Metatheory and Europeanization research: let’s get critical!

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Abstract

This paper explores the metatheory of Europeanization research, in particular the underlying ontological assumptions. Until fairly recently, such reflection was uncommon in the field of European studies and largely absent in the sub-field of Europeanization. It might be read from this state of affairs that the matter is of little import. However, we suggest that there are good arguments for encouraging greater reflection on matters of metatheory in European studies generally and in relation to Europeanization specifically. In particular, such reflection can help identify some areas of EU impact that have been neglected by Europeanization research. The paper sets out the basics of metatheory. It briefly explores what attention has been paid to these concepts in EU studies more widely before focusing on Europeanization, where we argue that the focus on research guided by the three new institutionalisms has confined the research agenda. We then look beyond them, first to other institutionalist voices, and second to others beyond institutionalism. In concluding we argue for a more reflective approach to Europeanisation research to facilitate greater dialogue and understanding within the field.

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This is a draft paper. Comments are welcome.
METATHEORY AND EUROPEANIZATION RESEARCH: LET’S GET CRITICAL!

Introduction

The paper explores the metatheory of Europeanization research, in particular the underlying ontological assumptions. Until fairly recently, such reflection was uncommon in the field of European studies and largely absent in the sub-field of Europeanization. The underlying assumptions of research are generally either taken for granted or ignored. It might be read from this state of affairs that the matter is of little import. However, we suggest that there are good arguments for encouraging greater reflection on matters of metatheory in European studies generally and in relation to Europeanization specifically. Moreover, we suggest that such a shift is in some respects underway as the field moves further away from what Manners (2007, 77) described as the ‘intellectual straightjacket of traditional political science during the cold war era’ to embrace a wider range of theoretical contributions with diverse metatheoretical roots.

In broad terms, reflection on metatheory involves identifying and foregrounding the social scientific roots on which research stands. It holds the promise of understanding more about the potential and limitations of our research and of promoting greater dialogue between scholars who might otherwise talk past each other. We note the dangers inherent in ‘showing one’s working’ observed by Hay but also agree with his conclusion (2009, 897) that to do this is ‘surely preferable to foreclosing all theoretical and conceptual debate by burying the theoretical inspiration for the analytical insights one’s work presents’.

Reflection on metatheory is not only important for this reason; it also can help the identification of uncharted research agendas. In this respect we argue that Europeanization needs to embrace its theoretical underpinnings rather than simply delimiting itself as an analytical framework. For example, the theoretical core of Europeanization has its foundations in new institutionalism. Not only are these foundations centred on the three new institutionalisms outlined by Hall and Taylor (1996)—namely rational choice, historical and sociological—but they rarely move into more critical approaches to political analysis. A greater appreciation is already

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1 Jupille (2006) and Rosamond (2009) are notable exceptions
2 Exceptions are Radaelli (2000); Haverland (2006); Börzel and Risse (2000) and, at length, Gunay (2008).
developing around the scope for agency that can be underplayed in more structural applications of institutionalism (below). However, a ‘wider chorus’ is lacking: one which could draw on some of the more recent developments in the institutionalist literature, such as the feminist and constructivist turns in the new institutionalism.

Going even further, Europeanization could encompass other voices, in particular from critical political economy. To put a blunt question: whose interests does Europeanization serve? Here academic analysis needs to consider the changing perceptions of the EU’s impact. It may be a rather crude ‘tabloid’ assertion that the euro-zone crisis is witnessing the imposition by northern Protestants of their will upon southern Catholics. Nevertheless, the euro-zone crisis is certainly causing some to interrogate whether Europeanization is always a force for good, particularly if it heralds protracted periods of economic austerity. Issues of power, class and capitalism must also be brought into the Europeanization debate alongside more focus on agency and diversity of actors. This widening of the research agenda, we argue, can be facilitated through reflection on the metatheory of Europeanization.

The remainder of the paper is divided into four main sections. In the first section we consider metatheory and set out a number of questions that need to be posed in order to take forward the research agenda for Europeanization. In section two we discuss metatheory and EU theory to situate our discussion of Europeanization in the wider EU literature, in which steps have already been undertaken to adopt more critical voices into the analytical chorus. In section three we turn specifically to the metatheory of Europeanization research, looking beyond the three institutionalisms, first to other institutionalist voices, and second to voices beyond institutionalism, developing the discussion from the themes identified in preceding sections. In concluding we argue for a more reflective approach to Europeanisation research to facilitate greater dialogue and understanding within the field.

