Theorising Regional Integration Comparatively:

An Introduction

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Workshop 10: Comparative Regional Integration – Towards a Research Agenda
Introduction: Working Across Intellectual Boundaries – Cooperation Between ‘European Studies’ and ‘New Regionalism’

For several years there has been a worrying divide between scholars of regional integration, in which scholars of the same phenomenon have tended to speak past each other rather than enter into sustained dialogue with each other\(^1\). Focusing on the EU as a nascent, if unconventional, polity in its own right, the majority of EU studies scholars have tended to opt for one of two strategies (articulated respectively by Hix, 2007 and Jachtenfuchs, 2007). The first of these treats as axiomatic the idea that the EU is a political system with classically Laswellian traits. This allows scholarship based upon comparative political science, rather than International Relations, in order to improve knowledge is a rigorous and analytically secure way. This ‘comparative politics’ approach to the EU (Hix 1994, Hix 1998), while both careful not to sever links with international relations scholarship entirely, has produced much useful scholarship and pointed out the benefits of comparing EU policy-making processes to those of (Western) states in order better to understand them. However, by the same token, it has tended to focus on those attributes of the EU that are state-like, and thus to downplay the respects in which it remains more like an international organization - or other regional integration projects. The second strategy is to treat the EU as a new, less familiar and perhaps path-breaking political form for which new tools of analysis might be required. Or if familiar tools are used, then analysts should not be sucked into presuming that they are dealing with an object that always and necessarily obeys the operational laws of the classical Weberian (nation) state. Again, this branch of EU studies is less and less concerned with the phenomenon of integration – with how economic, social and political space has been (re)constructed on a regional basis in Europe. Meanwhile, scholars interested in regionalism and regionalization outside the European continent or as a more general phenomenon have tended to undertake their studies using international relations (IR) or international political economy (IPE)-derived lenses, and have often either avoided focus on the EU or used somewhat outdated information on it as a result. In this ‘new regionalism’ work, a ‘new regionalism approach’ has been consciously and carefully elaborated (for an overview, see Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; Hettne, n.d.).

Our aim in this paper – and indeed in this workshop – is to help overcome this divide, which we consider to be particularly worrying in terms of its ability to frustrate the elaboration of useful theory. Several EU studies scholars have begun actively to investigate the new regionalism work (see *inter alia* Breslin, Higgott and Rosamond 2002; Telò 2001; Warleigh 2004). Moreover, within the new regionalism studies community, the prospect of interrogating EU studies work, and even integration theory, has become more acceptable (Hettne 2003; Laursen 2003). Thus, building on previous work, we seek to set out a solid set of reasons why such scholarly cooperation between scholars of regional integration in all its forms is valid. Indeed we suggest that in large part the practice of mutual neglect is misconceived. In a constructive spirit, we present some key issues for consideration as part of this intellectual rapprochement.\(^2\)

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, we set out what we consider to be the primary benefits and problems of regularly using the EU as a comparator in NR studies, and vice

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\(^1\) We use the term ‘regional integration’ as a catch-all device to include the vast range of regionalization projects. We do not intend it as a normative indication that all regionalisms and regionalizations must follow the EU path.

\(^2\) We draw in particular here on Warleigh 2004 as well as Rosamond 2005a, 2005b, 2007.
versa, because those are the terms in which EU studies have primarily (and somewhat cautiously) been brought into the ‘new regionalism’ field. Second, we re-examine the reasons for the apparent intellectual divorce of NR and EU studies as a prelude for a tentative and qualified argument in favour of re-examining the merits of classical integration theory – a body of work that grew up largely under the empirical watch of early European integration. Finally, we put forward a set of issues and questions which confront scholars seeking to go beyond this process of comparative study and elaborate a theoretical framework for the comparative study of regional integration as a means to structure the workshop.

Europe³ and the New Regionalism: The Benefits and Problems of Comparison

In order to establish the value and limits of Europe as a comparator for other instances of regional integration, it is necessary to address three issues. First, why should NR studies be comparative? Second, is Europe suitable as a comparator? Third, if Europe can be agreed to be suitable in this way, what are the advantages and disadvantages of this particular comparison - and, in addition, do the former outweigh the latter? We address each of these issues in turn.

