
Original Article

From above and from below: A political sociology of European actors

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Abstract The aim of the article is to develop a perspective on EU studies centred on social agents and to assess its contribution to the understanding of both the making of an EU political field at the top and the emergence of European social fields at the bottom. This perspective, intellectually informed by authors such as Pierre Bourdieu or Norbert Elias, provides a way to deepen existing approaches and to expand the scope of EU studies in two ways. First, it aims to evaluate the social foundations of the European integration process through a very precise analysis of what social actors involved in EU processes think and do considering their position in wider structures of interaction and domination. Second, it calls for wider collaboration with sociology, history and anthropology and bringing back traditional notions and toolkits from other social sciences in order to better understand an emerging European institution-society nexus.

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Introduction

For almost 20 years, EU scholars have argued that it is time to move beyond the neo-functional/intergovernmentalist debate. Several interesting approaches have emerged as a result (social constructivism, social and historical neo-institutionalisms, multi-level governance, sociology of the EU and so on) but, despite their own aims, they often remain built on a formal separation between 'politico-institutional' and 'sociological' aspects, that make the European Institution-society nexus opaque. The claim for changing such



formal separations by improving multidisciplinary perspectives is now shared by a growing literature (Fligstein, 2008; Kaiser *et al.*, 2008; Rumford, 2009; Favell and Guiraudon, 2010). In this article, we argue that a political sociology paying more attention to the sociological dimension of the people involved in formal and informal EU political processes, which provides a way to revisit and enrich some of these approaches while significantly expanding the scope of EU studies.

'Actors' (their involvement, shift, resistance or control) have always been a major issue for integration theories. Several scholars have also called for an 'actor-centred' analysis of EU institutions (Marks, 1996; Marks *et al.*, 1996) and there is a wealth of material on 'actors' in many researches, for instance on socialization, social movements, governance and administration or Europeanization. But there hasn't been a systematic research agenda on European actors that combines the study of formal institutions and informal practices with a variety of sociological indicators (social trajectories, academic background, careers and so on) and concepts such as *habitus*, configuration or field. In this article, we propose such an agenda. Drawing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, we argue that focusing on people involved in EU processes can take us beyond classical dichotomies, such as structure/agency, individual/collective, rational/unconscious, in order to understand what social agents involved in EU processes think and do considering their position in wider structures of interaction and domination.

This programmatic article is divided in two sections. In the first section, we propose ways in which political sociology can be applied to the study of formal EU institutions (from above). In the second part, we move to the society level to show how the broader process of European integration shapes a large variety of social phenomena that are seemingly remote from Brussels (from below). In both sections, we draw from a rich body of fieldwork and empirical research that has been conducted over the past 10 years in French-language historical and political sociology but is not yet well known in the international political science and EU studies literature.¹

Conceptualizing the EU Institutional Field

Until now, EU studies have produced a great deal of research on European institutions and organizations. As a consequence, we know many things about the various formal and informal rules of this field; studies of such norms, procedures and roles are very useful to analyze this 'centre in formation' (Bartolini, 2005). The problem is that ultimately, we know little about the people working in or around EU institutions in terms of social, academic or professional backgrounds. Although the sociology of elites, political or



administrative agents is a classic approach in political science and especially in comparative politics, few books in English actually provide sociological data on the people who run Europe (Page, 1997, Haller, 2008). Significantly, a book like *Brussels Bureaucrats* (Stevens, 2001) contains no analysis of biographical, social or professional paths. Although Hooghe (2001) contains a lot of new and interesting data, the social, professional or academic backgrounds and people analyzed are, again, often minor independent variables comparing to other variables. The most relevant research in this trend comes from outside of political science (Ross (1995); Shore (2000), or very recently the second part of Rhodes *et al* (2007)). This gap must be filled for two reasons. First, studying these actors as social agents would improve existing theories of European integration, by shedding light on the social foundations of what happens (struggles and compromises) in the EU centre. Second, conceptualizing EU institutions as a social field may be fruitful in several respects, such as reassessing EU institutionalization, political regime and crisis.

