Concepts, approaches and methods on europeanisation – a meta-analysis

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Abstract

The present paper aims to overview the most relevant conceptualisations on Europeanisation with the goal to contribute for the better ontological and epistemological understanding of the notion. The meta-analysis was done in a framework concerning two main features of the selected concepts: first, how they interpret Europeanisation, as an explanans that explains other factors, or as an explanandum that is explained by different variables; and secondly, on which level(s) – macro, meso and/or micro – these concepts identify the core specificities of the notion. The main findings are presented through a theoretical differentiation of three generations of studies on Europeanisation. The first one is a more functionalist, constructivist and normative approach that mainly focuses on the macro-level aspects; the second generation is rather institutionalist, generally structuralist, and it prefers the meso- and micro-level; while the third period seems to shift to a more agent-based micro-level discursive, post-structuralist direction, while constructivist studies are rising in number as well.

Keywords: europeanisation, concepts, institutionalism, structuralism, constructivism, post-structuralism

Introduction

The issue of Europeanisation has become relevant in several disciplines in the last years, which now are decades, actually. In fact, not only in academic researches: it has become a central concept in the terminology of the European Union (EU), and also in the everyday communication of different EU policies and project structures (Sittermann, 2008). Despite these trends, we cannot just open a lexicon and look up what Europeanisation actually means as a brief definition, or as a more complex description of the phenomenon (more correctly: even if we find such definitions, they are certainly not of universal value). This is not a new finding if we consider that though there is active theorisation on the notion, yet

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these papers still just partly build on each other, they are rather parallel conceptual elaborations (Vink and Graziano, 2008).

Therefore, while theoretical and empirical studies on Europeanisation are increasing, in an interdisciplinary sense, however, the conceptualisation of the notion by its ontological and epistemological clarification is still rather deficient (Wach, 2015). Beyond doubt, in case of such a complex issue, the exact definition of intensional components (explaining the concept) and extensional ones (describable and explainable by the concept) is anything but an easy endeavour. It may happen that certain definitions relevantly different from each other, in diverse research contexts, result in consistent concepts, but we have to take it with academic criticism if we can comprehend a wide variety of things under the heading 'Europeanisation' (Bulmer, 2008). Very simply, if too many things are seen as parts of Europeanisation, then actually nothing is part of it; if too many things can be related to Europeanisation, then it does not explain anything clearly and with validity – as this was underlined also by Radaelli (2000). Although it is an undeniably right approach that Europeanisation must have a comprehensive definition and conceptual framework, yet this ontological base should not be so wide that it can only be defined with the method of negative knowledge (i.e. first clarifying what does not belong to it). Though several important publications have been issued in the recent years trying to contribute to the ontology of Europeanisation either by epistemological framings, to outline theoretically based research designs, or by synthesising different theoretical approaches, i.e. through meta-theoretical studies (Chryssochoou, 2000; Jupille, 2006), the conceptual background is still insufficient and contested.

Despite this strong but definitely not unique viewpoint on the notion (cf.: Buller and Gamble, 2002; Bulmer and Radaelli, 2004; Mair, 2004; Olsen, 2002), the main objective of this paper is not to (re)conceptualise Europeanisation. Instead, it was written with the aim of making a 'step zero': it looks at the evolution of the concept, shedding light on different phases of studies on Europeanisation. Due to the limitations of scope, a comprehensive overview of the theoretical diversity of Europeanisation cannot be a realistic goal, but an attempt may be made for a brief summary of the more general conceptual interpretations, the investigation of the epistemological frameworks, and the description of the emerging topics and methodological specificities.

The study is divided into three parts, each focusing on one identified generation of studies on Europeanisation. The meta-analysis was done from two perspectives: to look at the theoretical arguments concerning the concept and highlight their added values, on the one hand, and to comprehend the specific approaches and methodologies, on the other hand. The selection of papers examined in this meta-analysis was performed according to the snowball logic: first identifying frequently cited theoretical papers, and then checking on which studies do these papers based their conceptual arguments. Of course, the pool of

papers cannot be comprehensive enough, there are always additional writings to add to it; and critics can claim as well that the examined pool consists in overly 'outdated' studies. Yet, it is crucial to underline that the primary aim of this meta-analysis is to draw up a conceptual evolution according to the major specificities and not to discuss the theoretical trends in a sense of completeness or actuality.