The Uses of Comparison

Despite concerns that issues, methods and prescriptions derived from study of regionalization projects in the ‘North’ may not be automatically transferable to such projects in the ‘South’, and that Africa in particular poses challenges to comparative political study, there is widespread agreement in NR circles that comparative study is likely to be helpful. Although there are obvious differences between the various regional integration projects of the globe - of which the fact that some are heavily institutionalised, while others eschew formal institutions altogether is only the most obvious example - scholars tend to agree that these differences can be exaggerated, and that they certainly do not in themselves preclude comparative study (Eliassen and Børve Monsen 2001). Sound comparative political analysis must in any case be sensitive to both ‘political institutions (and) the social milieux within which the art of politics takes place’ (Kamrava 1996: 32); to be worthwhile, it must ‘be undertaken in an informed knowledge of the range of possible variation’ which is in turn steeped in an appreciation of the history and culture of the different subjects of study (Calvert 1993: 10). Comparative study is not the search for uniformity; rather, it is the search to uncover such general principles and practices as exist in a particular issue area, undertaken in the knowledge that divergence between systems and contexts can be practically significant and heuristically important.

Thus, given that regional integration in its so-called ‘second wave’ seems to be a universal phenomenon, it is only by thorough comparative study of its various incarnations that we are likely to understand either it or its impact upon/causal links from the changing world order (Hettne 2001b). Comparative study can help scholars understand the differences between different regional integration projects (Katzenstein 1996). Such work can thus enable scholars (and by extension policy-makers) to see both how the various regional integration projects could usefully learn from each other, and also how the international political economy is impacting upon governance in different parts of the globe (an impact which may be universal but which is unlikely to be uniform). Thus, provided that comparative studies avoid giving one particular model of regional integration ideological or analytical pre-eminence, taking it

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³ We use ‘Europe’ here not as a synonym for the EU, but because regional integration in Europe involves many different overlapping institutions, of which the EU is merely the most powerful.
as a norm which others must or would be expected to follow, they will tend to be extremely useful (Higgott 1998).

At this point, it is worth noting that there are objections to the aspiration to compare. Indeed as Söderbaum (2005) has remarked, there is such a position – which he labels the ‘new regionalisms/new realist’ approach – within NR studies. The reasoning here follows from attentiveness to the local specificities of distinctive regional projects – an idiographic defence against the generalising ambitions of deductive nomothetic social science. In common with much of the cultural, anthropological and sociological literature on globalization (for example Appadurai, 1996), such work wishes to emphasise the profound particularities and differences that attend the reorganisation of social space on a trans-territorial scale. Our view is that regional particularities are important and we remain committed to the idea that it is possible to make generalising statements that take account of variations. And is certainly not our intention to fall into the trap of generating a generalising and wholly deductive ‘hard’ political science project that elevates explanatory analytical leverage over the quest for understanding.

**The EU as Comparator in New Regionalism**

Of course, with regard to the use of Europe/the EU as a comparator, the issue of a perceived hierarchy of the different forms of regional integration is an issue to be addressed. In ‘first wave’ regional integration studies, it was often taken as read that what is now the EU was a teleological model for either other regions or indeed the world (Haas 1961: 366-9). By extension, in order to succeed, other regional integration projects would have to try to emulate the EU as much as possible; that they did not do so could be taken as evidence of their likely failure. Even today, the fact that the EU is by far the most ‘advanced’ instance of regional integration can incline scholars to the view that it is innately superior to other regional integration projects - particularly by those who wish to see the EU become a federal United States of Europe. Indeed the term ‘advanced’ is hopelessly loaded, presupposing as it does an unproblematic continuum of ‘integration’, along which different regional formations might be placed - as if in some sort of race. This progressivist understanding of ‘integration’ owed something to the intellectual atmosphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s when emerging theoretical work in international economics (notably and most influentially Balassa, 1962) imagined integration as a staged, teleological process where modest integrative movement would beget deeper integration and so forth, and the decision to initiate a free trade area could ultimately provoke full economic union. However, if the EU is to have any utility in NR studies, this view must explicitly be rejected (Hettne 2002; Breslin, Higgott and Rosamond 2002). The fact is that the EU has as often been explicitly refused as a model of regional integration as it has been seen as a source of policy/institutional good practice (Acharya 2002; Hettne 2002). Moreover, as neofunctionalist EU scholars eventually admitted, taking the EU as the norm, or focusing on it exclusively, produces biased research and inadequate theory (Haas 1975), because it entices scholars to make unwarranted generalizations. Thus, neither EU nor NR scholars have anything to gain by taking Europe as the model of regional integration, rather than one among many.