**Metatheory**

Metatheory is the analysis of the building blocks of social enquiry. Metatheoretical reflection helps analysts identify theories’ assumptions about the nature of reality, what can be known in that reality and how knowledge can be acquired, thereby ‘offering a sense of self-reflection and thus creating an additional intellectual space’ (Chryssochoou 2000, 131; Jupille 2006, 210). We can not do justice here to the subtleties of the components of metatheory or to the intense debates that surround
them, but in this section simply set out the main lines of mostly ontological reflection that we think the Europeanization literature can benefit from. In line with the main argument of the paper, this section will briefly introduce the ontological building blocks of Europeanisation research, which are key for the ‘wider chorus’ to flourish. As Kauppi has pointed out, ‘doing ontology’ is a basic step of research as it foregrounds certain objects of social life for analysis and delegates others. (Kauppi 2010, 21). Therefore, having a coherent and inclusive ontology opens up new venues for research and helps acknowledge the different perspectives in which different theories are embedded (cf. Cox 1986, 207).

Ontology is taken here to refer to the assumptions that a particular approach makes as to ‘what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with one another’ (Blaikie 1993, 6). The categories that we have identified as being most useful in terms of expanding the ontology of Europeanisation are the nature of and the relationship between structure and agency, power, ideas and the material world.

Structure is basically defined as the context of political action (agency), which, to a certain extent, orders it (Hay 2002, 94). Structuralism refers to an ontological stance, which conceives structures as determining political outcomes. Structuralists view political culture, historical context, and political opportunity structures as the sole causes of political outcomes (Hay 2002, 96-9). Therefore actors are taken as interchangeable and lacking agency, the capacity to cause an effect. At the other end of this spectrum, individualism views social phenomena as outcomes of individual action. The related conception of social context is no more than the constraints imposed on individuals by other individuals. That is, the social environment that individuals face does not have its own causal powers, does not predate action and is not autonomous from its components. Therefore, the individualist conception of the social environment is ‘made up of other people, their habits, inertia, loyalties, rivalries and so on’ (Archer 1995, 42). Structuralism and individualism are thus two extremes that locate causal powers to structures and agents respectively.

Another relevant aspect of ontology is the nature of agency, i.e. whether actors rationally calculate cost and benefits of possible paths of action according to their predesignated, unchanging, exogenous preferences (logic of consequences), or they
act according to the rules that are appropriate in that context (logic of appropriateness) (March and Olsen, 1989).

Finally a crucial ontological issue is the role of ideas: whether they have ad hoc power of making things happen only when there is a deadlock of costs and benefits of potential paths of action; or whether they always have causal and constitutive powers in the social realm.

Exclusive versus inclusive ontology is a useful analytical categorization that has been coined by Kauppi (2010). Exclusive ontology refers to those ontologies that take the extreme positions in these debates, i.e. structuralism versus individualism, rational actors versus rule-bound actors, materialism versus idealism. Inclusive ontology, on the other hand, refers to a relational approach that includes the extremes (after all, we cannot get rid of concepts) but introduces shades of gray, an empirically more fruitful position. It presents a more comprehensive approach that does not a priori rule out some dimensions of scholarly reflection, and is open to the development of alternative ontological frameworks (Kauppi 2010, 28).

This dynamic perspective of ontology allows researchers to broaden their horizons in relation to both where to look for explaining ever-changing social reality and to the broader historical and spatial context in which theorizing takes place. Ontology should offer ‘a transitory snapshot of a world in perpetual motion’ and therefore cannot be a closed list of factors that are assumed to be eternally explaining social and political reality (Cox 2002, 78).

This observation comes with an acknowledgement of the historical context of theorizing itself. Theorizing is always embedded in certain space and time conjectures, and addresses problems that arise within that spatio-temporal context. Certain historical periods favour certain kinds of problems and therefore times of crises and uncertainty in power relations pave the way to critical theories along with a more inclusive ontology, since there is a strong urge to understand the changing power relations, opportunities and risks (Cox 1986, 210).

The questions that are raised by ‘doing ontology’ are therefore important in terms of broadening the research potential of a field of study and also the reflexivity of scholarship in that field. As we elaborate later in the paper, the broader EU studies literature and the theories it incorporates have passed the threshold of this self-
reflection and the emergence of a wider chorus. We argue that, interestingly, the same process has not taken place yet within the Europeanization literature. The ontological questions that need pondering in the Europeanization literature thus include but are not limited to:

- What are the changing problems that Europeanization literature could focus on? Or what issues and problems might the Europeanization literature focus on that it has neglected hitherto?
- Who are the agents? Whose voice/interests are favoured and whose are marginalised?
- What are the structures that Europeanization reproduces? What ideas are institutionalized in those structures?
- What is the role of the spatio-temporal context in shaping Europeanization?