1. Europeanisation: explanandum or explanans

Europeanisation, like other concepts when seen in cause and effect relationship, can have a double role in a given research. It may appear as an explanans, on the one hand, i.e. as an explanatory variable that influences other phenomena, has an impact on them and explains them. Europeanisation, on the other hand, can be an explanandum too, i.e. a variable explained by other factors. In a cause and effect relationship, this means that Europeanisation as an explanans is the cause itself, and the effects are what it explains in the research; while as an explanandum, Europeanisation is seen as an effect and the other factors are the causes. This order of relationship is not modified by the use of potential intermediary variables, as they remain explanans factors compared to the phenomenon appearing as an explanandum at the end of the cause and effect chain (Exadaktylos and Radaelli, 2009 and 2012).

One of the aspects then that basically determines a given research is where it places Europeanisation in the cause and effect relationship: as an explanans or an explanandum. The other dimension is what level(s) is/are taken into consideration. This paper distinguishes macro-, meso- and micro-level studies, which is a relevant aspect for both theory-making and choice of methodology. In the case of Europeanisation, macro-level means supranational level, meso-level in this case means the level of the nation (member states and partner states), while micro-level can be related to the individual actors. Of course, a respective research can have multiple tiers; it may integrate macro-, meso- and micro-level dimensions, in the light of adequate theoretical and methodological interpretations (Haverland, 2006 and 2007; Töller, 2012).

2. The start of studies on europeanisation

The integration processes started in the Western half of Europe following World War II were considered as issues to be researched by some disciplines, especially by political, historical and economic science as well as by international relations and international laws, with the objective of describing the actual context of integration (framing) or its longer term changes and possible future development paths (reframing) (Harmsen and Wilson, 2000). Yet, conceptualisation of the issue was not on the agenda, even though a large number

of politically committed normative papers that promoted the unification of Europe were published.

The breakthrough was not a sudden process but came relatively soon, and had a kind of organic development as a result of the fact that European Integration turned to be the best practice example for other regional cooperation. Accordingly, this became a focal point of researches of comparative political sciences and law, and even more so of macro-minded economic studies. Research goals were focused primarily on the progress of integration, the forms of cooperation between nation-states and the emerging supranational level, the institutionalisation of these cooperation, results achieved and failures experienced, and studies were also interested in the comparative analysis of European and other regional integrations (Kohler-Koch, 1996; Moravcsik, 1994). In the initial phase thus, Europeanisation was interpreted almost exclusively in a macro-dimension, examined both as explanans and explanandum – sometimes in a way that it was very difficult to distinguish (Cini, 2007). It is easy to identify 'imported' conceptual and theoretical frameworks during this phase, such as federalism-confederalism, neo-functional approach and intergovernmental interpretation.

The federalist-confederalist theory was mostly applied by normative, constructivist studies from the field of political and historical science (Burgess, 2007). Despite the different emphases, basically, there is a consensus among these papers that political efforts in themselves should promote a kind of national, institutional-organisational and citizens' cooperation; about the commitment to common objectives and affairs, and politics promoting long-term development, welfare and well-being; and about the necessity of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual 'European identity' based on mutually respected values, norms, faiths and heritages. Both within the federalist and confederalist approaches we can distinguish more centralist arguments assigning a larger role to the supranational level and a more decentralist argumentation emphasising the significance of nation-states (Burgess, 2000). One way or another, the strong normative framework always determines these works, often openly declared.

Neo-functionalism is a concept that lived its first heyday in the fifties and sixties and became popular again in the field of European Studies after the establishment of the EU. It is focused on three dimensions basically: 1) integration spillover effects; 2) socialisation of elites; and 3) role of NGOs and interest groups at the supranational level (Stroby-Jensen, 2007). This approach is also normative, due to its functionalist view (Moravcsik, 1993). It looks at Europeanisation both as explanans and explanandum, but does not leave the macro-level, i.e. it is only interested in supranational processes.