If it can be agreed that the European case is not to be considered a prescriptive model, what value could its study add to the NR field? We argue that the benefits are considerable, as European Studies ‘matters not only for the particular knowledge of Europe it can produce and transmit, but for the bearing of that knowledge on pressing questions for…other regions of the world’ (Calhoun 2003: 20). These benefits can be grouped into two kinds. First, what might be called *study-informing* (or quasi-methodological) benefits and second, what could be termed *study-shaping* (or [meta]theoretical) benefits.
Study-informing benefits

First, there is the fact that while it is not a model to be slavishly emulated and is certainly not to be regarded as an analytical template, the EU’s greater historical experience with institutionalised regional integration may still be a source of learning. Not only is the EU capable of being an anti-model (as mentioned above), it is a laboratory in which those outside can see how actors who are relatively experienced in playing the regional game make mistakes, innovate, evolve, and address the legacies of past (in)action. This may well have a sort of demonstration effect, whereby actors in other regions can take what they find useful from European experience, or whereby NR scholars can generate useful data.

Second, Europe is not the last refuge of the ‘old’ regionalism. Indeed, it might very well be argued that what is commonly understood to be the ‘new regionalism’ began in Europe, with the launching of the single market programme in the mid-1980s (Schulz, Söderbaum and Ojendal 2001; Hettne 2001a); thus, the European process can serve as a (qualified) source of information about why ‘new regionalism’ was initiated, and how it differs from ‘old regionalism’. Aside from inviting obvious questions such as the relationship between ‘globalisation’ and the growth of regional orders, the European process can also provide useful comparisons for scholars investigating ‘micro-regional’ issues such as the growth of cross-border regions or development corridors in other regional projects; for example, the growing attention paid by NR scholars to micro-regions (e.g. Breslin and Hook 2002; Jessop 2003) is likely to draw usefully on the impressive literature available on the ‘Europe of the Regions’ idea and its many off-shoots.

A third benefit from studying the European case is that it can indicate much about two particular defining characteristics of ‘new regionalism’, namely its multi-dimensionality and reliance upon regional consciousness or identity (Hurrell 1995: 332). The links between politics and economics in European integration are perpetually controversial - witness the single currency project. For this very reason, the continuous re-visiting of the balance between economic and political integration in Europe, and the attempt to pass the latter off as the former, are indicative of the struggles to be expected in any advancing regional integration project, whether it is highly institutionalised or not. The EU can thus serve to show both what can happen in ‘later’ stages of certain kinds of regional integration, if they are ever attempted (a useful source of data for theorists) and what can be done about managing tensions between member states (a useful source of data for practitioners).

A fourth benefit is that using the European case as a comparator alerts scholars to the interplay between different regional bodies, institutions and processes. The EU is but one among several European bodies which govern the continent, and European states differ in their membership of the several bodies (e.g. The Council of Europe, European Economic Area, NATO). There is no uniform process of integration in Europe, and if the continent’s

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4 The laboratory metaphor is borrowed from Nicolaïdis and Howse 2003.

