DO WE NEED A CORE CURRICULUM IN EUROPEAN STUDIES?

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Umbach and Scholl's (2003) intervention on the benefits of a core curriculum in European Studies contains much of interest, particularly their emphasis on the need for EU studies to be interdisciplinary and international, an emphasis which is gaining increasing recognition. There are however two issues that we wish to raise. The first is the idea of a core curriculum, the need for which we resist strongly. The second is to point out that Umbach and Scholl suppose that no core curriculum exists at present in EU studies: this is incorrect.

Firstly, we urge the authors and those tempted by a core curriculum to resist this dubious pedagogical impulse. The idea of a core curriculum has far more disadvantages than advantages. In universities, what is taught reflects the interests and expertise of individuals and allows for diversity, vigorous debate and disagreement. Many other disciplines do not have core curricula, so why is it necessary for EU studies? The study of the EU is not - and should not be - a field that has a core of accepted international literature in the way that, for example, a course on Marxism would. Would a core curriculum not run the risk of setting up 'core' leaders of the discipline with followers who apply and teach their thoughts? This is a recipe for stultifying debate, boredom and sameness. It must be resisted strongly as imposed conformity would result in an intellectual desert, with younger scholars leaving the discipline in droves. Should the leading figures in the study of any social science subject not be admired for their depth and breadth of insight and wisdom, rather than for their development of a core curriculum?

Secondly, there is in fact already a firmly established, strongly defined, and well-resourced curriculum, which we see as approximating a core curriculum: it is called European Integration studies. This curriculum is structured around the idea that the primary task of EU studies is to explicate integration, and that all developments within the orbit of the EU can be explained in terms of integration. European Integration (EI) studies readily assumes that when we study the EU what we are studying is the extent to which integration has occurred, or the likelihood that it will occur in the future. The predominance of EI studies over a broader vision of European studies is, we wish to argue, both distorting and limiting, and it constitutes an inhibiting factor in establishing a truly multi-disciplinary and global field of study.

European Integration studies is legitimated by the central cleavage in the study of the European Union: neo-functionalism versus intergovernmentalism. The issue at the heart of understanding the political project of 'ever closer union' is the extent to which the nation-state has been 'Europeanised' (surrender of sovereignty, incorporation within a 'multi-level' polity), and, by extension, the extent to which the EU may represent some form of supra-national state or polity. This preoccupation with the EU as a supra-national authority increasingly responsible for functions 'passed upwards' by member states (and its opposite, the idea that the European Union comprises a set of treaties between sovereign states which work to empower them) has forged a consensus that what is under investigation is the extent of European integration (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet, 1998). The result has been a growing distance between EI studies and the disciplines, such as political science and international relations, which gave birth to it.

We argue that the unhealthy trend towards ever-greater specialisation in integration studies can be corrected with an injection of multi-disciplinary social scientific thinking and the establishment of a more globally inclusive context within which to study EU developments. In this sense we are encouraged by Umbach and Scholl's call for greater interdisciplinarity and internationalism. We would however wish to assert that interdisciplinarity and internationalism are not sufficient. Indeed, the EI studies that we criticise can lay claim to a high degree of interdisciplinarity and demonstrate a genuine international dimension. The cleavage identified at the heart of EI studies – along the axis of supranationalism versus intergovernmentalism, and variations thereof – has constituted EI studies as an interdisciplinary field. Political scientists and International Relations scholars are at the core of this field of study, and have a long-standing monopoly over interpreting and explaining the EU. What is needed in EU studies, we argue, is a multi-perspectival approach which encourages multiple reading of key EU developments (Murray and Rumford, 2003; Rumford and Murray, 2003).

In terms of an international dimension, EI studies has legitimate claim to rest upon pan-European (and now world-wide) foundations. This is currently exemplified by the European Commission's Jean Monnet Project, a major source of funding for European integration studies. Through this project academic colleagues in Europe (and latterly, around the world) are encouraged to teach courses on integration topics, specifically Community law, European economic integration, European political integration, and the history of the European construction process. According to the Commission's Vademecum issued in 2003, 'the term European integration studies is taken to mean the study of the construction of the European Community and the institutional, legal, political, economic and social developments related to this process' (http://www.deltur.cec.eu.int/english/vdm2003_en.pdf). The priorities of the Jean Monnet project illustrate both the institutionalisation of integration studies, and

also that the subject is both inherently interdisciplinary and pragmatically international through its promulgation of the scheme throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

In the sections that follow we will advance our case for a multi-disciplinary and global study of the EU. Our version of EU studies differs significantly from that of Umbach and Scholl in two important ways. First, we stress the need for a multi-perspectival rather than solely interdisciplinary EU studies as being the best way to incorporate social science disciplines other than political science and international relations. Second, we recognise the importance of a global context for EU studies, particularly the necessity to understand processes which work counter to integration; processes which do not originate with, or within, the EU; and the impact of the EU outside of the orbit of its near-abroad and applicant states.