The theory behind the integration spillover effects is very simple: if a sort of institutionalised cooperation is performed in a given policy area, then this scheme will become a pattern in the areas closely related to the respective policy segment. What may assist the long-term sustainability of the spillover effect is if

the cooperation is more than just a one-off act; and if the advantage of utilisation of common potentials and capacities in cooperation and the distribution of responsibilities are recognized. As soon as a regulated institutional framework is made for this cooperation, the structure will become more and more difficult to disintegrate, so it has an interdependent impact (Moravcsik, 2005; Rosamond, 2005).

An aspect not sharply distinguishable from this is the (re)socialisation of elites, i.e. the representatives participating in supranational decision-making. According to this theoretical argument, those who are active participants in these processes are more likely to develop loyalty, identification with the supranational level, not necessarily on emotional grounds, rather on the basis of interests or competencies. As these elites start intensive interactions, and be part of elaborating supranational level goals, strategies and policies, these commitments inspire them to protect this institutional system and their own roles. This promotes a kind of supranational technocracy and pragmatism, weakening the role of rigid national interest representation (Stroby-Jensen, 2007).

Finally, the third dimension is concentrated on NGOs and interest groups and their functions, saying that these organisations also show up as lobby forces in 'European' decision-making. As the integration process progresses, as the institutional framework gets stabilised and its tasks and competencies extended (first dimension); and as elites become more and more active, committed and influential, strengthening thereby the functions of institutions and their own roles (second dimension), the significance of supranational level is increasingly appreciated for NGOs and interest groups too (Stroby-Jensen, 2007). They create their organisational forms above the national level, discover the supranational networks and potentials, define their policies, strategies and objectives communicable at this level, and by these steps, simply by participation, they assist to the stabilisation of supranational institutions.

Criticism concerning neo-functionalism is based on both theoretical assumptions and empirical experiences. Some say that nation-states may consciously delegate representatives committed to the national interests, which questions the theory concerning the socialisation of elites (Taylor, 1990). Similarly, in the election of supranational level representatives, we can often see 'protest votes': electors, voicing their dissatisfaction about the acting governments, delegate mostly members of the opposition parties to representative bodies at supranational level, who consciously try to reflect to national processes, so an ideological policy-making is taking place, instead of pragmatism. NGOs and interest groups themselves strive to primarily put on the agenda not supranational but national level policies, which also slows down integration. Finally, there is a strong criticism against the neo-functionalist approach, saying it is too elite-oriented and does not take citizens into consideration adequately.

The intergovernmental interpretation is mostly based on these critical remarks, aligned to the realist-neorealist concepts of international relations (Cini, 2007). This approach should be interpreted as a theoretical reflection to the deepening of European Integration, especially the establishment of the EU and the development of supranational institutions. Its intellectual basis can be traced back to neorealism. This – together with the realist school – emphasises that nation-states consciously follow their rational interests amidst the global processes and during the shaping of bi- and multilateral relations, and so the international space is constantly conflict-laden, competitive and uncertain (Nugent, 1999). While realists – coming from this – take instability as natural, neorealists are more bound to believe that the following of their own interests by nation-states may contribute to the institutionalisation of regional cooperation forms (Rosamond, 2000). The intergovernmental approach itself – coming from the above thoughts – tries to conceptualise what the factors that make regional integrations come alive are and to fill them up with functions, but parallel to this, also safeguard the autonomy of nation-states (Putnam, 1988). Moravcsik (1998) argues that integration has its limits, on the one hand, which may be traced back to the excessive sovereignty limitations of member states; on the other hand, it is integration that should serve the member states and the assertion of national interests, and not the other way around, i.e. supranational level with its institutions is not more than the unfurling of national policy context. Just for this reasons, thirdly, it is the national policy context that should be taken as a starter to examine the processes at the supranational level (Bache, Bulmer and Gunay, 2011).