5 On the characteristics of ‘new regionalism’ see Hurrell 1995: 332.

6 There is a large literature on such issues – particularly in Europe - in economic geography and IPE. It should be said that a great deal of this work shows promise for genuinely comparative study of the making of regional spaces. One of the general findings of such work is that the spatial co-ordinates of transnational economic spaces is rarely contiguous with the macro-area defined by the EU, suggesting in turn a disjuncture between formal (de jure) state-led regional institution building on the one hand and the informal (de facto) emergence of market-led transnational space on the other. Much of the NRA treats the relationship between these two attributes of regionalism/regionalisation as fundamental to its project. The causal chains in the relationship have been hypothesised in EU studies by Sandholtz and Stone Sweet, 1997.
various experiences and experiments in regional integration are taken together they provide a whole range of potentially illuminating comparisons, both within the continent of Europe and between Europe and elsewhere. To raise two examples, might ASEAN more fruitfully be compared with EFTA (the European Free Trade Association) than with the EU? Might interesting data be generated from a comparative study of NATO (an organisation which allows the USA to dominate the security governance of the European continent) and APEC (an organisation which arguably allows the USA to extend its influence over the economic governance of the Asia-Pacific)? At the very least, using Europe as a comparator alerts the scholar of new regionalism to the fact that the various regional integration processes themselves, and not just regional integration per se, may be polycentric and internally variegated.

Study-shaping benefits
The first study-shaping benefit of using Europe as a comparator in NR studies is that it highlights the evolutionary nature of regional integration, and thus indicates that theorising in NR should be contingent, non-deterministic, and critical. Although Hettne (2002) is right to stress that there is no inherent teleology in regional integration - such projects can advance, deteriorate, advance again, fall apart etc - that should not blind us to the fact that such evolution is possible. Moreover, such evolution is often as much a source of new questions as it is of solutions to old puzzles. This evolution tends to take place (in Europe, at least) at the expense of established ideas of what ‘deepening’ involves. Two particular issues are interesting here. First, the EU shows that as regional integration deepens it may become less rather than more formal in nature. Thus, the increasingly complex business of policy-making in the EU relies on informal politics and alliance construction between actors in the various EU institutions and member states just as much as it does upon formal processes and procedures (Warleigh 2000). Second, approaches to policy making may change and multiply as regional integration deepens. Thus, the EU’s increasing use of soft law, flexibility (the idea that member states can opt out of common EU policy) and co-ordination rather than regulation may indicate that instances of advanced, institutionalised regional integration may have rather more in common with other (e.g. East Asian) models than is often thought. While some might be nervous about the implied retention of a notion of integration as a continuum along which regions advance, this approach does at least break away from previous understandings of integration as a (universal) process. Earlier versions were certainly more mechanistic, relying on somewhat crude, stylised and one-way conceptions of ‘spillover’ dynamics. These in turn – at least in some versions of integration theory – almost presuppose the a priori presence of supranational strategic actors (performing so-called ‘cultivated spillover’ – Tranholm Mikkelsen, 1991). This then comes dangerously close to conflating the distinct ideas of integration as a process on the one hand and the institutional form taken by integration on the other. We suggest that one reason why NRA scholars have found the EU such an unattractive comparator is precisely because the understanding of integration as process has been bound up with the an assumption that the default institutional form will/must conform to the European model.

Secondly, academic work in EU studies can serve as an example of how important issues can be screened out by dominant theoretical frameworks which consider them insignificant. This problem has been present throughout the EU’s history, and should not be repeated in NR studies if at all possible. At a meta-theoretical level, it is important that NR studies broadens itself out to encompass not just IR and IPE but also comparative politics and political theory, so that it can address with sufficient depth and rigour the issues such as identity-formation and power transfer that it rightly identifies as crucial.
Third, again at a meta-theoretical level it must at least be questionable whether the EU is really the most suitable ‘other’ against which NR should seek to define itself. Surely, insofar as such a distinction is necessary, either international organizations of non-regional nature such as the WTO, or domestic polities, are better expressions of alterity in this context. Reducing the sense of EU studies as the ‘other’ would allow NR scholars to relax their conceptual boundaries and develop a fuller appreciation of their field. For example, and related to a point about non-determinism in theory making made above, why should regional integration in the neofunctionalist sense be completely ruled out as a possible end-point of contemporary regional projects? This relaxation would be a helpful contributing factor in the attempt to revise the New Regional Approach launched by its creator (Hettne 2003), as could the significant experience of EU scholars in re-working, refining and re-evaluating their own theoretical frameworks. An example is the general re-evaluation of what might be called classic integration theory in EU studies, which has been constant since the mid-1980s. A particular case in point is the need to understand how formal and informal practices of regionalization coexist. This has been singled out by NR scholars as an area in need of further exploration (Bøås, Marchand and Shaw 2003), and it is one with which EU studies scholars have been grappling for several years.