FOR A MULTI-PERSPECTIVAL EU STUDIES

It is not simply the case that sociology, anthropology, geography, and cultural and media studies can offer creative perspectives on central issues in European integration, or even that these disciplines can help to problematise the assumptions that underlie rigid thinking on integration. A number of publications that have emerged from these disciplines in recent years have contributed to a widening of the debate on the nature and dynamics of integration (Bellier and Wilson, 2000; Delanty, 1995; Hudson and Williams, 1999; Jonsson, Tagil, and Tornqvist, 2000; Rumford, 2002; Shore, 2000). However, the real benefit of locating EU studies within a much broader social science agenda is that a plurality of perspectives and approaches will enable scholars of the EU to gain further access to the multiplicity of meanings and implications attached to many key issues - without which the dynamics of the EU, and its relationship with the rest of the world, cannot be fully understood. EU scholars would then be in a better position to transcend the analysis of integration in the EU, and the frameworks of selected sub-disciplines within EI studies that deal with the EU. They could increasingly interconnect beyond these established boundaries of EI studies to a more comprehensive, wide-ranging world of academia, inclusive of researchers on issues which are not exclusively 'area studies' or 'integration studies' but which wrestle with the theoretical and dynamic aspects of, for example, legitimacy; citizenship; international governance norms; the role of NGOs, and non-national polity and governance debates.

One pertinent example of the limitations of the current EI approach is demonstrated by the way globalisation has come to be comprehended. It is a feature of EI studies that globalisation tends to be considered primarily as an economic phenomenon which has impelled greater EU integration. On this

reading, globalisation is an external threat which has impacted upon the EU by encouraging the replacement of an economic space of independent trading regions and nations by a single Europe-wide corporate economy (Amin and Tomaney, 1995: 33). The challenge (or threat) of globalisation has been met through closer cooperation, the EU being able to advance the interests of its member states in a way that even large national economies could not manage alone – a message of interdependence that is a key tenet of EI studies. For EI studies, the existence of globalisation legitimises European integration in the name of the need for greater EU competitiveness. Economic integration is narrated as a successful outcome to the response to globalisation, resulting in the EU member states becoming competitive in the global economy. The richness and diversity of globalisation as it is studied in other social science disciplines is thereby lost, and the possibility that globalisation may comprise a multi-dimensional rather than predominantly economic process is foreclosed. EU studies would gain much from an engagement with alternative conceptualisations of both integration and globalisation developed within contemporary social science. It is worth making the point that many theorists within political science and international relations also prefer a multi-dimensional reading of globalisation (Held et al., 1999). Unfortunately, however, the range of conceptualisations in the parent disciplines have rarely journeyed across into EI studies. In part, this is because EI studies is viewed by other social science disciplines as a field of study comprising somewhat dry, technical debates on an entity that is regarded as complex, opaque, and lacking in decision-making transparency. The oft-repeated criticisms of the EC in the 1970s as overly technocratic are still in evidence today, and other social scientists tend to be reluctant to change subdiscipline and enter 'integration studies', or what appears to be 'area studies', at a time when globalisation has altered our understanding of area, just as much as EU enlargements have altered our understanding of the EU and its near abroad.

Social science interpretations of globalisation, whilst diverse and broad-ranging, tend to share the view that it comprises a multiplicity of social, political, technological, and cultural processes, through which the world has become increasingly interconnected and our consciousness of it as a single place has increased (Robertson, 1992). This multi-dimensional global framework has several strengths. First, it allows EU dynamics to be placed in the broader context of global processes and developments, thereby avoiding the tendency to see the EU as self-contained and capable of resisting what it sees as the negative aspects of globalisation (threats to the nation state or democracy), which remain external to it. Second, it interprets globalisation as comprising a complex of forces, many of which cannot be domesticated by the EU. Third, it interprets globalisation neither as a force for good or bad but as a new environment bringing a range of opportunities and threats to an ever-widening group of actors and agents. Fourth, it sees in globalisation the potential to provide new horizons of possibility and new

sources of inspiration: people increasingly have the opportunity to identify with transnational and global collectivities. It could include new social spaces for transnational dialogue; the study of NGOs, transnational civil society, protest and international contestation (Imig and Tarrow, 2001). Fifth, it moves beyond a continued tendency to regard the EU as sui generis, not fully comparable and potentially self-referential.

Investigating the relationship between globalisation and the EU provides an ideal opportunity for EU studies to incorporate perspectives from many disciplines: a one-dimensional economistic model of globalisation is restrictive, distorting, and ultimately damaging to the discipline. Moreover, it also provides a platform from which to challenge the dominant view that globalisation has been responsible for impelling 'ever closer union': the contradictory and differential impact of globalisation on the EU also needs to be acknowledged – so too does the impact of the EU on globalisation. To date, globalisation has been interpreted by EI studies in such a way as to make it compatible with economic integration. In Delanty's (1998) terms, 'globalisation is the condition which has replaced the need for peace in the justification of European integration today.' EU studies should take a greater interest in why this is the case. It should be especially concerned with understanding why certain questions come to define the discipline, and why these and not others are being asked. In short, EU studies must aim at a high degree of reflexivity and develop an awareness of the ways in which disciplinary boundaries can work to legitimate and de-legitimate knowledge.