3. The second generation of studies on europeanisation

This 'paradigm shift' that launched the – so to say – second generation of studies on Europeanisation, was not only a methodological innovation but also focused, in a theoretical sense, on aspects generally neglected before. Of these, it is evidently the penetration of institutional approach that is the most important; in the second generation researches, it actually became dominant. As an effect of intergovernmental interpretation, as we have already seen, increased attention was paid to the relations and cooperation between supranational and national institutions, and to the problems of adaptation in general. Besides the recognition of the necessity of multi-level institutional network, aspects like centralisation / decentralisation, harmonisation / disharmonisation, convergence / divergence, subsidiarity, partnership, monitoring, additionality etc. were much appreciated. This way the different regulations, organisations, procedures, interventions, plans, strategies and programmes made the basic units of studies, and generally the relation and the presumed mutual impacts between the supranational and the national levels that became a determining research problem (Rosamond, 2007). As it can be seen, this is a narrower interpretation – focusing on formal aspects,

only – which may mostly be identified with historical institutionalism. This approach tries to explore the kind of long term impacts that institutions have on ongoing processes, and how institutional changes are realised on a longer run. A typical feature of this approach is 'path dependency', to understand institutions as 'closed' and 'rigid' structures, to contrast the progress of reforms with the stability of certain elements, to pay special attention to the interactions of institutional factors, and to neglect the 'active actors' understanding for a 'passive agents' interpretation (Pierson, 1996). In this approach, Europeanisation appears as an external effect that promotes and influences the national institutional reform (Bache et al., 2011; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004 and 2005).

However, as institutionalism is interested in the research of not only formally existing factors but also of the actors who actually operate the institutions, it became inevitable for this shift to also occur in the studies on Europeanisation. An interest was born thus in the informal elements, those components interpretable at both individual and collective levels that may influence individual decisions and actions. But who are these relevant actors, actually? As the context of Europeanisation can be interpreted quite broadly, the circle of actors to be studied is wide too. It entails a diverse bureaucratic and administrative community, different members of the staff of 'project systems', representatives of other (non-governmental, academic etc.) organisations, epistemic communities and advocacy groups, stakeholder communities, beneficiaries of projects, and, of course, different collectives of society (Börzel and Risse, 2003).

Having looked briefly at the range of potential actors, let us now see the theoretical beliefs with regard to the factors that may influence individual decisions and actions. There are two diverse but not mutually excluding views (obviously these are not theoretical innovations of studies on Europeanisation, either). One starts from the rational thinking, considering individuals as rational actors who aim at maximising their profits and minimising their losses. Although this approach seems to be agent-based, yet it is structuralist, as it presumes rationality and convicted pursuit of interests not only by individuals, but also immanently sees that as a sort of collective pattern. It is not accidental that the ones favouring this approach regularly emphasise two aspects: 1) the as perfect as possible information gained in a given situation decreases risks and so assists in the making of rational decisions (as individuals are able to more adequately relate the exact circumstances to their general perceptions); 2) individuals in a recurring situation will often rely on their cognitive knowledge and experiences, and so do not contemplate all small details in every situation (Hay and Wincott, 1998).

The other explanation is often given the attribute 'constructivist' or 'sociological', yet this paper prefers to name it culturalist. According to this view, individual decisions are influenced not only by rationality but (also) by different collectively accepted social values, norms, beliefs, codes, customs, rules, routines, understandings and taboos that are transmitted from generation to generation, with

some alternations of course but showing stability on the whole. In other words, individuals during their decisions and actions want to comply with the frames given by these social patterns. Of course, within a given society these patterns may differ very much by collectives and they must never be explained as absolutely determining structures. Yet, the negligence of their influence and the assumption of individual rationality, only, as a reason behind decisions and actions may make us draw false conclusions, and so the best we can do is to start from holistic approaches (Kauppi, 2010).