New Regionalism as a Comparator in EU Studies
Study-informing Benefits

A first benefit of this kind to EU scholars is that they would thereby be liberated from being parochially European in their focus. A corollary of the switch from IR-derived to comparative politics-derived conceptual frameworks has been the neglect in much EU study of the links between regionalization in Europe and the global or international context; and yet the globalization-regionalization matrix is a standard feature of NR studies. Although much attention has been paid to how the EU impacts upon its member states – viz. the concept of ‘Europeanization’ – the focus on middle range theory has tended to obscure the links between the EU’s creation, essential nature and policy agenda on the one hand, and global or international politics on the other. The growing literature on EU foreign policy ironically perpetuates this division by creating a sub-sub-field which is often kept in purdah from those scholars focusing on ‘EU domestic policy’. An example of the utility of EU/NR comparison here is in the issue of micro-regions/‘Europe of the Regions’ linkages mentioned above.

A second such benefit is to allow EU scholars to instrumentalize some of their emerging concepts more successfully. If the EU is indeed a ‘normative power’ (Manners 2002), then this needs to be investigated not only with regard to foreign policy or its role as a ‘civilian power’ but also with regard to other regionalization projects in the globe. The external projection of regions might well be related to their internal normative structures. Alternatively there may be a disjuncture (if not necessarily an outright contradiction) between internal construction (say regulatory, disciplinary neoliberalism) and external representation (say the advocacy of core labour and environmental standards, human rights protection etc).

A third benefit is to enable EU scholars to explore emerging policy issues more fully. Issues such as flexibility, the use of informal politics and power, and the continuing widening-versus-deepening debate may not be the result of insufficient spillovers at all, but rather intrinsic features of regionalization processes. This much is at least suggested by an

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7 For a recent example, see Christiansen and Piattoni 2004.
8 On this see Laïdi and Schmidt 2005.
understanding of regionalization in other contexts such as the Southern African Development Community and South East Asia (Söderbaum and Shaw 2003).

Study-Shaping Benefits
In terms of study-shaping, comparison with NR studies has further benefits for EU scholars. First, it would ensure that an IPE perspective is rather more central to the sub-discipline of EU studies than at present. This would be beneficial in helping EU studies make theories that are commensurable with those of other political science fields, but would also ensure that a critical theory perspective is more clearly integrated into the kinds of theoretical project that EU scholars consider necessary or worthwhile. By extension, EU scholars would also engage more regularly with IR theories and approaches as scholars with something to offer a sub-discipline which is itself undergoing revision.

Meta-theoretically speaking, it is vital that EU scholars cease to consider themselves students of the only ‘real’ form of regional integration. The biggest advantage here is the liberation of EU studies from its infamous ‘n = 1’ problem. This is partly for reasons of clarity: regionalism/ization and the EU can no longer be considered to mean the same thing. It is also for reasons of theoretical advancement: an understanding of how other parts of the globe are addressing regionalization is likely to yield useful understandings of how the EU itself is now different from its incarnation(s) in the 1950s-early 1980s, especially with regard to the often unacknowledged but significant reforms made to the ‘Community Method’ of regionalization in recent years.

There are thus many benefits to be gained by using the European experience in comparative regional integration studies. In the next section of the paper, we take a slightly different tack to think about what the field of EU studies has to offer the broader project of comparative regional integration studies. In particular, we question whether classical integration theory has been too readily written off by its critics, both within EU studies and in the emerging NRA school.