**Metatheory and theories of EU integration**

The early theoretical debates on the process of European integration eschewed explicit reflection on issues of metatheory. The academic consensus is that dominant theories of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism were essentially built on common metatheoretical foundations (e.g., see Risse 2009; Rosamond 2007), both informed by an essentially rationalist ontology (although this assumed ontological consensus has been questioned more recently).³ It was, as Rosamond (2007, 244-5) suggests, a contest of the ‘first order’ around competing hypotheses rather than a more fundamental ‘second order’ metatheoretical disagreement.

While academic debate on the EU broadened out with the acceleration of integration in the 1980s through the single market programme, reflection on metatheory remained largely absent. Here the shift in debate was from a concern with the extent to which states controlled the process of European integration to a divide between those who continued to treat the EU as a case of inter-state cooperation and those who identified features akin to those in national systems.⁴ In essence, the former

³ While it is commonly assumed that realism and neofunctionalism shared ontological precepts, Haas (2001) later emphasized the differences between them and suggested that neofunctionalism ‘was self-consciously designed to reject the ontological assumptions of realism’ (p, 23) and that a case could be made for seeing neofunctionalism as a precursor to constructivism.

⁴ We would argue that the shift away from the exclusive use of international relations paradigms to concerns with institutional and policy analysis began some time earlier with the
continued to take their lead from theories developed from the study of international relations while the latter developed the application of domestic and comparative politics approaches associated with the so-called ‘governance turn’ in EU studies (see Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006).

A further characteristic of this period was the development of concepts that sought to transcend the sub-disciplinary conventions of international and comparative politics by drawing on aspects of both. The concept of multi-level governance is an obvious case here, with antecedents in neofunctionalism but also replete with network metaphors and a focus on policy implementation drawn from the study of national systems. The concept of Europeanization can also be located in this tradition (below). However, of most obvious relevance for our concern with the metatheory of Europeanization research was the rise of the new institutionalisms in EU studies in this period and, related to this, contributions that challenged the rationalist-materialist assumptions on which the dominant integration theories were built and prompted the emergence of the rationalist-reflectivist debate.\(^5\)

New institutionalism emerged in the political science community from the 1980s as a reaction to the behavioural approaches that had come to dominate the discipline. It suggested that the behavioural reaction against the ‘old’ formal institutional analyses had gone too far in its critique of the importance of institutions in structuring political behaviour. An initial contribution on EU governance (Bulmer 1993) highlighted the importance of the differing instruments and institutions within discrete EU ‘governance regimes’ in shaping political action. While there is much that divides the new institutionalisms (below) they were united not only in the understanding that institutions matter but also in seeking to explain how and why they matter.

New institutionalism and its first three variants, namely rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalism, in EU studies mirrors the rationalist-reflectivist debate in IR theory (see Keohane 1988). This debate raised the profile of ontological issues in EU studies highlighting the distinction between rational choice scholars who assume interests to be materially given against those who suggest they

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\(^5\) See in particular Christiansen, Jørgensen, and Wiener (1999); also the survey by Risse (2009).
are socially constructed, thereby addressing the structure and agency debate. By contrast, reflectivists explore ‘how collective understandings emerge and how institutions constitute the interests and identities of actors’ (Rosamond 2003: 121).

Despite the apparent debate, this did not lead to a paradigmatic shift or to a dialectical approach to structure and agency. In their crudest sense, all three institutionalisms remained structuralist. Colin Hay and Daniel Wincott have identified the hidden structuralism at play in rational choice institutionalism. They argue that no matter how individualist rational choice theories look, in the final analysis they take away the ability to choose, which is the essence of individualism, and replace it with rational calculations that are attributable to institutional settings or rules (Hay and Wincott 1998, 952). Sociological institutionalism, despite broadening the horizon to acknowledge the power of norms and culture, remained structuralist. The structuralism in sociological institutionalism is so evident that Schmidt points out that this approach can be considered ‘culturally deterministic’ due to its strength in explaining norm-following and weakness in explaining norm-breaking behaviour (Schmidt 1999, 3). Likewise, historical institutionalism has been criticized for offering a combination of both logics of action, whereby actors can be either interest-maximizers or norm-followers, but eventually they operate within a ‘logic of path-dependency’ (Schmidt 1999, 2). However, historical institutionalism has to an extent paved the way to critical perspectives in EU studies. In Paul Pierson’s words, a historical approach is capable of ‘reinvigorat[ing] the analysis of power in social relations, by showing how inequalities of power, perhaps modest initially, are reinforced and can become deeply embedded in organizations, institutions, and dominant modes of political understanding’ (Pierson 2004, 11).