In the case of both rational choice and culturalist argumentation, this brief summary only touches the surface; still, it might give us a picture of the role that these approaches play in the studies on Europeanisation. Before the elaboration of this, however, it has to mention how these two trends are connected to institutionalism. Rational choice from an institutional perspective (*rational choice institutionalism*) emphasises that it is actually the institutional framework that creates situations require decisions and actions from the actors. Accordingly, this trend is concentrated on formal institutions (procedures, regulations, policies, interventions etc.). It assumes that actors purposefully strive for the use (or alternation) of this institutional framework in accordance with their rational interests. In other words, institutions, and institutional changes are affected by rationality. Institutions, in addition to spurring action, are also the guarantee of rational behaviour themselves (March and Olsen, 1989; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

For the culturalist approach (*sociological institutionalism*) it is less important what kind of possibilities for decision making and action formal institutions open up. This trend is more interested in how formal institutions are influenced by the cultural features of the actors operating them, participating in them, i.e. what sort of interaction exists among the formal and informal institutions; mutual interplays between the two (North, 1990 and 1991). Although this interpretation does not exclude the cultural influencing role of formal institutions and, accordingly, does not see informal constraints as determining factors, yet it considers this possibility the other way around as well, as opposed to the institutional interpretation of rational choice (Fiori, 2002).

All being said, the institutional interpretation related to rational choice tries to grab the process of Europeanisation primarily at the meso- and micro-level. It starts from the fact that national institutional reforms going on (also) as an effect of European Integration, opening up new possibilities for actors who, driven by their rational interests, try to actively participate in these processes (Börzel and Risse, 2003; Sittermann, 2008). The progress of Europeanisation is thus related to actors' rational thinking and their actions based thereon, as the effective cooperation between supranational and national institutions is a prerequisite of their interest assertion (Börzel, 2002). Therefore, according to this approach, to cope with the institutional gaps between the two levels, and to rightfully handle

the challenge of adaptation to EU requirements depends on relevant actors' rational choices (Radaelli, 2003).

The culturalist institutional interpretation also looks at Europeanisation at the meso- and micro-level. A challenge of adaptation is present in these studies too, but in tackling with this problem the relevance of not only formal but also informal factors is taken into consideration (Börzel and Risse, 2000; Sittermann, 2008). The culturalist approach thus examines the process of Europeanisation in a wider section: it also analyses the values, norms, codes, customs, understandings, perceptions and identifications of actors, as aspects that may be influenced by Europeanisation, and which may influence the process of Europeanisation.

The penetration of these institutional interpretations and the trend of shifting the focus from a narrower historical approach concentrating only on formal elements in a broader sense that includes actors' actions, decisions, attitudes and behavioural patterns too can well be seen in the definitional attempts trying to describe Europeanisation as a concept. In one of her early works, Börzel identified Europeanisation as a '*process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making*' (Börzel, 1999, p. 574). This is quite similar to the definition of Lawton (1999), who very simply described Europeanisation as national sovereignty 'becoming European', indicating that a significant proportion of member states' former issues are given to the competency of supranational level. Bulmer and Burch (1998) think similarly: in their opinion, Europeanisation can be seen in the fact that expectations defined at the supranational level must be reflected at the level of nation-states not only regarding decisions but also relating to governance practices and administrative mechanisms. These definitions are identifying Europeanisation as a top-down mechanism of impacts between supranational and national institutions, especially formal structures (such as procedures, policies, rules, regulations etc.).

Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001), on the other hand, already referred to actors as well, although the starting point is still that Europeanisation is manifested in the birth of a supranational institutional system of governance, and its impacts on the operation of national institutions. Actors are only mentioned in this definition inasmuch as their interactions are influenced by an institutional framework formalised under the aegis of a supranational level European regulation. Howell's interpretation (2004) goes far beyond this when he identifies actors as stakeholders in the process of Europeanisation who are organised into different groups and networks for the representation of their interests and to take active steps both at the national and supranational levels for influencing decisions and policies. This definition is close to the institutional concept of rational choice. As for the culturalist approach, in his definition, Radaelli tries to reflect to actors' informal attributes as well:

> Europeanisation are processes of construction, diffusion, institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (Radaelli, 2000, p. 4).

The same trend is reflected in the case of epistemological frameworks related to Europeanisation. In the model of Risse et al. (2001), Europeanisation is interpreted as an adaptation need (*misfit*). Intermediary variables are the formal institutions themselves and the actors' actions which together influence the institutional reform at the national level, the explanandum. As we can see, the model grabs Europeanisation at the meso- and micro-level, using it as an explanans. At the same time, the causal argumentation is not fully linear, as the development of national institutions – evidently – influences formal institutions and actors, thereby the adaptation need and finally Europeanisation itself. In other words: Europeanisation appears also as an explanandum in the model, therefore the cause and effect relationship is a circular one.