Bringing EU studies back in?
The foregoing makes a case (we hope) for a sustained conversation between two active scholarly communities: the field of EU studies on the one hand and those scholars (broadly operating within IPE) who focus on the phenomenon of ‘new’ regionalism. We have argued for what we see as the analytic virtues of using the European example more than is commonplace within NRA. Indeed we would question the tendency to ‘bracket’ the EU case as particular, special, different etc. At the same time, we maintain that the reappearance of the EU as a comparator within comparative regional integration studies must not signal a return to either (a) the assumption that the EU/European integration is a paradigm case of regional integration against which other regional projects must be measured or (b) the presumption that EU studies has all of the suitable intellectual technologies to study regionalism/ regionalisation comparatively. We are keen to emphasise that both fields have much to offer one another and, if nothing else, we hope that this workshop and any associated spin offs will intensify an

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9 Another way to think about this is to suggest that much of EU studies, by conceptualising the EU as a polity of one type or other has secured some analytical leverage and thereby avoided the n = 1 elephant trap. But this has been accomplished at the expense of talking at all about integration as a process in which the EU might be engaged. As such the arrival of the new regionalism and the NRA has made a less than appropriate impact within EU studies.

10 These changes are both institutional (for example the rise to power of the European Parliament) and procedural (for example the rise of soft policy and comitology as means of and approaches to decision-making).
atmosphere of mutual learning. We return to the conditions under which this might be accomplished in the final section of this paper. For now, we pay some preliminary attention to the question of what EU studies has to offer for the comparative study of regionalism.

The field of EU studies is rich and varied. Its evolution is rich and complex (see Rosamond, 2007). Interestingly, its story is narrated not only from within (i.e. work in the EU studies tradition), but also from without, notably by scholars of the ‘new’ regionalism, keen to differentiate their object of study and their project from that associated with the EU studies mainstream. The problem with this external critique of EU studies is, to put it bluntly, that is often relies on a gross misperception of what exactly goes on within the field. The presumption is that EU studies not only deals with an ‘old’ regionalist project (the EU) that is problematic as a comparator in the ‘new’ regionalism school of analysis, but also trades in ‘old’ analytical tools that may be relevant to the study of ‘old’ regionalism. Part of the auto-definition of NRA is that it offers ‘new’ approaches to a qualitatively ‘new’ phenomenon. EU studies as an approach, therefore, commits the crime of studying the ‘old’ with the ‘old’. Needless to say we find this move problematic. While it helps to delineate and legitimate the NRA as a field of study and helps to position it as a subfield of IR/IPE, it excludes the EU and EU studies insights as a priori unhelpful. One of us has already argued about the folly of such a move and developed a case for why IR more broadly should pay serious attention to ongoing work in EU studies (Warleigh, 2006a). In short the argument here is that IR – even that which self consciously seeks to ‘think otherwise’ about world politics and which is open to the notion that we are living in a post-Westphalian era – has been largely blind to the acquis academique of EU studies. The latter offers a rich set of ideas – and more to the point fully fledged bodies of scientific literature – about inter alia governance beyond the state, the re-calibration of authority, the interplay between international institutions, governmental actors and domestic polities, the possibilities of the practice of post-national democracy and the formation of post-national demoi and the role of law and legal institutions in international governance. None of this presumes the EU to be a benchmark case. It is rather a case where some very interesting (and analogous) things are going on which IR scholars could examine to their profit.

Of course, while critics from the outside have cast doubt on the usefulness of the EU for comparative analysis, so a long-evolving auto-critique from within has said pretty much the same thing. The field we now know as EU studies in large part emerged from the intellectual efforts of a group of scholars of the 1950s through to the mid 1970s to use the European case as the basis for a project of comparative integration studies. This was very much what the early scholars of integration theory (the most usual catch-all label is neofunctionalism) claimed to be doing: while the European Communities provided a vital empirical laboratory, integration theorists aspired to develop general testable propositions that could be applied to all cases of regional integration. Thus the claim that neofunctionalism’s project failed is also an attack on the use of the European case as a laboratory for the emergence of grounded proposition. The most awkward argument was that integration theory/neofunctionalism had simply provided a thick descriptive account of an $n = 1$ scenario. The concept of ‘spillover’ turned out to be a phenomenon quite local to particular temporal and spatial co-ordinates. Confirming evidence was supplied by the failure of other regions to replicate the European experience. Historical institutionalists would later theorise this as a question of the particular conditions in post-war Europe that provoked particular institutional choices, that in turn embedded interested institutional-bureaucratic actors and associated path dependencies (Pierson 1996). Intergovernmentalists (especially Moravcsik 1998) claimed that the interaction of national governmental preferences under institutionalised conditions –
something found in all sorts of international venues – provided the key clue to the advancement or otherwise of integration in Europe. Meanwhile, as we have already noted, comparativists (Hix 1994, 1998) found other strategies to secure analytical leverage.\(^{11}\)