Beyond the rather limited metatheoretical concerns prompted by the rationalist and sociological strands of new institutionalism are those raised by a wider chorus of ‘critical perspectives’ that have joined the debate on the EU in the past decade or so. Whether constructivist⁶, feminist or Marxist in orientation, these perspectives have at

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⁶ Sociological institutionalism and constructivism can be used interchangeably by scholars in the field. However, we believe they are metatheoretically different, except for their acknowledgment of norms and ideas as legitimate objects of social inquiry. For an excellent review, see Wiener (2006). Also, for IR constructivism and its variants, see Rumelili (2004). Ontological constructivism denies the existence of a real world ‘out there’ and assumes reality is produced and reproduced by agents and analysts, and that there may be more than one reality due to the recursive nature of the social realm. As a function of this, theories do not represent reality; they rather construct it. For this, see ‘idealist ontology’ in Blaikie (2007).
their core a concern with challenging key assumptions about what should be studied in politics, how it should be studied, and what we can hope to know. As such, they have presented a challenge to more established approaches to the study of the EU to reflect on matters of metatheory. We illustrate this with reference to contributions from critical political economy and feminism, both of which highlight the crucial ontological relationship between structure and agency.

**Critical perspectives**

Critical political economists have challenged the ontological assumptions of ‘mainstream theories’ for assuming ‘either explicitly or implicitly that market forces are expressions of an inner rationality of universal human nature that is held to be the essence of the realm of freedom in political affairs’ (van Apeldoorn, Overbeek, and Ryner 2003: 18). They dispute the assumption that the market is a reflection of human nature and that its operation equates with freedom in political affairs, and suggest instead that this starting point obscures the uneven distribution of power inherent in the operation of markets. They argue that the consequence of this ontology is a narrow definition of power relating to control by political authorities; thus the empirical focus is on how this power is organized (institutions). In the critical political economy perspective, this view needs to be supplemented with a view of power derived from social forces (generally, class relations) that underpin market relations and shape formal political authority. In short, social relations shaped by the forces of capitalist production provide the structural context within which developments in the EU must be understood (Cafruny and Ryner 2009, 237).

Feminist analysis, starts from the ontological position that gender is the main organising principle of the social world. Here, Kronsell’s (2005) critique of six approaches that she sees as representing the ‘state of the art’ in EU studies is particularly instructive. In summarizing her critique of dominant theories, Kronsell (2005, 1035-6) highlights two points: that they ignore the ‘male-as-norm’ problem and are based on a simplistic view of power. Despite this, a number of the approaches are identified as being ontologically compatible with a more gender-sensitive approach and a key purpose of the critique is to promote a dialogue between

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7 The six approaches are: liberal intergovernmentalism, domestic politics approaches, neo-functionalism, multi-level governance, supranationalism and constructivism.
established ways of theorizing the EU and feminist analysis that will highlight new or neglected aspects of EU politics.

These perspectives are not only critical of mainstream theories, but also of each other. Importantly, though, they share an emphasis on the ‘hidden’ sources of power in the realms of ideas and social forces. They are in many ways a corrective to the ‘institutional bias’ that has been identified as manifest in EU scholarship (Smith 2002; Manners 2007). Whether ‘institutional bias’ is the correct term to apply to the Europeanization literature also is debatable, but it is mostly institutionalist in nature. We return to this point below.

Flowing from this discussion, we identify two levels of analysis that guide our discussion of the metatheory of Europeanization research. The first seeks to unpack the metatheoretical assumptions and issues of the new institutionalist debates within Europeanization. The second considers the ontological breadth of the new institutionalisms and examines whether this focus excludes any concerns that might reasonably be considered under the Europeanization rubric.

**Europeanization research and metatheory**

Europeanization literature has so far portrayed itself as an analytical framework or a valuable ‘attention-directing device’ (Olsen 2002, 943) with a theoretical bedrock of new institutionalism (Vink and Graziano 2007, 13). This had two effects on the development of Europeanization as a body of scholarship. First of all, self-portrayal as an analytical framework rather than a theory foreclosed potential metatheoretical self-reflection. Secondly, the lack of reflection led to the failure to transmit the critical turn in new institutionalism to the Europeanization literature. Even if Europeanization has been seen as organically linked to new institutionalism, for a long time it has operated within the parameters of the three new institutionalisms rather than going through the critical turn in the broader new institutionalism literature.

**Europeanization and the three new institutionalisms**

Europeanization has emerged as a key theme in European studies over the past two decades or so and has come to be used in empirical research to understand the impact of the EU on the domestic politics, institutions and public policies of member states,
potential member states and near-neighbours. As Jordan and Liefferink (2004, 4) have pointed out, a first generation of studies focused on Europeanization as the domestic outcomes of European integration. From the mid-1990s Europeanization received more attention as an analytical framework, and came to be seen as a process impacting on politics, institutions and public policy at the domestic level, i.e. as the driver of change rather than as an outcome. Later studies also increasingly highlighted the interactive two-way relationship between member states and the EU. That is, how as well as ‘downloading’ from the EU level, governments would also seek to ‘upload’ to the EU level to minimise problems of adjustment at the post-decisional stage (Börzel 2002, 195-6). More recently, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between horizontal forms of governance and Europeanization through the transfer of ideas and practices across states: a process that may be facilitated by the EU, in particular through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) (Kröger 2009).