Mapping the EU staff (or the social foundations of what happens in the EU centre)

By proposing a sociology centred on the social agents and groups who operate in EU institutional, policy and political fields, we do not intend to focus on individuals, nor do we advocate the return to a form of behaviourism which sees social class and professional position as a key variable prevailing over all others. Rather, our aim is to understand social phenomena as the product of an encounter (rarely conscious but played out in practice) between, on the one hand, (individual and collective) dispositions to act (*habitus*), which may be inherited, acquired through social and professional paths or offered by the position, and on the other hand, so-called relational contexts, which may be analyzed under various forms, in organizations, institutions and fields. The intention is also to map out systematically the European political staff (high level euro-civil servants, members of European Parliament, permanent representatives of member-states, Experts, lobbyists, trade-unionists and so on). This requires a methodology that consists in collecting biographies and building prosopography (collective biography) studies. Based on these biographies, the actors' positions are established, not only in terms of membership (to a country, an institution, a unit within an organization and so on), but according to the structure of the social actors' resources and experiences. While most studies go further than this, this is nevertheless a pre-requisite.

This method can usefully complement other theoretical approaches. First, the two major International Relation (IR) approaches of EU (intergovernmentalism/neo-functionalism) can be nuanced, by re-evaluating the supposed



duality between national and international (or supranational) levels. Those general dichotomies have, of course, already been challenged by multi-level governance theory, the fusion thesis or the literature on Europeanization, but never using biographical indicators. In light of biographies, the supposed opposition between national and international agents clearly appears as a question of polarity and not of essence. One is more or less one or the other. As far as 'national' actors are concerned, while some of them owe everything to their country and are likely to work within their country only, others, conversely, have a long international experience and their careers are likely to be more autonomous. On the other hand, 'Community' agents may have many national resources. Commissioners are often far from conforming to the model of the supranational actor (speaking several languages, with significant experience or interest in Europe): most of these actors have spent most of their careers as national politicians. Permanent representatives, who are supposed to be 'national', are sometimes more international and permanent in the field than a Commissioner or a director of the Commission who are supposed to be real 'Europeans'. Respective dispositions to act, think about issues or forge alliances, that is transmitting and embodying a national or European interest, may vary widely according to these differences. We believe that some bones of contention between intergovernmentalists and neo-functionalists, such as the question of who holds leadership, would benefit from exploring these finer indicators, taking into account the variety of the resources of social agents at play and their overall structure.

Additionally, a broader consideration of the social dimension of actors involved provides neo-institutionalist scholars with new assumptions and variables. While these scholars are right to analyze struggles and the competition between the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, many of them often consider more or less explicitly institutions as a whole, if not under an anthropomorphic form. This is not so much an ontological problem with neo-institutionalism as it is the product of epistemological weaknesses or lack of rigour, when for instance, indigenous discourse is taken for granted or theories such as that of the 'three' institutionalisms or the three 'I's' are used too narrowly. In any case, considering institutions as a whole leads to overlooking many nuances. For instance, there are often more differences between a director-general (DG) of agriculture and a DG of internal market than between the latter and a central banker or a member of the European Central Bank. There are also unequal possibilities of exchanges or circulation: becoming DG for agriculture after having been DG for internal market is almost impossible (Georgakakis and de Lassalle, 2007a, forthcoming), whereas becoming a central banker is quite possible (Lebaron, 2008). These elements are key in order to understand institutional alliances, communities of ideas and common sense, the real support of policies or the dynamic of positive or negative mobilizations.



A political sociology perspective also shows that the struggles and dynamics of processes in EU institutions are not only sectorally or nationally grounded as is often said, but also rooted in the social, professional or academic background of people working in institutions. For example, if the opposition between DG Regio and Comp within the European Commission (EC) is so important on regional policies, it is because there are sociological conflicts between, on the one hand, geographers specialized in town and country planning and development economists and, on the other hand, economic jurists, with opposing social, educational and often political backgrounds. The same process is observed in social and economic sectors (Robert, 2007). This kind of opposition not only revolves around probable misunderstandings, but also around issues of power and domination linked to the volume of resources related to their position, as well as to the symbolic hierarchy of their title and former background. With equal competences at work (if comparison is really possible), being a former Yale student working at DG Comp often represents something different than being an urban sociologist from Saint-Etienne at the DG Regio.

