most of these authors with the fallacies of 'positivism' – and hence is not much helping the kind of empirical sociology of Europeanization that we seek.

Habermasians and Foucauldians arguably remain marginal to the mainstream of EU studies, but the same cannot be said of the 'social constructivists' who, in the late 1990s, developed the biggest new inroad into EU studies for a self-proclaimed 'sociological' account of familiar EU politics (Christiansen et al., 2001; Rosamond, 2000: 171). Their 'social construction' of Europe offered a stimulating antidote to excessive rationalism, an open invitation for much more meta-theory (i.e. about ontology, structure and action) and hence a desire to interrogate established categories and concepts – especially those most often mobilized in EU studies, such as the notion of national interests in treaty bargaining. Citing a return to Berger and Luckmann's phenomenological sociology of meanings, they argued for a renewed attention to symbols, norms, understandings and belief systems in the explanation of familiar EU political actors and dynamics. Curiously, there is here a quite ingenuous return to a functionalist-sounding idiom to describe social action. When constructivists talk of the 'constitutive' role of 'social

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meanings' in the development of a 'collective consciousness' that might 'induce' political action – to take an archetypal formulation – they are re-inventing classically Parsonian-style thinking. For sure, notions of 'collective identity', 'social institutions' or 'political culture' can be invoked in this quasi-Durkheimian style, which posits belief in such 'social facts'. But, compared with contemporary sociology's leading theoretical edge, they are clumsy and dated ways of conceiving of social structural explanations. Contemporary sociology's leading theoretical edge has, indeed, been most concerned about getting 'beyond identity' and interrelated concepts, disaggregating this vague black box explanation into terms such as social mechanisms, networks or social cognition (on this, see Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

As Moravscik (1999) pointed out in an early review of the flagship book of this movement – which, although hostile, helped institutionalize a convenient new cleavage (i.e. rationalism vs. constructivism) for the next generation of EU theorists – there was remarkably little concern with specifying testable sociological claims. In the end, though, the value of the constructivist turn has to be judged empirically, in terms of its contribution to explaining and understanding the EU – not in terms of its contribution to social theory. In this, the 'sociological' turn can be congratulated for putting Katzenstein's core question of socialization firmly back on the table. This opening of Pandora's box was the right one, and it is not difficult to trace the rich seam that has been mined in these terms, for example in the return to studies of the socialization of actors in international institutions that reaches back to some of the initial neo-functionalist hypotheses of Haas (Checkel, 1998). Putting into action survey- and interview-based research on the attitudes, careers and choices of actors working within international environments is one obvious sociological operationalization that links back creatively to the older anthropological studies of the Commission (Abélès and Bellier, 1996) and forward to the new 'French' political sociology of the EU that we will mention shortly. Problematically, though, even here, despite the ambitious constructivist agenda, the *object* of EU studies is not changed. It is still the visible EU of actors, laws and institutions at the European level. Now, though, instead of these actors reflecting or transmitting broader societal interests (as they did in the original rationalist/pluralist accounts, however crudely), they merely reflect how they have themselves been constituted by EU institutions – and the discourses, norms or rules circulating therein. Influential work about socialization in EU studies has thus been about how the EU does (or does not) create its own Europeanized actors (Checkel, 2005; Hooghe, 2005; Laffan, 2004). Ironically, this mirrors the very structure of the 'democratic deficit' charge in which the EU and the field of scholarship studying it are all reproducing the idea that the EU is a creation built for, by

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and because of elites, sealing the EU from the politics (i.e. the societal conflicts, cleavages, contestations – the 'Euroclash' in Fligstein's terms) that must surely underpin the legislative highs and plebiscitary lows of EU politics (see Ross, 2008, on elite readings of the latter).