In other words, the one sustained effort to draw comparative insight from the European case has been marginalised from within EU studies as well as from the outside. The EU studies critique of it own theoretical legacy is interesting, perhaps because it says something about how the present field uses images of its past to justify particular moves in the present (see Rosamond, 2007 for a more detailed argument). Our point is simply to suggest that just as IR/NRA has been too hasty in its dismissal of EU studies present, so perhaps both EU studies and NRA have relied upon jaundiced images of EU studies past. If, for example, neofunctionalism (c1958-1975) has been misunderstood and if what is normally taken to be its essence is, in fact a bad misconception, then the case for a re-inspection, if not full scale intellectual recovery, is strong.\(^{12}\)

There is no space here for a full scale sociology of knowledge/critical disciplinary history discussion of the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of this misconstruction (Rosamond 2007), suffice it to say that the following three observations may have some pertinence to the project in hand.

- Classical integration theory and neofunctionalism in particular was not, as is sometimes suggested, ‘ghettoised’ in IR and lacking in (contemporary) understanding of social science rigour. Such a caricature is completely wrong (Rosamond 2005a, Ruggie et al 2005). So what? To dismiss such work as IR (and thus incapable of analytical leverage in the EU context) or lacking in professionalism (and thus unsuited for use by ‘sound’ IR scholars) is a justification to set it aside and leave the original texts unread. Our knowledge of what integration theory was is left to secondary renditions, many of which amount to little more than a few framing sentences that seek to render legitimate theoretical moves in the present and screen us off from an appreciation of our intellectual heritage.

- There are interesting affinities between neofunctionalism’s ‘soft’ rationalist ontology (Haas 2004), e.g. its ongoing and developing interest in the role of knowledge, values and cognitions in regional integration (see especially Nye 1971), and the constructivist impulses of much analysis of the new regionalism. Neofunctionalists developed interesting ideas about loyalties, persuasion and the evolution of expectations, all of which can be found in embryonic form in the first edition of Haas’s *Uniting of Europe*.

- The concept of ‘spillover’ has been unhelpfully frozen and caricatured in standard accounts of neofunctionalism. ‘Spillover’ is important because it appeared to carry much of the explanatory weight in the neofunctionalist account of how integration deepens, moves from sector to sector and becomes politicised. If ‘spillover’ was Euro-specific, then neofunctionalism could only be Euro-centric and thus incapable of more general application. Yet, contrary to prevailing suppositions, neofunctionalists were acutely aware of this danger and therefore sought to think through and refine the concept in ways that took account of disintegrative dynamics and the possibility that spillovers did not occur automatically. Moreover there was a very clear recognition within early neofunctionalism that spillover was an empirical phenomenon found

\(^{11}\) None of this is to suggest that any of these approaches is unhelpful in the project of reconstructing the comparative study of regional integration. Far from it.

\(^{12}\) For two versions of this argument see Schmitter 2004 and Rosamond 2005a.
(probably) only within the European Communities. In other words, other variables must explain why spillover occurs and the core problem for 1960s/1970s integration theory was the search for candidate independent variables that might help scholars to assess either (a) the initiation of regional integration or (b) the success or failure of integration projects that were already in motion. So much for the empirical disaster of the European experience not being replicated. In fact Haas and Schmitter had figured this out in 1964 and the failure of Latin American integration was a theoretical success for the neofunctionalists (Haas and Schmitter 1964 and see Haas 2001: 29-30, fn2). The danger was that the ‘dependent variable’ could still be treated as something familiar from the inductive investigation of Europe, but is intellectually lazy to assume that integration theorists never properly addressed this question. Indeed, Haas (1971: 27) took on this problem squarely. Integration theory needed to open itself to numerous possible independent causal mechanisms, while thinking of its dependent variable as ‘putative’ and non-teleological. This still strikes us – 35 years later – as a worthwhile aspiration for comparative research in regional integration.