This idea of a struggle between types of social dispositions and resources also improves our knowledge of the relationship between power and European organizations (Trondal, 2007; Egeberg, 2008). Organizations can be examined further: Of course, there are struggles, issues or positions within organizations, but struggles are not only rationally based and do not only occur between services as in the bureaucratic politics perspective; they are also about defining what the organization is and what properties are required to hold a position of power within the organization. For instance there are strong oppositions within the Commission between actors or groups who have a political or horizontal capital (they were members of Commissioners cabinet, worked in several different EU policy sectors) and those who have a more technical or sectoral one (engineer spending all their career at EU level in the same DG), as between holders of national and in-house resources. Those who possess political and internal resources are more likely to access positions of power and prestigious DGs than others (Georgakakis and de Lassalle, 2007). This balance between dispositions and resources also affects the organization's historical dynamics. The distribution of social skills and credit changes according to time and the relative positions of the DG; it is useful in order to understand the salience of some policies or dynamics of organizational inertia and change. For instance, being French or having technocratic skills was important up to the mid-1990s (Ross, 1995; Kauppi, 2005), but management and financial skills are nowadays more important, which is probably one of the main changes in the last Commission.

Lastly, a social agent-centred analysis also leads to rethinking preferences, discourses or ideas. Here again what actors think and do both depends on individual variables and on the way they meet the competitive structure of



what their allies and competitors think and do. Being at the centre or on the margins, that is who is in (that is, invested) and who is out, are key variables to understand what agents think. As Ross shows, people who have long been invested in the EU institutional game have absolutely no doubt about the success of Europe of the market and of the enlargement. If there is a failure, it is, of course, supposed to be because of the nation-states (Ross, 2008). The ability to give meaning or adhere to certain concepts, such as the 'new European governance' promoted by the Commission, greatly depends on the positions held (Georgakakis and de Lassalle, 2007b). The role of biographies can also be very helpful to understand how theories are shaped and ideas circulate internationally, such as the theories of governance or the various trends in European studies, both in terms of the likelihood of subscribing to the various paradigms available on the 'ideas market' and in terms of access to reviews or book editors. While there have been very few studies on the subject (Popa, 2007), it appears unlikely that what most researchers of the new sociology of ideas for other social sciences have shown should not apply to European studies or theories that are part of the European institutional game on a practical level.

EU institutions as a social field

Beyond these contributions to existing theories, an actor-based approach allows us to redefine the EU's central decision-making space as a social field rather than just a set of formal institutions (Kauppi, 2005; Cohen *et al*, 2007; Mérand, 2008; Vauchez, 2008; Georgakakis, 2009). From a general point of view, the concept of 'field' (Bourdieu, 1998; Fligstein, 2008) can be used to go beyond the fragmented vision of the European institutional field and uncover hidden relationships that make the whole picture more realistic and (despite the sociological jargon) more concrete. The concept contributes to explaining the balance of forces and social skills depending on whether one belongs to a big country or not, to a major institution, but also, as mentioned earlier, has a technical or political profile, is an economist or a jurist, a 'permanent' or a 'part-time' European and so on. Hence, we can understand the probability of some deep (and sometimes hidden) opposition or alliance and connivance when shedding light on 'elective affinities'.² While our understanding of Brussels generally benefits from an analysis in terms of fields, three specific avenues of research should be explored.

First, the concept of 'field' calls for a new approach to the institutionalization of European institutions. The effects of this historical process are measured through indicators such as the stabilization of internal cleavages related to the distribution of dispositions and resources and the definition