The approach of Börzel and Risse (2003) is a smart attempt to overcome this confusion, also enriching the model with new elements. The adaptation need (misfit) expected by the EU is the explanans factor. The authors distinguish two groups of intermediary variables: formal institutions and actors' actions regarding this institutional framework make one dimension; while the other encompasses actors' informal constraints (which is a rather unclear distinction especially because the paper refers to the latter ones as not only social values, norms, customs, etc. but also as learning and identity-building processes that can be easily taken as actions). The explanandum, just as in the previous model, is the institutional reform at the national level, appearing under three aspects: 1) political activity (*politics*); public policies (*policy*); and political institutional system (*polity*). In the authors' view, this complex process is Europeanisation itself, i.e. the way the national level reacts – through the filter of intermediary factors and in the light of institutional reform – to the European adaptation need. This model then blends the meso- and micro-dimensions again, parallel to identifying the reform of national institutions with Europeanisation, which finally becomes explanandum.

A much more complex design is the model by Radaelli (2003) which consists of two parts. One enumerates those elements (*domains*) that may be influenced by tackling with the adaptation need, while the other describes the mechanisms of impacts itself; the way the process is realised. This model too is built from the blending of the meso- and micro-dimensions, and Europeanisation, as an explanandum, is the institutional reform itself. With regard to domains, Radaelli distinguishes three main categories: political structures; structure of representation and cleavages; and cognitive and normative structures. The first

includes elements like formal political institutions, public administration, legal structure, governance procedures (these provide the institutional framework for political actions), while this category also involves political parties, interest groups and NGOs as organisational actors. The structure of representation and cleavages is seen by Radaelli as a heterogeneous group of indirectly politicising civil agents as actors, and, at the same time, as a pool of policy problems, formally adopted policy principles and styles, as well as public policy resources and tools, which altogether influence how and about what issues public policies are formulated. Cognitive and normative institutions are mainly the informal constraints in Radaelli's model that include values and norms, discourses, identities, legitimacy, as well as narratives, perceptions and understandings on governance. These are thus the domains that may be influenced by the tackling of the adaptation need as a process. This is a comprehensive enough interpretation, ranging from the formal (tangible) element to informal (intangible) ones, yet it has a still narrow approach in the case of the latter, as Radaelli selected cultural features just in the light of public policy and public governance attitudes.

The author distinguishes two basic types of impact mechanisms: the vertical impact can be identified with the adaptation need (misfit) in the model by Risse et al. (2001), and Börzel and Risse (2003). The horizontal one is different on the other hand inasmuch as the supranational level does not propose any expectation; still, the national institutional reform is progressing towards a European harmonisation. Before describing these impact mechanisms, it is worth noting that Radaelli considers four possible 'outputs' as partial results of these processes. The first is the persistent opposition of the national institutional system saying that there is such a difference between the European expectations and the system in operation that the implementation of reform becomes impossible. This rejection can only be temporary in most of the cases, as sooner or later it challenges other elements of the multi-level cooperation too. The second one is just the opposite of this: complete adaptation, i.e. the implementation of the national institutional reform in a way that follows fully, letter by letter, the supranational expectations. The third is the classical mixed solution, as it tries to promote reforms of national institutions, but only to the extent that their fundamental organisational, operational, procedural and functional characteristics remain unchanged and still meet the European expectations. During these reforms there is typically an effort to adapt the 'European' to the national or only to imitate certain aspects of the changes. Finally, the fourth possible outcome is when no obligatory expectation is made at the supranational level. Nevertheless, a national reform with harmonisation objective is launched.

The first of the impact mechanisms in Radaelli's model is the adaptation need (misfit) to which double institutional responses can be given: one is adaptation or its partial implementation, occasionally its rejection exclusively along the consideration of the given national and supranational factors; the other

is full or partial adaptation not only in the light of the given national and supranational factors but also by the discretion of other nations' interests. The latter is the case when it turns out that the lack of adaptation can cause malfunction not only in relation to the European level but also in cooperation with other member states and/or third parties. The larger the number of national institutional systems adapted, the stronger the pressure on states rejecting the reform.