Let us not forget the iceberg. EU actors, laws and institutions, however self-referential they sometimes are, did not ultimately *cause* regional integration in Europe to occur, any more than they were the cause of globalization. Somehow, then, the field has to escape its current limitations. It must find a way to break out into the broader and deeper study of European society and the European populations that constitute it. Where sociology could thus contribute best is in the much-needed empirical specification of the key question raised by the constructivist turn – the puzzle of socialization – at its fundamental unit of analysis: that is, individual-level data on attitudes and behaviour, or observations on individual and group action. As a good rule of thumb, when asked what sociologists do, it can be said that they study everyday people in everyday society – via either quantitative or qualitative tools. Surveys reveal social structures as aggregates of social behaviour; ethnography reveals individuals as embodiments of social structure and social change. What constitutes significant behaviour in their view is not prejudged by 'political' definitions of behaviour, although that behaviour may well turn out to be 'political' in its impact, and sometimes in its expression. The key contribution of sociology will be, in other words, to put a face on the social processes evoked, but not specified, by constructivists and others.

Alternative approaches in the sociology of European Union

An empirical sociology of European Union does exist – at least in incipient form. In our final section, we lay out some exemplary works that are beginning to coalesce into a clear and important research agenda for EU studies.

The process of European integration that Kaelble put in social historical terms, and that other comparativists have explored in terms of convergent models of economy and society, has been taking place for over 50 years now, across an expanding space and embedded in ever more global processes. We need to distinguish the ex ante social bases of this integration from the later effects of regional integration on society, and we also seek to disentangle effects of 'Europeanization' from other phenomena. The mainstream Europeanization agenda has tended only to study the direct effects of European institutions on policies and politics at international and national levels, a methodological weakness when it does not control for other causes and effects of integration. We need to sort out the effects of European regional integration from the

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effects of European political intervention (the EU) and from other contemporary effects of global, international and societal integration. The EU in effect has been an intervening variable in a process whereby society would influence (EU) politics, which in turn would have effects on societal dynamics. By broadening the political science debate on Europeanization, we can also begin to study the different ways in which people are 'Europeanizing' their behaviour, for example engaging in European careers, using EU rights or organizing across European borders, and there may be different explanations as to what predisposes them to do so.

In all this, research design is key. In fact, most of the studies that we cite in this section are longitudinal and/or comparative and thus seek to uncover dynamics over time and patterns across space. They offer a broad range of quantitative and qualitative approaches. They try as much as possible to build up their own databases to go beyond the limitations of nation-state-bound statistics and other forms of 'methodological nationalism' that make it difficult to study transnational phenomena (Breen and Rottman, 1998; Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002). They also creatively imagine new ways of studying Europe when constructing their object of research and engaging in observation. Here, we introduce contributions under six thematic headings.

Social Stratification

Despite much discussion of the relationship between globalization and regional integration, there have been few studies that actually seek to operationalize and assess the effects of regional integration on a key structural indicator in sociology: social stratification. Has European integration led to more or less income inequality? A breakthrough study by Beckfield (2006) hypothesizes that both economic and political integration can lead to greater income inequality as they, respectively, decrease the leverage of labour and lead to welfare state retrenchment. Beckfield's work is a first exemplar of how sociology can both broaden EU studies – here with a study that sets up quantitative research within the comparative regionalism literature – and deepen it by revealing underlying social structural causes and effects of European Union. Tracing these effects on social inequalities surely deserves as much scholarly attention as tracing the effects of EU legal decisions on domestic ones. Beckfield's (2006) study in fact operationalizes political integration as jurisdictional integration (with references based on article 177) and economic integration as intraregional trade share (percentage of exports to other EU states), testing several models with a number of control variables taken from the literature on social stratification that vary nationally.

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Use is made of the Luxembourg Income Study data set for the years 1973 to 1997 in 12 EU countries with the Gini coefficient as the dependent variable. The results show that regional integration explains nearly half of the rise in income inequality within these West European countries over the period studied. Beckfield (2006) thus empirically challenges the argument that regional integration has somehow protected the European workforce from the social polarization blamed on globalization, demonstrating in fact that liberal economic policy scripts have travelled from one level to another. The study is also exemplary in showing that one can operationalize the impact of regional integration and isolate it from the broader effects of globalization. In this, it also shares key methodological features with the quantitative tests made by Fligstein and Mérand on similar questions (2002).