Considerable attention has been devoted to defining Europeanization conceptually in order to ‘identify the beast’ (see, for example, Radaelli and Pasquier 2007). Similarly, methodological concerns have also been prominent because of the need to ensure that research designs do not bias findings such that domestic outcomes are found to be the product of Europeanization rather than other variables, notably globalization, or unrelated domestic causes (see Haverland 2007; Exadaktylos and Radaelli forthcoming). Theoretical debate has not been lacking either. However, it has been rather different in nature because Europeanization is not itself a theory. Consequently, the theoretical toolkit has been imported from mainstream political analysis. As we have suggested above, the key source has been new institutionalism (Bulmer 2007) and particularly the three variants of new institutionalism identified in the classic review undertaken by Hall and Taylor (1996; see also Aspinwall and Schneider 2001).

Applications using rationalist institutionalism (RI) have typically placed emphasis on the incentive effects of EU rules, which are seen as providing an opportunity structure for domestic actors. Exponents of sociological institutionalism (SI) are concerned with the EU as a vehicle for the diffusion of norms, ideas, new organizational cultures as well as discourse amongst domestic actors. Historical institutionalism (HI) is typically concerned with the persistence, in the face of

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8 See Olsen (2002) for a slightly wider set of usages of the term.
Europeanization, of distinct institutional patterns at the domestic level. However, this rather determinist position has been complemented by analyses of how Europeanization can have long-term impacts that may bring about change when critical thresholds are reached.

Whilst some Europeanization literature has adopted one of the new institutionalisms as its analytical toolkit, some empirical literature is almost atheoretical. An alternative approach has been to incorporate competing explanations, typically using RI and SI. Börzel and Risse (2003) were important initial advocates of this approach. Arguably the most extensive application has been found in the work of Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier in exploring the impact of the EU on accession states (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004; 2005; 2006). Thus, in a rationalist account if the external incentives of membership offer greater reward than costs, domestic change will take place. Similarly, if EU rules offer more efficient domestic policy solutions, a rationalist account suggests they will be adopted. By contrast, a sociological interpretation would place emphasis on learning processes in the accession states that entail changing identities or norm internalization at domestic level.

Owing to the importing of theoretical toolkits from the new institutionalisms we argue that the Europeanization literature has underplayed theoretical reflection and completely neglected metatheoretical reflection, resulting in a narrowing of the intellectual arteries. In the spirit of improving the intellectual health of Europeanization studies we offer a metatheoretical perspective as a tonic.

Before exploring some areas on which the Europeanization literature has been rather silent, it is perhaps worth exploring the metatheoretical agenda pursued by Börzel/Risse and Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier and linking it to our earlier discussion of ontology. The objective of both pairings of authors was one of promoting dialogue between different knowledge claims rooted in different ontological positions: between the individualism and instrumentality of RI and the more sociological conception of agency in SI. Neither set of authors was explicitly advocating synthesis of the two approaches; that would raise problems of incommensurability between the different

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9 Some see historical institutionalism (HI) as a convenient middle ground between the rationalist and sociological variants, but we see HI’s main contribution in explaining the temporal dimension of domestic change arising from Europeanization.

10 As Hay (2002, 103-4) has noted, despite its methodological individualism rational choice is in fact structural, since actors are assumed to adapt optimally to the rules of the institutional environment.
ontological and epistemological assumptions intrinsic to RI and SI. Instead they were pursuing—albeit without explicit metatheoretical reflection—what Sil and Katzenstein (2010) have more recently termed ‘analytic eclecticism’. As they put it (2010, 415), ‘The combinatorial logic of analytic eclecticism depends ... on the multiplicity of connections between the different mechanisms and social processes analyzed in isolation in separate traditions’. The advantage of analytic eclecticism lies in maintaining a rigorous approach in deploying distinct theoretical traditions in order to capture the complex reality of the real world. Analytic eclecticism thus corresponds to a more inclusive metatheoretical position, where dialogue is seen as attractive for pragmatic reasons rather than the pursuit of a more exclusive and parsimonious adherence to a single theoretical position. Analytic eclecticism of this kind also enables the role of both the material world and ideas to be taken into account, as reflected in the parallel investigation of the EU’s impact on accession states through the parallel application of, respectively, RI and SI. Nevertheless, to the extent that there has been analytical eclecticism of this kind, it has tended to select from the three new institutionalisms, thus taking on board their inherent structuralism.