of a symbolic capital specific to this space as well. From this point of view, a useful indicator is the place held by the actors endowed with long-lasting European recognition, based on European experience, resources (languages, social networks) or their accomplishments of (small) miracles (a satisfying negotiation or compromise for what is deemed as European common interest or progress) that give them a local charisma of sorts through their 'European credibility'. This indicator is indeed arguably better than that of the conversion or loyalty shift of elites, which has long prevailed since Haas neo-functional studies. A conversion is a sociologically heavy and ultimately rather rare mechanism, except in cases of major change of political forms, generally a long-term historical process. By observing how some actors accumulate specific dispositions and resources, a more nuanced interpretation of the oft-debated EU institutionalization process can be reached. Studying biographies suggests that this process only occurs at certain points in space. While it is relatively clear for certain actors (civil servants, some members of parliament, some national politicians or permanent representatives), it is non-existent for others, whose structures of dependencies remain mostly state-centred. Whereas most scholars focus on the relative weight and cleavages of EU institutions/member-states, we can show how the institutionalization process is likely to be different and more or less advanced in various parts of the field. In other words, we argue that the institutionalization process maps out a structure combining both clearly objectivated areas (like those where top EU servants or invested Member of the European Parliament (MEPs) are dominant, for instance) and holes (where national and economic interests have free reign).

On a short-term political level, these observations also lead us to address the structure of the EU's political regime differently, not so much in terms of rules or institutional balance like the institutionalist literature does, but taking into account the configuration of the elites present in the field, as historians and sociologists of regimes do (Higley *et al*, 1991; Charle, 2001). Is the centre of gravity occupied by a pivotal group? If so, what are the features of this group in terms of profile, volume of resources and capacity to produce meaning in the institutional space? How are they involved in the field? Are they permanents such as EU officials or part-timers such as national experts or ministers? According to these indicators, configurations that are typical of certain eras or certain moments can be outlined. The social properties of Commissioners and their permanence were very different in the 1970–1980s from today. The gap between the paths and involvement in Europe of Heads of State and EU institutional elites was smaller during Delors's mandate, and their permanence relatively strong compared to now. These structural phenomena go far beyond the texts of current institutions, although they may be related. Noticeably, the Lisbon treaty, as the Constitutional Treaty before it, strengthens permanence in the Council by appointing a president; as far as the Commission is



concerned, rotating systems have been envisioned, and the Commission's administrative reform policies have led to an increasing number of contract workers compared to permanent civil servants.

Finally, the transformation of the structure of positions suggests a reflection on the effects of this structure on the way the agents think about Europe, within the field as well as outside it. The shift of the internal structure in the part-timers' favour seems to have clear effects on the perception of the permanents in the field. Most top civil servants were appointed in a context where building Europe was the common 'definition of the situation' (in symbolic interactionist terms). This general context (as many observers say) has changed; it is well known that in Brussels, some EU officials say (unofficially) that there is no longer a president in the Commission, but another Secretary-general, or refer to the College as 'Coreper III'. This context or this new dominant definition of the EU's institutional situation weighs quite heavily on the officials' perceptions of 'political' personnel, especially commissioners. It means that those whose trajectory leads to be the most involved in Europe feel 'wrong-footed' by this context (commonly defined as the victory of intergovernmentalism). Hence, they perceive commissioners as lacking expertise, being weak or traitors to the cause. This was not the case 15 years ago. This bad blood seems to be the product of the coincidence of their path focused on 'building the EU' and a definition of the situation where the latter does not seem to be a priority compared to pleasing the member states and better management. This gap between objective path and perception of reality is important as far as perceptions matter. Typical of a 'hysteresis effect', it can explain many internal crises, or supposed crises, and a bad climate within the field, observable for instance in the Santer resignation case (Georgakakis, 2004) or in the perceptions of the administrative reform (Bauer, 2008). It is also a new challenge to the relationship between this field and the others and, of course, to the external legitimization of the institutions, less based on faith in Europe than around something else to be found (such as the 'Europe of results' or recently 'Europe as shield against crisis').

EU Social Agents and Processes in European Societies

If focusing on EU institutions as a social field leads to a better understanding of the institutionalization process, we know that this process is also related to horizontal social interactions (Guiraudon, 2006; Fligstein, 2008). The EU has now a social reality that can be indirectly observed in national societies through a variety of social phenomena (Weisbein, 2008). The research agenda on a European 'society' aims to examine the social foundations and consequences of the European integration process and so, to 'bring European societies to the



centre of social scientific inquiry on the European Union' (Diez Medrano, 2008, p. 4). Indeed, the horizontal diffusion of EU standards throughout local societies and their hybridization with domestic norms bring new empirical objects to scholars' attention for which the 'sociological imagination' (according to Wright Mills' expression) is required. For example, to study mundane practices such as matrimonial choices, family socialization, intra-EU mobility and travels, towns twinning, professional identities, sports, consumption patterns, school, currency, feelings, all of which are not considered as being legitimate objects in mainstream European studies (Bélot and Bouillaud, 2008).