Social class and identities

The question of social stratification leads on, naturally, to the question of social class in European society, particularly to studies that focus on the Weberian question of emergent, plural formations involving the novel interactions and identifications of new social groups. Diez Medrano, whose book *Framing Europe* (2003) had already set the example on how to conduct a multimethod longitudinal comparative study of identification with Europe, is now tackling the issue of class, in a study of the emergence of a European society, distinct from what he calls the Europeanization of national societies – which he defines as the widening of the scope of the national citizens' economic and political activities that result from European integration. A European society, rather, would imply the emergence of transnational European social groups, i.e. groups of European citizens across borders whose behaviour and consciousness denote solidarities that transcend their (sub)national affiliations (Diez Medrano, 2008; Berezin and Diez Medrano, 2008).

Thus far, this subject has been explored within EU studies via studies on public opinion (Gabel, 1998) and the question of emergent European identity among European citizens (Hermann et al., 2004; Duchesne and Frognier, 2002; Bruter, 2005). It is a difficult subject to operationalize: nearly all extant studies have been tied to ready-made Eurobarometer-style data and define 'identity' to fit the questionnaire (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000; Carey, 2002). This is also the case of the sophisticated recent articles in this journal that seek to tease out the difference between economic and political determinants of support for integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2006). Interestingly enough, public opinion research has mainly focused on cross-individual and cross-country variation at a particular point in time, thereby 'masking' the collapse of public support for European integration since the early 1990s across most member states and

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social groups. In our view, this significant empirical puzzle requires a more nuanced understanding of how European integration shapes individual behaviour as well as social interactions over time. Public opinion is not a good proxy for Europeanized behaviour as such (which may not consciously see itself in those terms at all), and is startlingly limited to the apparatus of opinion gathering itself (Brechon and Cautrès, 1999). Because findings are invariably negative – even when we know that Eurosceptic populations can be among the most enthusiastic in using European rights, such as rights to buy property or retire abroad (structural foundations in 'identity' for the extraordinary institutions that have been built in Europeans' name remain elusive).

Diez Medrano's (2008) approach thus goes further by developing a thoroughly Weberian conception of a putative Europeanized social class, adding a Bourdieusian 'distinction' element in its attempt to refer also to cultural tastes and what might be defined as consumption patterns. The group identification, intermarriage, joint political action and social closure strategies of this social class are some of the dimensions that he explores. He expects the Europeanization of society to proceed faster than the emergence of a European society since the former is a precondition of the latter. Europeanization does help bring people into contact and thus is the precondition for the solidarities that might constitute European social groups. Yet he finds little evidence for the European society hypothesis with the data available. He concludes that in fact one should focus not on the existence of European classes '*für sich*' (for itself) but rather on a European middle class '*an sich*' (in itself). The stress would be on behavioural indicators that signal European class fractions within national stratification systems, distinguished by their consumer patterns and outlook on life (Diez Medrano, 2008).

Other empirical work searching for prototypical 'Europeans' whose behaviour might denote that they belong to this emergent fraction has begun. One example is the work by neo-Gramscian scholars who have claimed that the EU is the conspiracy of a newly emergent 'transnational capitalist class' (van Apeldoorn, 2002). This needs empirical documentation and verification as a hypothesis (see Carroll and Fennema, 2002). Another example is the groundbreaking urban research in several major cities by Le Galès and associates (Andreotti and Le Galès, forthcoming) who have developed a survey that seeks to map out in spatial and network terms the newly Europeanized organization of middle- to upper-middle-class families in terms of social networks, consumption, business, travel, education of children, and so on. A third example is work that has focused on spatial mobility within the EU – the new Europeans who move within Europe as a result of European free movement rights.