FOR INTERNATIONAL READ GLOBAL: PUTTING EUROPE IN ITS PLACE

Not only does EI studies work with a mono-causal explanation of globalisation - it also prefers an interpretation which emphasises the increasing connectivity of national societies. On this reading the global is an aggregation of nation-states, and constitutes another 'level' in a model which posits the local, national, supra-national and global as distinct but mutually implicated circuits of operation – an understanding of globalisation as European integration writ large.

At the centre of this global model is the changing role of the nation-state, ceding power to EU institutions or working to secure supra-national protection from the threat of globalisation. In this context, comparative politics has risen in popularity in recent times and emphasises the extent to which the EU resembles a political system, akin to the nation state (Hix, 1999). In passing we might want to note that this form of comparative politics encourages a view of globalisation as the increasing interconnectedness of national societies (Held et al, 1999), thereby reinforcing the idea that globalisation has been the catalyst for European integration. Given the development of the integration agenda and process since the 1950s, this also highlights the need to involve the study of history more closely in

the multidisciplinary approach to integration in Europe. This trend in comparative politics coupled with the dominant interpretation of globalisation as a process external to the EU but creating the need for closer economic integration has encouraged a rather solipsistic interpretation of EU developments. The EU is frequently portrayed as the author and/or the propagator of developments – citizenship and democracy are very good examples – which in many cases have a global as well as national provenance.

The limited interpretation of globalisation in EI studies has led to a tendency to view it as an external threat to democracy (Kaldor and Vejvoda, 2002: x), mirroring the idea of globalisation as a threat to the economies of member states. Challenges to self-determination, domestic peace, democracy, and good governance are seen as best countered through European integration (Axtmann, 2001). However, the impact of globalisation on democracy is complex, particularly if the latter is no longer seen to derive exclusively from the nation-state. The EI studies interpretation fails to acknowledge that globalisation has been responsible for the dissemination of the nation-state as the universally recognised 'democratic container' in the modern world (Meyer, 2000). In short, globalisation should not be viewed simply as a threat to the nation-state, even if peoples no longer need the vehicle of the nation-state in order to achieve democratic mobilisation: a broad range of social science interpretations of globalisation emphasise that the nation-state is both strengthened and weakened by globalisation (Held et al., 1999; Hirst, 2001; Robertson, 1992).

In fact, the EU could be profitably viewed as an entity patterned by – and at times influencing - the accelerating institutionalisation of international and global instruments of governance in the post-war period - the UN, World Bank, GATT, NATO, OECD. Similarly, sociological interpretations of globalisation have generated new ideas on the democratisation potential of cosmopolitanism, the world polity, and global governance which significantly have not been incorporated into the mainstream of EU studies (Beck, 2001; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez, 1997). In addition, there is increasing scope for EU studies to examine with enthusiasm the following issues: adaptation to the EU's regional integration by non-EU actors, such as the Asia Pacific; the ways in which the EU might constitute a model of regional integration, and the trend towards macro-regionalisation in response to the EU's institutionalisation, expansion of tasks and scope. The EU has, for example, advanced a European social model (regulated capitalism; social cohesion; social justice) as a norm for global governance, as well as norms of trade regulation and trade liberalisation.

In relation to developing a global and internationalised agenda for EU studies, it is worth recalling that the term 'integration' is regarded by some analysts and policymaking communities outside the EU as a potential model for regional

integration. This is relevant in a comparative context. It is also pertinent because the EU is increasingly advancing – and even attempting to manage - norms of governance. In short, there are aspects of globalisation which merit serious consideration and could be critically examined in - and not excluded from – some teaching curricula on the EU.

IS INTEGRATION A GOOD ENOUGH CONCEPT ON WHICH TO FOUND A DISCIPLINE?

A single term has come to stand for the post-war transformation of Europe: integration. Moreover, a diverse range of contemporary processes and developments including enlargement, globalisation, mass unemployment, regional autonomy, and the democratic deficit are rendered compatible with the project of integration, even though they might conceivably work to complicate, even compromise, the prospect of 'ever closer union'. We wish to dissent from the unproblematic reading of integration generated by EI studies. An important task for a genuine multi-perspectival and global EU studies is to investigate the potential meanings that can be invested in the term integration; ranging across political objectives, theoretical models, and policy processes.

We dissent from the proposal for a core curriculum, however worthy the idea. A core curriculum contains inherent limitations or constraints on the academic imagination. Introducing a core curriculum would mean that an opportunity for lively debate, contestation, and increased multidisciplinary dialogue on the meaning of integration - as well as how to move beyond it in the study of the EU - would be lost. Rather, we need to embrace greater diversity in discussions on new and refined theories, and attempt to develop new approaches to EU studies that highlight issues of, for example, social contestation and legitimation/de-legitimation. We are already benefiting from the end of the 'permissive consensus' regarding elitist decision-making. Let us not fall into the trap of a permissive consensus of elitist academics. Let us encourage our students to engage, debate, question and examine the meaning of European integration. Re-examining the origins, processes and objectives of integration studies in a global and multi-perspectival manner will reap more rewards than a core curriculum ever could.

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