In turning to another ontological theme identified earlier—namely the roles of structure and agency—it is worth noting Colin Hay’s observation (2002, 102-3) that all processes without subjects, such as ‘-izations’ tend to be seen as structural in character. Similarly, if the theoretical support for Europeanization comes from new institutionalism, which itself privileges the role of structures, it follows that there is quite likely to be a structural bias in the research agenda. It is welcome, therefore, that renewed attention is being devoted to agency following the call of Woll and Jacquot (2010) to explore the ‘usages of Europe’ in domestic politics (see below).

Having reflected on the metatheoretical issues raised by key reference points in the existing Europeanization literature, we now turn to under-emphasized or neglected aspects of the research agenda.

*Europeanization beyond the three new institutionalisms*

The first important step already finding expression in the Europeanization literature is to give more attention to agency. As Hay (1995, 191) has pointed out, ‘attributing agency is attributing power’. If agency is defined as having the capability of choice and acting on that choice individually or collectively (Kubalkova 2001: 22), it entails the power to make things happen, i.e. causal power. As we have argued in the
previous section, Europeanization literature has tended to adopt a rather structuralist and therefore, in terms of the structure-agency debate, an exclusive ontology. Europeanization research from an RI perspective has tended to attribute causal power to material opportunity structures, those from SI perspective to social structures and norms, and those from HI perspective to historical trajectories of institutions. Therefore, even the most insightful theoretical reflection in the field of Europeanization remained within these parameters (see previous section). The ‘narrow top-down perspective’ (Börzel and Pamuk 2011, 2) and a ‘focus on institutional constraints, where policy actors are reduced to “mediating” factors’ (Woll and Jacquot 2010, 112) have recently been criticized by a newly-emerging body of scholarship that favours a more agency-centred approach in Europeanization research.

In this body of research, the opportunity structure or pressure created by the EU is not taken as ‘something explains,’ rather it is taken as ‘something to be explained’ (McCauley 2011, 2). Agency exerts causal power and brings about a political reality by pursuing a political agenda, defining policy problems, framing debates, justifying its actions and altering the structure through intended and unintended effects of its action (cf. Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). Darren McCauley (2011, 2), for example has defined bottom-up Europeanization as ‘the reorientation of a (sub-)national actor’s champ d’activité towards supranational institutions, politics and/or policy-making’. In a similar vein, Cornelia Woll and Sophie Jacquot (2010, 116) have defined ‘usage of Europe’ as ‘social practices that seize the European Union as a set of opportunities, be they institutional, ideological, political or organizational.’ Both definitions take Europeanization as actors seizing the opportunities caused by the EU structure; however this approach should be complemented with accounts of agency adapting to the constraints caused by the EU structure, e.g. in the transposition of EU directives. The usual focus of the Europeanization literature has been on this downward implementation of EU constraints, however based on rather structuralist accounts of agency, without enough attention paid to ideologies, identities, discourses of those actors who agree with being constrained. That is to say, both constraints and opportunities caused by the EU structure require agency to effect political reality.

\[11\] Notable exceptions include …
In this line of argument, logics and theories of agency are utilised to offer a fuller explanation. McCauley (2011) has utilized social movement theory to explain the French anti-genetically modified organism movement’s response to the EU opportunity structure. McCauley’s finding reasserts the need for a more balanced approach to structure and agency in the Europeanization literature as he argued that ‘supranational opportunities are more conscientiously placed “out of focus”’ than frustratingly “out of reach”’ (McCauley 2011, 17). In other words, contrary to the RI assumption that actors automatically respond to available new resources, McCauley has pointed out the importance of discourse and ideology of actors in responding to resources offered by the EU. Tanja Börzel and Yasemin Pamuk (2011) have also shed light on the significance of agency when they have found out that EU conditionality on fighting corruption resulted in institutional adaptation in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which in turn stabilized rather than transformed clientelistic governance structures in these countries. Börzel and Pamuk (2011) highlight the role of agency as these formal changes are ‘driven by the differential empowerment of incumbent elites that have instrumentalized the fight against corruption to undermine the power of their political opponents’.

All in all, we argue that this emergent body of scholarship demonstrates that now there is more ontological reflection in the Europeanization literature, which has brought in a more balanced assumption on structure and agency. Such an approach attributes due causal power to agency (both individual and collective) thereby partly addressing the question ‘whose interests Europeanization advances?’ As summarized above, Europeanization does not necessarily empower reform-minded elites or pro-democracy circles, nor is it always automatically ‘used’ by actors with sufficient resources. However, these insights only partly address the points we raised earlier in the paper. More focus on agency to balance the prevalent structuralism sheds light on unchartered aspects of Europeanization but the underlying social and economic forces have to be addressed too.