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Social and spatial mobility

The small but symbolically potent population of intra-EU migrants is a natural population to consider in the search for Europeans. In combined survey-based and ethnographic work, Recchi, Favell and associates (Recchi and Favell, 2009; Favell, 2008a) have explored the lives, careers and experiences of these 'Eurostars', often pointing to the hidden barriers they still face in a Europe legally 'flattened' for free movement, alongside their unsurprising affiliation to the European project. The key question for them is how such spatial mobility may be linked to social mobility and the new potential for social flux in the traditionally rigid European social structures. Their findings in fact suggest that, although European mobility opportunities are more likely the province of upper-middle- and upper-class Europeans, there have been significant upward social mobility effects for migrants from the south of Europe and for migrants who move to major metropolitan hubs, especially London. The effect of fewer than 2% of the current European population is not going to be structural, but their symbolism is clear. A bigger structural effect can be expected from East–West migrants, a new migration system within Europe that *is* having profound structural effects on the continent's service economy (Favell, 2008b).

These new sociological approaches offer a reminder of how the question of regional integration can be given a human face by considering these migrants as its vector. The more 'middle-class' EU migrants are carefully distinguished from other migration by broader global trends, such as the immigration of non-European working classes or the movements of global elites. The studies also contribute to revealing the underlying structures of European economy and society that persist despite the EU's efforts at building a borderless single market. The low numbers of EU migrants may indeed be explained by the persistence of national 'cultural' barriers rooted in the preservation of welfare protections – especially in terms of child care, housing or retirement benefits. These 'pioneers' of an integrating Europe experience first hand the invisible borders of European polities, embodying the possibility of social mobility while pointing to the immovable resilience of the European nation-state-society as the dominant organizational form. Although quantitatively small, intra-EU migration is, however, now producing serious legal and institutional feedback effects that are forcing EU policy developments to deal ad hoc with issues concerning EU citizens' access to pensions, welfare benefits or health care across borders, or dilemmas to do with marriage and divorce in international private law. A sociological dimension to studying this phenomenon would clearly enhance the existing top-down Europeanization discussions on these topics (Martinsen, 2005).

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Social networks

Mobility is one of the bases of European social networks, but certainly not the only one. Networks are one promising avenue of research in understanding the underlying social/spatial formations and how they may be reproduced over time with or without the help of the EU. Interest in social networks and the creation of social capital dates back to Tönnies and Durkheim and now fills social science libraries. Although 1950s theorists of integration such as Deutsch thought that they would be necessary to drive the process, we had to wait until this decade to see some historical and contemporary empirical work on European social networks, their possible effects on the integration process, and the embedded individuals' attitudes to the latter. For example, Krotz (2002) considers the multiple and diverse 'para-public' links – associations, student exchanges, town twinning, prizes and projects – that have underpinned on an everyday level the decades-long transformation of German–French relations from enemies into peaceful bedfellows at the core of the European construction. As both Kaelble and Therborn point out as well, these regional ties running through the centre of Europe have a long history that pre-dates the political construction. Mau (2009) offers an operationalization of this insight, surveying the manifold types of transnational connection German citizens have within Europe. In another study, de Federico de la Rúa's (2003) work on Erasmus students explores their networks by following a cohort over time to understand, first, the dynamics of their friendships, their intensity and duration, and then whether the social networks created have an effect on the students' feeling of belonging to Europe. This longitudinal study uses sophisticated network analysis to test both the original goal of the programme and the possible effects of socialization on individual attitudes to European integration. Erasmus students 'bond' with other Erasmus students rather than 'bridge' with the locals (a non-integrative effect), although they feel somewhat more European than their friends back home when they return with post-Erasmus depression. More importantly, the study clearly underlines the many differences in individuals' investment in Erasmus friendships and networks and it identifies some variables that show that there is no automatic socialization to Europe (related findings in King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003).