Analyzing these various social activities through individuals or collective actors (such as voluntary associations, social classes, professional communities and so on) is particularly useful to assess the way in which EU governance and European societies are constructed in relation to each other: as Norbert Elias or Michel Foucault have underlined concerning the history of modern states, there has been a direct link between the making of political power at the centre and the shaping of everyday life at the periphery. This is without doubt one of the most interesting point when focusing on the remote actors who are exposed to EU policies: it enriches the social foundation of EU integration process; it helps us to understand how non-political issues may produce a relatively integrated community; and it can generate a dialogue between EU studies and other social sciences such as sociology, political science, history or anthropology.

Discovering new actors and mobilizations from below

What can be learned from existing empirical research in political sociology? First of all, the diversification of social groups and agents who are engaged in the European integration process involves a re-evaluation of what European integration is about. There are several conceptualizations of what is at stake. Some argue that if a 'European government' exists, it has no corresponding 'European society' because of weak patterns of socialization to EU norms and also because of the weak symbolic dimension of European integration (Smith, 2004). There are also no proper European social groups, that is transnational groups whose behaviour and solidarity would transcend national and subnational affiliations (Diez Medrano, 2008). Elias has also underlined the resistance of national *habitus* to the extension of feelings of belonging beyond nation-states (Elias, 1991). But despite the resilience of national structures, we can consider that there are more and more European social fields in which individuals or groups routinely interact under a shared understanding of what's at stake in various social arenas (Fligstein, 2008). These European



fields can be analyzed through the individual and collective actors they put in contact. A series of empirical studies conducted in France shows, for example, that a growing number of local groups and institutions are aware of European pressures. Local public authorities are, of course, particularly involved in EU policies because the EU shapes their opportunity structures, especially with regards to regional policy (Smith, 1995; Pasquier, 2004) and urban governance (Le Galès, 2003). Local governments are also strongly concerned, especially because devolution processes in many European countries such as France, Spain, United Kingdom or Germany alter the way EU norms impact domestic policy networks.

But Europeanization processes also affect non-political groups. For example, EU funds and programs gather various stakeholders in local arenas (interest groups, professional actors, trade unions, experts and so on) but such mobilizations turn out to be highly selective because managing an EU programme requires money and specific skills. Also, we see a growing number of subnational mobilizations that target EU institutions, regardless of EU policies and norms or electoral moments. These quiet forms of Europeanization have been observed in various fields, for example towns twinning, intra-EU mobility, consumption and even feelings between Europeans (Bélot and Bouillaud, 2008).

Second, the growth of European actors has led to the discovery of the political capacities of institutions and groups that were until now considered as minor ones, especially in the 'misfit model' of Europeanization which underestimates their ability to resist and to adapt to EU pressures (Pasquier and Weisbein, 2004). Some domestic political actors are reconsidered as being active and even proactive in the EU, especially as they can become political brokers, converting EU norms into subnational resources. It seems that the European context may reveal a new kind of local political actor whose power depends on their ability to link domestic concerns with EU polity. Some regions, in France and in Spain, have, for example, the ability to adjust to the European context and also to shape from below new forms of Europeanization (Pasquier, 2004). In France, for example, government departments like the Ministry of Equipment or the Ministry of Social Affairs manage to use EU resources (law, money, status) to strengthen their dominant positions in local political struggles but they also actually participate at the EU level to the construction of these resources (Nay, 2001; Prudhomme-Deblanc, 2002). The Europeanization of various local public policies has also given more power to experts and policy networks (Guerin Lavignotte, 1999). And there are various local interest groups who promote EU integration, such as federalist militants (Misch and Weisbein, 2004) or business elites and 'free-movers' (Wagner, 1998; Favell, 2008). This sociological literature, however, also reveals the resistance of various groups



to EU norms – even small and dominated actors such as hunters (Mischi and Weisbein, 2004), fishermen (Lequesne, 2001) or winegrowers in the south of France (Dechezelle and Roger, 2009).