The next impact mechanism is the so-called 'negative integration', when it is not the new formal elements that should be introduced in the national institutional system, but on the contrary: the existing ones must be broken down and abolished. This must be done, however, not in light of supranational expectations but in a 'reflective' manner, as an institutional reaction. This process can be significantly urged by the actors who, seeing the new possibilities, want to act and assert their interests through changes in the institutional context.

Finally, the third impact mechanism in the model is when there is no supranational expectation, yet the institutional system still changes on its own initiative. Three cases of this are possible. First, when the EU serves as an external legitimacy for national reform, saying that this change has already been implemented elsewhere. Second, when simply the practice of planning, strategy- and policy-making, and the 'idea' or 'culture' of cooperation (among different levels and states) itself launches institutional changes. Third, when it becomes accepted and recognised that governance is not a power struggle but a problem-, goal-, task- and solution-oriented partnership among levels, sectors and actors.

4. Third generation of studies on europeanisation

The institutionalist approach opened up the way, on the one hand, for more comprehensive epistemological frameworks, and by this, it designed how the impacts of Europe on national politics, policies and polities should be understood; on the other hand, it facilitated the scientific need for empirical experiences. What this approach failed to answer is the continuous evolvement of Europe, as an abstract entity perceived by different agents, from experts and stakeholders to the everyday people in different member states and third parties. That was the shifting factor behind the new wave of studies on Europeanisation.

The common features of papers aiming to elaborate a broad social theory with openly normative, 'pro-Europe' arguments are the emphasis of cosmopolitanism, the necessity of moving further than nation-state frameworks, and the promotion of a common European identity and culture (Beck and Grande, 2007; Delanty, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2009, 2013, and 2016; Delanty and Rumford, 2005; Rumford, 2007). These are usually papers from the field of sociology that try to blend the normative attributes of 'good society' in a constructivist manner with various grand and mid-range theories – especially with concepts that can serve as foundations not only for the understanding of the process of

Europeanisation but also the justification of the envisaged social development (such theories are e.g., the second modernity, globalisation, individualisation, reflexive modernity, singularisation, risk society, trust). It is important to underline that based on the concepts listed above comprehensive meta-theoretical works are doable, which may contribute effectively to the ontological and epistemological understanding of Europeanisation.

Similarly, a promising meta-theoretical attempt to tackle with Europeanisation as a concept is the critical realist approach which aims to overcome both theory-determined and empiricist elaborations of narratives on reality; and, instead, it facilitates out-of-the-box way of thinking to get closer to the deeper ontological background (Bache, Bulmer and Gunay, 2012). Critical realism argues that ontology is understood as assumptions on what exists in the social realm (visible and invisible structures, agencies, time and space), and how the different units of this context are interacting with each other (relationships, interplays, influences, impacts, causalities). In this sense, what it tries to grasp is whether reality reveals itself as it is, or there is a discrepancy between reality and appearance. Epistemology for critical realism is a step further for understanding or explaining, which provides a frame to catch a phenomenon for examination, yet as it is an outcome of the interrelations between the known and the knower, therefore it is already a narrower interpretation of ontology. And in the end, methodology is a set of different manners to properly acquire the epistemological knowledge, although this tackling through methods is generally more limited than the original frame of understanding or explaining. That is why critical realism emphasises that to put efforts into elaborating ontology is always more important from the perspective of conceptualisation, as epistemological and methodological stages are already reflecting on a narrower interpretation of the given phenomenon.

A more empirically designed approach which aims to conceptualise Europeanisation through 'field experiences' based on individuals' perceptions is the discursive interpretation which is strictly focusing on micro-level aspects (Lynggaard, 2012). These studies are interested in how the actors perceive and understand Europeanisation; what the meaning of the notion is for them; how they identify themselves with these understandings; what kind of justifications they use; and what the specificities of their discourses are (Barbehön, 2015; Trenz, 2016). Though this approach aims to grasp the in-depth meaning of Europeanisation from the actors' perspective, it tries to break with the rigid structuralist and institutional interpretations which elaborate understandings on the notion irrespective of actors' perceptions who are just semi-active, rather passive agents for those studies; however, because of certain methodological hardships, it is hard to conclude generalisable claims from these discursive works (Zappettini, 2015). Yet, the ontological and epistemological contributions of these studies are undoubtedly important.