Interestingly, the sociological turn to networks is also inspiring theoretically grounded work amongst a younger generation of political historians of the EU (Kaiser, 2008; Kaiser et al., 2008). Historians, even more than sociologists, are famous for putting faces – indeed whole biographies and career trajectories – on the political actors who have built Europe with their efforts. Now, inspired by the methodological advances in network studies developed across the social sciences, they have boldly begun to trace the

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informal politics and emergent transnational connections of politicians and social actors that built the EU in an earlier era hitherto assumed to have been driven only by remote intergovernmental bargaining.

Social movements, political fields and public spheres

In terms of the link between European social phenomena and EU political institutions, we now come to an area of study that is certainly familiar to political scientists: mobilization in relation to the EU, i.e. studying the actions of what might be called 'EU professionals', in institutions and beyond (e.g. lobbyists), as well as collective actors such as associations, trade unions and social movement organizations that position themselves in relation to European integration, and finally the media that cover this news. Here, the distinctiveness of sociology lies not so much in the object of the study – which is familiar in the mainstream – as in the novel research designs and methods that it adopts.

The understanding of European integration can be enlarged sociologically by pushing harder at the idea that political and media actors are always socially embedded in worlds outside of politics per se. They can thus be observed via ethnography and comparative data sets in terms of the social *resources* that individuals participating in EU politics can draw on, the way that they incarnate a *role* that has been carved out of nothing and constructed over time, and the extent to which these resources and roles *differ* from those of typical political elites and activists in national (or other) contexts – whether they are members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Commission *fonctionnaires*, European Court of Justice (ECJ) advocates-general, personnel from non-governmental organizations and think-tanks, or EU media correspondents.

It is in fact in France where the most extensive and systematic array of studies along these lines has developed, often under the influence of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Here, a quite distinctive form of political sociology has emerged, which seeks to understand the formation of distinct European *fields* of political action and specify the particular types of *capital* they valorize and the *habitus* they incarnate (see Irondelle, 2006, and Georgakakis, 2008, for reviews of this literature). The pioneering works in this vein by Bigo (1996) on a transnational field of security professionals and by Kauppi (1996) on MEPs and EP campaigns both explicitly adapt Bourdieu's notion of 'field' to capture these emerging dynamics. 'Field' is a richer social theory concept than either rational action or structure/agency and emphasizes the continually protean horizons of action and hierarchies of social power that characterize not-yet-fully-formed institutional environments such as the EU.

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A first set of studies seeks to contribute to a 'socio-history' of the EU by re-examining what has become social scientific common sense. This is particularly the case in research on the importance of legal expertise and the Court in European integration (Jettinghoff and Schepel, 2005; Cohen and Vauchez, 2007a; Rask Madsen, 2005). The focus is on putting a 'human face' on law, i.e. looking at the social means by which EU-implicated legal professionals consecrate their own circles and legitimate the supremacy of European law (Schepel and Wesseling, 1997). These studies adopt a long-term view that helps us to reflect upon what we take as given in EU studies (i.e. 'landmark' ECJ cases) and seek to explain what we take as an explanation – integration through law – by situating the functions and missions attributed to the Court in a broader social context in which European lawyers are struggling for social power in relation to their peer group(s) back home, as well as to other EU professionals in the EU institutional environment.

Other sets of studies focus on the careers of different EU professionals. With roots in the political anthropology of the EU, which in the 1980s engaged in observation of the consensus-building, forward-looking Commission and Parliament (Abélès and Bellier, 1996), these more recent political sociologies have used ethnographic methods to go inside EU institutions, immersing themselves in the loci of power: whether following debates over Europe and institutional reform (Cohen and Vauchez, 2007b; de Lassalle and Georgakakis, 2007a), focusing on policy developments (Guiraudon, 2003; Smith, 2004; Mérand, 2008), or studying places where 'Europe' is taught, such as Bruges (Schnabel, 1998) and training schools in European affairs (Michel, 2006). Still others have created personalized databases of individual careers within EU institutions, gathering as much information as they can on the socio-demographic characteristics of EU officials and tracing their educational and professional trajectories (Dorandeu and Georgakakis, 2002). Study of the Commission (de Lassalle and Georgakakis, 2007b), for example, reveals the increasing specialization of personnel over time with the development of particular profiles: transversal/political posts for Commission top managers with international and EU experience versus technical/sectoral posts for national civil servants. Studying who people *are* and what they *do* highlights processes of distinction and specialization over time. Work on the European Parliament is telling in this respect as one sees over time the institutionalization of the MEP function, with its emphasis on expertise, and the professionalization of 'unlikely' politicians, such as women, celebrities and minority parties' members such as the Greens and right-wing populists (Kauppi, 2005).