Discovering the political dimensions of market integration

Compared to the European integration process described by neo-institutionalists, the process described by political sociologists appears to be heterogeneous and unsteady. It is interesting, from an actor-centred perspective, to ask whether this phenomenon may produce social integration and even political participation at different levels.³

Since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, a European citizenship has been created which challenges national models of citizenship. Nevertheless, the horizontal diffusion (that is, in domestic arenas) of EU standards of citizenship is considered as being unlikely to happen because of its supposed weak political or sociological reality: European citizenship is a ‘market citizenship’, not a political one. Furthermore, the European integration process is not yet a political trophy in national countries or even subnational arenas because, at least in centralized local governments such as France, political elites still control the kind of issues which are considered to be legitimate, thus excluding European topics (De Lassalle, 2007), but also because local media are not very interested in EU issues (Marchetti, 2004). Here, it can be argued that scholars such as A. Smith (2004) use somewhat too sophisticated standards of what is a ‘political society’, according to a Weberian tradition: a government which has the legitimacy to give orders, a specialized political sphere in which only few social groups have enough resources to mobilize others, a territory with a cultural homogeneity and so on. It is useful, we think, to put some of these fundamental variables aside in order to point out the political effects of Europeanization in domestic arenas.

Political sociologists are paying increasing attention to the boundaries of a polity (Lagroye, 2003). The notion of *politicization* is used in a way that is very different from that of political scientists, for example in the debate opposing S. Hix and S. Bartolini (Bartolini and Hix, 2006). It aims to analyze how social mobilizations and activities are framed as ‘political’ or ‘non-political’ ones. The political space is then unsteady and relative, depending on space and time or on social configurations. European integration, despite its distance and its abstraction, contributes to reshaping these moving political boundaries from below. We can illustrate this point with recent studies on small social groups. Sometimes, Europe can be an opportunity to (re)politicize social experiences: for example, Mischi (2007) shows that in rural and popular areas near Saint-Nazaire (France), hunters have recently mobilized against the



'Birds Directive' (Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds) by reconvertng a militant capital, inherited from past activism in the French communist party but which was dormant since the 1990s. Other authors argue that business, which has been strongly affected by European integration over the past 50 years, has also been politicized in the sense of a dialectical relation between increased trade and the institutionalization of rules at the EU level (Fligstein, 2008).

This EU-derived process of politicization regarding social activities can also be observed in sports. For example, a surfers' association that promotes the environment, *Surfrider Foundation Europe*, has recently developed a European repertoire of collective action to protest against the 'Prestige' oil spill in 2003 (demonstration in Strasbourg, petitions, partnership with the European Commission and the European Parliament through the Directive 2006/7/EC concerning the management of bathing water quality, lobbying in Brussels). Interestingly, this Europeanization is very different from the one described by institutionalists because such political mobilizations do not aim at gaining access to the EU polity *per se* but rather at defending new moral standards regarding what surfing is and who surfers are (Comby *et al*, forthcoming). Other popular sports such as rugby or soccer may also have more indirect political effects concerning individuals' framing of what could be a 'European society': this is the case for professional players as well as supporters and fans. By watching sports in European competitions, individuals do change their mental map concerning national societies through stereotypes and emotions (Smith, 2001). And horizontal exchanges of norms, rules and players (between teams or professional organizations such as the Union of European Football Association) but also vertical procedures (for example, the 'Bosman ruling' from the European Court of Justice) also contribute to build European representations from below.

Enriching EU studies' toolkit

In paying more attention to the European society, political sociologists try to understand the grass-rooted construction of a European polity. But the social foundations of the European integration process are too complex to be summarized in general categories. Through ethnographic inquiries into professional, sports or traditional activities but also by bringing back very classical concepts into the toolkit of EU studies, an actor-centred perspective can enrich the general notion of Europeanization: because social activities are embedded in small territories and long histories, 'Europe' has different meanings and entails different impacts and kinds of mobilization which cannot be adequately examined through traditional comparative surveys, mainly



because such phenomena appear to be too unique and very different from the categories which are identified (and promoted) by European institutions and which set the standards of what could be a 'European society' or a 'European polity'. This is why in-depth enquiries and ethnography are more adapted for revealing structural processes and for enriching their understanding.