**A Wider Chorus in Europeanization?**
Here we discuss ‘critical perspectives’, namely feminism and critical international political economy and how they might enrich Europeanization research. In doing so, we note that some feminists have engaged with the new institutionalisms to develop an embryonic feminist institutionalism that is perhaps of most obvious relevance to
our critique of Europeanization research. We use these approaches to highlight two themes of particular ontological interest: structure and agency and, related to this, conceptions of power. Our treatment of this is necessarily brief and highly stylised and we note that there are notable exceptions.

Mackay et al (2010) develop a gendered analysis of new institutionalism that highlights the gendered nature of structures, processes and actor relationships. The institutionalisation of gendered relations acts as a constraint on behaviour and outcomes. As they put it (2010, 583): ‘Gendered relations and gendered institutions structure the context in which actors construct and deploy their gendered identities and interests’. This insight leads to a critique of the narrow understanding of power offered by the new institutionalisms, which neglect consideration of all aspects of the political environment within which institutions are embedded. Here, feminists point to how ‘gendering and regendering of political institutions are active processes with palpable effects’ (Hawksworth, 2003; 532), highlighting the sometimes barely visible ways in which the power relations that sustain political processes are produced and reproduced through gender’ (Mackay et al 2010, 583). These insights are largely neglected in the three new institutionalisms that are reproduced uncritically in ‘mainstream’ Europeanization research.

An earlier literature on gender and social policy in the EU emphasized the way in which rights essentially derived from the economic character of the treaties. If this analysis were re-framed in terms of Europeanization, one might have been asking whether the EU’s impact on domestic policy had institutionalized a set of economic rights on gender issues that was not complemented by social rights and so on. In short what gendering effect was the EU’s policy having at member state level? Of course, EU provisions have been extended subsequently with wider rights and anti-discriminatory provision, such as in the Amsterdam Treaty and the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights. But our point here is to indicate that there is a potential research agenda on how the gendered character of EU provisions impacts on the character of pre-existing domestic provision.12

Acknowledging gender as an ontological category is about acknowledging difference: different agents, contexts, discourses, ways of seeing and doing things. The importance of seeing difference has come onto the political agenda recently in the

12 See also Kenneth Armstrong’s work (2010) on the Europeanization of social inclusion.
context of the Eurozone crisis and the bail-outs of Greece, Portugal and Ireland. A critical political economy perspective would make analogous observations to those above about the reproduction, in barely visible ways, of asymmetrical social relations within institutions. If we take the recent Eurozone crisis and the financial deal offered to Greece to keep it in the system, this could be interpreted as a fairly straightforward case of top-down Europeanization: Greece has little opportunity for uploading its preferences in this instance and so the key puzzle to be explained is why the EU (or more properly, Eurozone leaders) arrives at the decision to offer successive financial packages to seek to stabilize the Greek economy. From a rational choice perspective, this might be explained by Eurozone leaders pursuing rational economic interests: the ‘bail out’ is aimed at securing the ongoing stability of the Eurozone and the prosperity of member economies. In any event, from Greece’s perspective its government has had to commit to undertake significant austerity measures in order to secure access to the bail-out fund. This situation might be understood in a similar way to the conditionality of reform that candidate states are subject to in order to gain the prize of successful conclusion of accession negotiations. From a sociological institutionalist perspective, the agreement at EU level might be interpreted as a norm-driven expression of solidarity with a fellow member state. From a historical institutionalist perspective, the explanation could be some combination of rationalist and sociological factors, but the key point being that the ‘sunk costs’ of cooperation and integration in this domain over a sustained period makes attempts at rescuing a member economy the most likely outcome. Within Greece the sociological institutionalist interpretation might revolve around a realization that it had not properly absorbed at domestic level the fiscal norms that full membership of the Eurozone entailed.

Within mainstream Europeanization research therefore, the focus would be on seeking to understand the relative claims of these NI variants. Implicit reflection over structure and agency might typically focus on the nature of the relationship between the EU and its member state and their interplay in coming to an agreement. Some assessment would be made about the extent to which this was a top-down, bottom-up or two-way process; of whether the EU requirements were a ‘good fit’ or otherwise with extant Greek practices and, related to this, on the degree of adaptational pressure arising. Over time, Europeanization research has become more sensitive to the ‘political’ as well as institutional nature of adaptation in member/candidate states.
(above) and this might be factored in as an intervening variable in explaining the outcomes in the Greek case, alongside the established institutional variables relating to the number of veto points in the domestic arena, organizational cultures and so on.