Given that these studies in political sociology often wish to personalize their political accounts, offering much more contextualized accounts than mainstream political science would dare to give, these efforts in fact concur

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with those of the contemporary historians of the EU that we have mentioned. Indeed, one might refer to the work as an EU 'history of the present'. The theoretical value of studies that 'flesh out' EU institutions is that they show power struggles between insiders and outsiders, lines of cleavage and rules of entry and interaction. In brief, they show how fields are institutionalized, and how roles are therein scripted, instead of taking institutions for granted (Guiraudon, 2006). Finally, they help to understand practices and their social significance within institutions, for example the broader 'meaning' of a vote in the EP. A constant refrain is that the true power-holders in EU fields are those who are multi-positioned in both national and EU fields and can thus act as brokers and gatekeepers (Guiraudon, 2000; Favell, 1998).

One key underexplored element linking these EU developments, and the everyday Europeans that other sociologists are studying, is the media. There has been much debate about the emergence of a European 'public sphere' and its importance in making the EU a political community that people could identify with. Normative Habermasian approaches are one way to approach this (Eriksen, 2005), but sociologists have also developed empirical studies to highlight the ways in which the press 'covers EU news' and its limitations (Baisnée, 2002, 2007). Comparative studies of news items, editorials and claims-making by political actors in national newspapers have followed (Fossum and Schlesinger, 2007; Diez Medrano, 2009). Drawing on original databases, they demonstrate the remaining differences in the domestication of EU developments by national media and actors.

Quantitative studies all point to a steady increase in mobilization targeting the EU and in the discussion of the EU in the media since the 1990s and the advent of the single market (Imig and Tarrow, 2001). For example, the EUROPUB.com project coded tens of thousands of newspaper articles and editorials, analysed the websites of thousands of collective actors and network links among them and interviewed about 500 policy actors and news media in seven countries across seven policy sectors. The results show that there is still a strong bias in access to the public sphere: executive actors dominate, civil society actors who are critical of EU policy outputs are almost absent and national actors remain the main targets of claims-making in what is visible in print and web media (Koopmans and Statham, forthcoming). In fact, transnational forms of communication are slow to emerge: even on the Internet, there are few multilingual sites that favour horizontal non-institutional ties across countries.

Social cleavages and political pluralism

In many ways, a congenial synthesis of these various emergent sociological approaches to studying the EU can be found in Fligstein's recent book

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Euroclash (2008). This book firstly makes it very clear why EU scholars should care about the social conflicts that divide Europe. The author argues forcefully that the future of Europe largely depends on the attitudes of the 'swing voters': the 50%+ of mainly middle-class citizens who sometimes – but not always – think of themselves as Europeans. Business owners, managers, professionals, white-collar workers, the educated, and the young have all benefited from European economic integration, specifically by interacting more with their counterparts in other societies. They tend to think of themselves as Europeans. Older, poorer, less-educated, and blue-collar citizens have benefited less. They view the EU as intruding on national sovereignty, or they fear its pro-business orientation will overwhelm national welfare states. They have maintained national identifications. As with public opinion work on identity, Fligstein (2008) starts with attitudes to the EU, but his work goes well beyond this as it explores, with all the available given data sources, the many ways in which the plurality of Europeans might be measurably found, as business elites, students on the move, consumer publics, even football fans. Fligstein notably offers a masterful synthesis of quantitative and qualitative strategies, and also makes a fruitful connection back to the French Bourdieusian study of 'social fields' as the structuring theoretical context for understanding the position of conflicting protagonists on and in Europe.