More generally, an actor-based perspective implies a rejection of macroscopic approaches to Europeanization and, as a consequence, scepticism towards the generic categories and methodologies that are used in mainstream European studies. Such concepts and toolkits are criticized for, at least, two reasons. First, they are often promoted by EU institutions (especially the Commission) and thus, they may condition the analysis in a normative way. And second, they tend to forget the singularity and historicity of case studies. For example, 'Euroscepticism' turns out to be too generic a taxonomy which lumps together heterogeneous phenomena: European integration has now opened up very different spaces of political struggles within domestic arenas which are too idiosyncratic to be merged in only one category (Neumayer *et al*, 2008). The so-called 'European public space' notion has been also criticized because of its normative dimension: most research conducted on this topic has been, in fact, influenced by a definition of a public sphere which was promoted by EU institutions, especially the European Commission (Baisnée, 2007). New modes of analyzing citizens' opinions on Europe deriving from the bottom/up perspective are also proposed which are an alternative to the Eurobarometer's methodology (that is, individual-centred) because they are based on the assumption that representations are in fact strongly embedded in social conditions, both symbolical and practical, which require in-depth investigations (Gaxie and Hubé, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is useful to underline how complementary the two perspectives are that we outlined. A perspective from above and a perspective from below cannot be separated even though they look at different research objects; indeed, they both ask the same kind of questions with regards to the European integration process and they both try to link conceptually the making of a EU political field at the top with the emergence of European social fields at the bottom. Methodologically, this sociological research agenda (Favell, 2006) aims to map out the whole range of collective and individual actors who are more or less concerned by EU norms through fieldwork: Who are these actors? Where do they come from? What are their education and their socialization? What do they do when they engage on 'European issues'? What does it really mean to be a MEP, an activist settled in Brussels or a winegrower trying to



obtain EU funds? When trying to give empirical answers to these very complex questions related to the social foundations of Europe, political sociologists put the emphasis on social realities, which are neglected in abstract theorizations of the European integration process.

From this point of view, a social agents-centred perspective brings EU studies out of their over-specialization. Academic communities need, of course, mid-range concepts and a specific vocabulary, depending on their research object, but only when there are no corresponding ones in the common conceptual heritage of social sciences. If not, this can breed compartmentalization. And this may be the case with EU studies: not only compartmentalization of objects, but also compartmentalization of notions and conceptual frameworks which cannot 'travel' from European objects to non-European ones. As a consequence, the social actor-centred research agenda calls for a wider use of sociology but also of social and mentality history or anthropology. Calling for academic partnership is not only a triviality. By assessing the consequences of general structural processes for social representations as well as bodies and minds, they pave the way for a general understanding of European integration as a part of the 'civilization process' Norbert Elias uncovered when studying the emergence of nation-states.

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Notes

- 1 Thanks to the anonymous referees for their comments and Jean-Yves Bart for his reading, and of course, special thanks to Frédéric Mérand for his advice throughout the process.
- 2 In German *Wahlverwandschaft*. After Goethe, Weber used the concept to analyse the process through which two types of *habitus* – social, economical, religious, intellectual, political – which have certain analogies enter in a relationship of reciprocal attraction and influence, mutual selection, active convergence and mutual reinforcement.



3 This question is not very original: well-known works of Eugen Weber, Benedict Anderson or Charles Tilly have showed that the institutionalization of Nation States in the nineteenth century had strong impacts upon subnational societies (politization and nationalization of grass-rooted identities, unification of peripheral political fields, standardization of political knowledge and competences and so on). The point is now to assess whether such past patterns of integration process of social groups into the States or into national political fields may start again with EU institutionalization and its new citizenship (Déloye, 1998). Moreover, the novelty stands on the broader scale of such dynamics: indirect effects of European civic integration may thus be very different from one local society to another because Europe affects several countries with different cultural or political traditions, bringing convergence as much as divergence.

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