However, from a critical political economy perspective, this approach can offer at best only a partial explanation of developments. What it ignores is a broader appreciation of the decisional context within which Eurozone leaders operate, which relates to the systemic drivers of global economic pressures and the EU’s external competitiveness (Siles-Brügge and Heron forthcoming). The crisis in the Eurozone is inextricably linked to a wider international economic crisis and has to be understood and theorised as such. In this context, other important actors – fractions of capital and organized labour – are vying for influence and place pressure directly and indirectly on political leaders. This is a context in which asymmetrical relations between different economic and social actors are reproduced within institutions in a barely visible way (like gendered relations.) Of course, the Europeanization literature has not yet caught up with the Eurozone crisis. However, what we are arguing is that to place it within the limitations of a conventional new institutionalist understanding would be a very incomplete account.

The insights from a critical political economy approach are not confined to the Eurozone crisis. It could also shed light—to take a quite different example—on marginalised economic actors (in this example, semi-subistence farmers) in Lithuanian agriculture. As Diana Mincyte (2011) has recently argued, Lithuanian efforts at building the infrastructure for the implementation of EU’s Common Agricultural Policy brought it conditionality on a number of requirements on ‘good farming’ practices. These requirements necessitated registration of farmers and their use of certain accounting systems to be eligible for EU’s direct payments: something which proved impossible for small-scale semi-subistence dairy farmers (Mincyte 2011, 111). Consequently, Europeanization of the Lithuanian rural development regime led to the marginalisation of semi-subistence farmers, as they were ‘too autonomous and effectively, ungovernable’ (Mincyte 2011, 111).

The conclusion to this section, therefore, is to argue that the research agenda of Europeanization has not only been confined by the particular variants of new institutionalism that have been deployed but also by failing to engage with more critical literatures. Unless Europeanization develops a more inclusive ontology this situation is likely to continue.
Conclusion

Our purpose here has been to try to stand back from our Europeanist roots and observe this subfield of EU studies with a more critical eye. Our aim is to encourage a more inclusive and informed approach to Europeanization research through greater metatheoretical reflection. In doing this, we have surveyed some of the key developments in the field – the early focus on domestic outcomes shifting to one on process, the greater incorporation of the new institutionalisms, and newer perspectives within the new institutionalist ‘canon’ that promise more reflection on key themes such as structure and agency. In particular, these recent contributions offer a necessary agency-focused corrective to the overly-structural ontology of mainstream Europeanization research.

Yet we suggest that the field can go further, in particular to shine a light on issues of power and the thorny question of whose interests are served through Europeanization? We illustrated our argument here in relation to the contributions of feminism and critical political economy, which offer very different understandings of the notions of structure and agency, the nature of power and thus raise very different questions relating to processes of Europeanization. They challenge the assumptions of much of the field and what constitutes a legitimate and valuable line of inquiry. This reflection on ‘what counts’ offers the potential for a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of Europeanization.

We advocate adoption of an evolving ontology to respond to the contemporary issues: one that is inclusive and that also points us to the historical embeddedness of theorizing. To advocate such a critical turn in Europeanization studies would also take us back to reflect on what the EU stands for and how it interacts with global trends, which in turn translates into the EU’s relationship with the member or candidate states. Instead of seeing lack of transposition due to veto players for example, it points us in the direction to see it when EU conditionality serves to normalize domination, or eliminates difference; and cases of resistance and transformation. Our proposed ‘critical turn’ in the Europeanization literature would be to revert back from the so-called ‘post-ontological phase’, where not enough attention was given to what the EU is and what it stands for, to more attention on what the EU is and does. This also entails more attention to EU time, and its impact on Europeanization. Instead of a narrow focus on the time, timing and tempo of the relationship between the EU and the member state, looking at the EU’s evolution over time is also necessary. As
Grabbe has argued, for example, 9/11 led to the prioritization of Schengen acquis in the accession negotiations with CEECs. Or similarly, as Mincyte has argued, the EU signing the GATT Uruguay Round (1994) on agriculture led to a restructuring of the EU’s CAP regime. This has caused different actors’ marginalisation compared to pre-1994 Europeanization dynamics (Mincyte 2011, 111).

In making this case, we are clear that while ontological reflection is important to political analysis, it is no substitute for it (Hay 2009). Much of value has been learned from first and second generation Europeanization studies – often theoretically informed and empirically rich – sufficiently so for one respected commentator to suggest a few years ago that ‘some of the very best and most innovative and challenging work in political science is now being carried out by scholars working in the field of European integration and Europeanization’ (Mair 2004: 346). However, we would argue that the field needs greater ontological inclusivity if it is to retain a prominent place at the leading edge of political science research.

References


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