It is not our intention here to mount a case for the re-application of neofunctionalism properly understood. Rather, this example is used to suggest that scholars should tread carefully when making claims about moving from ‘old’ to ‘new’ approaches. Pointing out that the study of comparative integration in the twenty first century has significant forebears in the twentieth and the foregoing is merely intended to suggest that, as part of our project, there is – at least – a prima facie case for the reinvestigation of classical integration theory for pertinent themes, ideas and hypotheses. Moreover, even if we accept a clear delineation between the empirical phenomena of ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism, then it is not a logical corollary to suggest that all investigation of the ‘old’ is irrelevant for the study of the ‘new’.

**In Lieu of a Conclusion: Theorising Comparative Regional Integration – Issues to Consider**

In this final section of the paper we deliberately shy away from imposing rigid definitions and prescriptions, because we wish the workshop to be a means whereby the issues we raise are freely discussed. Thus, in what follows we simply list what we consider to be the most salient subjects for deliberation, and add an indication of our current thinking for the sake of intellectual honesty.

**a) Can we build a framework to theorise regional integration comparatively?**

Notwithstanding the benefits of comparative study that we set out above, it must be admitted that the process of designing a conceptual framework which is applicable to all the principal instances of contemporary regional integration is difficult as a result of their many important differences in scope, style and structure. A first question is thus whether we should understand collaboration between EU and new regionalism scholars as a means to improve their own respective theories or as a means to generate a new, generalisable theory. A second is what kind of approach to theory-making we should have: is it safe to assume we should focus on ‘middle range’ work for example?

**b) Rational choice versus constructivism?** This question may appear superfluous, but the rational choice/constructivism divide is seen to be the dominant cleavage in contemporary IR and is increasingly prevalent as the way of classifying intellectual discussion in EU studies. Can the search for a theory of comparative regionalism sidestep this debate? If so, how? Or will/must it cast itself in these terms? Must there be co-existent constructivist and rationalist theories or is it possible to find common epistemological ground?
c) **International Relations, International Political Economy, Integration Theory, or Comparative Politics?** Which of these provides the most suitable set of concepts or conceptual tools for regionalism scholars? Can we combine them? If so, how do we address issues of level of analysis, scope, and paradigm assumptions? How can we understand/characterise the theoretical *acquis* in both fields? Are there other fields (economic geography for example) which might act as important sources of insight?

d) **How can we characterise the dependent variable?** In this paper, we have so far used the term ‘regional integration’: but is this appropriate for all kinds of regionalism in the contemporary political economy? ‘Regions’ can be understood differently in different parts of the globe, and they may also develop from one kind of organisation into another. Thus, if we try to define a new term, are we just unhelpfully adding to the list of neologisms, or creating a new consensus around a shared understanding of the phenomenon we study? Should we follow the advice of Haas (1971) and leave the dependent variable ‘putative’?

e) **What are the salient independent variables and research methods?** It is one thing to generate a common understanding of the phenomenon to be studied, and quite another to agree about exactly how that should be done. Pluralism is usually helpful in an evolving field of study; but without an agreed set of common variables, can we ensure scholars’ work will actually be comparable, and that work can be revised in the light of new findings? Would a retreat from pluralism, on the other hand, be prejudicial to particular approaches to social science?

f) **Which research programmes should be prioritised?** Which variables should we investigate first? Which regional organisations should be studied comparatively first, and why?

**References**


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13 One of us has proposed the term *regionalisation* as an alternative, understood as: ‘an explicit, but not necessarily formally institutionalised, process of adapting participant state norms, policy making processes, policy styles, policy content, political opportunity structures, economies and identity (potentially at both elite and popular levels) to both align with and shape a new collective set of priorities, norms and interests at regional level, which may itself then evolve, dissolve, or reach stasis’ (Warleigh 2006b, forthcoming; this paper also sets out suggested key independent variables).


Hettne, B (n.d.) ‘Beyond the “New” Regionalism’. Available at: [http://www.eki.liu.se/content/1/c4/36/46/autumn%202005/h05%20%20NPE_Hettne_3.pdf](http://www.eki.liu.se/content/1/c4/36/46/autumn%202005/h05%20%20NPE_Hettne_3.pdf), accessed 28/11/05