Ultimately, the stakes for EU studies identified by Fligstein (2008) are high. Where European integration has affected European society and the ways in which individuals and groups think and behave, there will be feedback effects on the structure of European economy and society that in turn will change the (more familiar) interests, ideas and identities that drive the institutionalization of the EU according to the different schools of integration theory. The European Union has altered the cleavages that divide the public across the continent, perhaps in such a way that the permissive consensus is no longer sustained or sure to reproduce. Some Euro-citizens may plan their studies, careers, holidays, investments, retirement, and knee operations taking into account EU rights and opportunities; their consumption habits converge across borders. But other segments certainly see a decline in their bargaining power at work and their purchasing power in the supermarket. Both can be attributed to the EU single market, although either might also be proven to be driven by both global and national causes. Throughout, Fligstein (2008) presents and assesses different ways of operationalizing issues in terms of existing European and national-level data sources. It is precisely this that is most needed in understanding the extent and determination of European integration processes.

Fligstein's (2008) work is also notable for raising the whole sociological enterprise again and bringing it around to address the core mainstream

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questions of EU politics. Linking with his already influential institutionalist accounts of policy-making in the EU (Fligstein and Stone Sweet, 2002) and building on his organizational studies of 'market making' in the EU (Fligstein and Mara-Drita, 1996), his study also shows how specific transnational 'social fields' within particular business sectors fast-tracked European integration, creating cross-national constituencies of business interests able to use and drive forward the European project. This is an uneven phenomenon in the EU: fast in the sectors such as chemicals, transportation or food industries, problematic in areas such as the telecommunications or military industries. What we see in Fligstein's (2008) work is an illustration of how a sociologist can revisit the question of the 'social bases' and pluralist 'foundations' of the European Union and begin to specify the relations, mechanisms and forces at work between the European economy and society and the European integration project.

Conclusion

Sociologists have not been served well in recent political science debates in EU studies evoking sociological approaches. It is time for sociologists to reassert the value of their characteristic empirical methods and objects of study and to end the unhelpful association of the discipline with social theory, soft discursive methods, and dated functionalist explanations. In this article, we have sought to identify opportunities for a sociology of European Union that can benefit from the openings created by the turn to constructivism in political science as well as from the abiding interest in Europeanization.

A new Europeanization agenda would, as we have suggested, focus on two things: a deepening and a broadening. It would seek to operationalize studies that can reveal the fundamental structures – the 'social bases' – that undergird the European construction; and, second, it would look at ways in which the construction of Europe has had effects downstream on society *beyond* legal and political institutions, focusing particularly on how such Europeanizing effects can be distinguished from others caused by international convergence, globalization, or other societal dynamics. It should also specify how these effects feed back into (and have changed) the more familiar political construction of the EU and its policy dynamics. In all this work, the European Union as a political construction should be considered as a historically well-founded but dynamic social entity – a *process* of the European Union – that must be structurally sustained and socially reproduced in order to survive. Finally, whether collecting biographies or drawing upon panel data, we need to home in on the very real individuals who experience and live out

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at a micro level the consequences of macro-level regional integration. Our goal must be to show how their actions and embodiment of Europe as an everyday practice aggregate somehow into the familiar political, institutional and pan-European societal structures we already know.

Note

Earlier versions of this article have been presented in several conference venues and seminars: at the 2007 European Union Studies Association meeting in Montreal, at the University Association for Contemporary European Studies 2007 Annual Conference in Portsmouth, at the Europe@LSE seminar in February 2008, during the 2008 European Consortium for Political Research joint sessions in Rennes, and at the 'Rethinking European Integration' working group in Copenhagen in late 2008. We thank the participants in these events, and particularly Alberta Sbragia, Craig Parsons, Damian Chalmers, Morten Rasmussen and Rebecca Adler-Nissen, for their constructive comments and challenging questions, which greatly helped the development of this article. We also thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal and Forum editor Simon Hix for their helpful suggestions.

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