The emerging feminist and deconstructivist papers do not aim to push for a comprehensive reconceptualisation but rather to criticise the traditional interpretation of Europeanisation, as well as the main problems and issues, and also the typical methodological applications. Both approaches are vehemently questioning the overwhelmingly structuralist understandings on Europeanisation, saying that relevant emphasis should be placed, on individuals as actors instead of on the structures restricting individual actions (formal and informal institutions, idea of rationality) (Hay, 2002; Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004). As stressed by these criticisms, if researches start from the structures, then they are less capable of recognising those actions of individuals that aim to transform or amend the existing structures. In this way, the identification of the problem is an inherent part of the particular problem it wants to investigate and understand, i.e. with their works, researchers reconstruct a given world laden with problems where it is just the discovery of the unrecognised problem that would be a progress. Feminists direct their critical remarks, just in line with this argumentation, at gender inequalities, drawing attention to how unjust male-female structural and social inequalities, laden with power relations, are neglected, rationalised and supported by an ideological argumentation in these researches (Kronsell, 2005; Lombardo and Forest, 2011). Deconstructivists, on the other hand, as a more comprehensive criticism, underline the over-explanation of Europeanisation, and thereby the quasi establishment, so to say, the creation of the phenomenon in structuralist works (Bache et al., 2011).

In comparison to these approaches, we can consider as 'conservative' those attempts that are meant to contribute from a methodological point of view to the research of Europeanisation. Such is, for example, the so-called transformative model that tries to link the explanans and explanandum interpretations, and also the different (macro-, meso-, micro-) levels of Europeanisation. As the model presumes, national institutions are under the pressure of continuous adaptation need, and the stakeholders acting in these constantly changing context are not only passive subjects but active participants as well; accordingly, they are able to influence the supranational level, either directly or indirectly, in a bottom-up sense through other national institutions and actors (Hang, 2011; Radaelli and Pasquier, 2006; McCauley, 2011). The further development of this model already contains that the institutions and actors of different member states and partner states may create cooperation among each other – going beyond the national frameworks but omitting the European one – that could make these bottom-up influences even more effective (Howell, 2005). Partly, this is where the Europeanisation macro-model of Beichelt (2008) is connected, giving a theoretical recommendation on how to group regional, national, European, macro-regional and global processes and factors impacting the institutional reforms at the national level. Unfortunately, the model is rather incomplete, and so it only assists understanding at the theoretical level, without giving detailed methodological recommendations.

Conclusions

The above presented generations of studies on Europeanisation are of course arbitrary inasmuch as such sharp breaks of phases cannot be identified either in a thematic, theoretical or methodological sense. Nevertheless, the selected trends can actually be observed, and so the development of the concept of Europeanisation, characteristic features of the approaches applied, and attributes of the theoretical arguments and methodological specificities tell us a lot about where the examination of this issue started, where it has got, and what the potential directions of the continuation of this work are. As the identified topics have an impact, in all disciplines, on the raising of problems and questions that strongly influence theoretical and methodological thinking, it is inevitable that in such an over-politicised issue like Europeanisation we cannot avoid this phenomenon. Twenty years ago, when describing the definition and concept of Europeanisation, authors concentrated on processes taking place at the supranational level, while now it is the national or sub-national political, economic and social changes that dominate theoretical thinking. A similarly striking shift can be seen from the emphasis on formal institutions and institutionalisation processes to the actors, and their actions, understandings, perceptions, discourses and cultural features. This would not leave anything to criticise if the exact definition of some attributes concerning the concept were provided – but this has not happened yet. Europeanisation is still only a notion in our academic discourses which we all understand but with regard to its content, it is an empty signifier as it does not precisely reflect anything, and so the interpretation is not based on consent but on individual perceptions.

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