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European social integration: from convergence of countries to transnational relations between peoples

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European Social Integration

From convergence of countries to transnational
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Abstract

European countries are becoming increasingly politically integrated and the process of integration has accelerated in recent years. But how much *social* integration is there within the Community? This article supplies a definition of European social integration, and thereby lays down the foundations necessary for answering this important sociological question. Instead of analysing the EU as a political system, I view the EU as a social space of non-state actors of different nationality, and concentrate on the intergroup relations between the national collectivities involved in the amalgamation process. I define social integration as being transnational and macro-social; my definition has a quantitative dimension (relating to mutual relevance) as well as a qualitative dimension (relating to cohesion). I will argue that this definition is more useful than the European Commission's approach, which equates social integration with the convergence of living and working conditions, and also more useful than the social policy approach, which equates social integration with the convergence of regulations and social policies.

Keywords: European Union, social integration, social cohesion, convergence, identity, transnational relations.

Unter dem Dach der Europäischen Union (EU) und ihrer Vorläufer ist die politische Integration Europas ein gutes Stück vorangekommen. Doch wie steht es mit der *sozialen* Integration innerhalb der Gemeinschaft? In diesem Artikel wird eine Definition von europäischer Sozialintegration vorgestellt, die uns erst in die Lage versetzt, diese soziologische Frage zu beantworten. Die EU wird dabei nicht als politisches System betrachtet, sondern als Sozialraum, bestehend aus den europäischen Nationen. Die Integration dieses Sozialraumes bestimmt sich durch die Quantität (diesen Aspekt nenne ich gegenseitige Relevanz) und Qualität (diesen Aspekt nenne ich sozialen Zusammenhalt) der Beziehungen zwischen den EU-Völkern. Meine Definition von europäischer Sozialintegration ist demnach transnational und makro-sozial. Es wird argumentiert, dass dieses Konzept brauchbarer ist als bestehende Ansätze wie der der Europäischen Kommission, bei dem möglichst einheitliche Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen im Vordergrund stehen, und dem sozialpolitischen Ansatz, bei dem Integration mit der Vereinheitlichung von Sozialpolitik gleichgesetzt wird.

Schlüsselwörter: Europäische Union, soziale Integration, sozialer Zusammenhalt, Konvergenz, Identität, transnationale Beziehungen.

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	What kind of animal is the EU?	5
3	Integration and Europeanisation: taking stock of basic approaches	8
4	A sociological concept of European social integration	14
5	Closing remarks	20
	Notes	22
	Literature	23

1 Introduction

European countries are becoming increasingly politically integrated through the European Union (EU), and the process of integration has accelerated in recent years.¹ *Political integration* is the process by which nation-states selectively pool their sovereignty and set up institutions of supranational governance (cf. Peterson 2001a: 4923). A broader definition would also include the standardisation and harmonisation of policies and regulations. Thanks to the booming discipline of Integration Studies, which is anchored mainly in Political Science and International Relations, we know a lot about the how and why of political integration. Neo-functional, institutionalist and transactionalist approaches compete to explain this process (for an overview see Rosamond 2000), and synoptic models try to build bridges across these theoretical perspectives (Busch 2001). A small flood of publications on European-level policy making exists, and attempts have recently been made to establish a common framework for analysing the EU as a political system (Peterson 2001b).

The extent of the *political* integration of the Community is determined by the scope (how many policies?) and level (how deep?) of amalgamation between the member states. Much less is known, however, about the integration of European societies – or to put it more abstractly, about the social integration of the EU. This is surprising, since the founding fathers of Integration Studies, particularly Karl Deutsch, were very concerned with how nations grow closer, and how large-scale political communities are built. Despite this example, research has mainly focused on political processes, and has more or less ignored their underlying societal dimension (cf. Cram 2001: 243). This concentration on ministers, diplomats and bureaucrats is increasingly recognised as a shortcoming. For example, in order to provide a better understanding of supranational politics, Stone Sweet/Sandholtz (1998: 9) propose to analyse Community rules, Community organisations and transnational society as three interrelated dimensions. They define transnational society as “those non-governmental actors who engage in intra-EC exchanges ... and thereby influence, directly or indirectly, policy-making processes and outcomes at the European level”. They see transnational society, especially the cross-border activities of firms, as a driving force behind the supranationalisation of governance.

The lack of attention given to the societal dimension is partly a result of the fact that scholars of EU Studies have clearly under-utilised the rich sociological store of knowledge on social processes, and partly because sociologists themselves have not played an active role in the field. However, the concepts of system integration and social integration provided by Sociology offer some original and fruitful perspectives. In this article I address the problem of *European social integration* (I use “Europe“ interchangeably with “European Union“). My aim is twofold. First, this is an attempt to bring people back into European Integration Studies. Second, it is an attempt to give Sociology a stronger voice in the field. If Europe becomes increasingly amalgamated (i.e. politically integrated) under the umbrella of the EU,

the questions to be considered are: How socially integrated is the Community?² Has integration increased over time, and have the numerous enlargements strengthened or weakened it? What are the main mechanisms impacting on social integration, and what are the consequences for European state building? Answering these questions would give deeper insights into whether ongoing amalgamation at the state level is underpinned by social integration from below – and it would be a major step forward if Sociology were to mark out its own claim in the field of EU Studies.

I cannot provide empirical answers or a theory in this article. The aim of the article is more fundamental – to provide a sociological discussion about which meaning of the term “European social integration” is the most constructive. It is crucial to clarify this – currently underdeveloped – concept, because the answers to the questions raised above depend to a large extent on what is meant by “integration”. In this article I argue that it is most fruitful to view the Community not as a political system, but as a social space, and hence that transnational relations between non-state actors from different EU-societies, particularly between ordinary citizens, are key. Referring to Karl Deutsch and a variety of sociological scholars, I identify mutual relevance and social cohesion as the two main substantive dimensions of transnational social integration. Further, I argue that these crucial dimensions can only be investigated meaningfully if the research focus shifts from convergence of member countries – which is currently the predominant approach used by the European Commission itself and many Europeanisation studies – to interrelations between them.

The topic of this article is of more than academic interest. Jean Monnet has already stated that uniting Europe is about uniting people, not forming coalitions of states (Duchene 1994: 263). In the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the EU has set the goal of building an “ever closer union among people”. In the same document, the notion of a European citizenship was outlined for the first time. And in the declaration at the Laeken summit in 2001, the issue of European identity was put at the forefront of the agenda (cf. Fahey/Nolan/Whelan 2003). Hence, there is an urgent need to know how much street-level integration there is between the European peoples.

My starting point is to present three different options for analysing the Community, and to choose one of these for this paper (section 2). Next I assess how various aspects of European social integration and cohesion are usually treated by EU bodies, Sociology, and International Relations (section 3), before systematically developing a new definition (section 4). In the concluding section (section 5) I suggest some ways forward for utilising the concept for further research.

2 What kind of animal is the EU?

The first thing one needs to be clear about is what kind of animal the EU is, or to be more precise, how one wants to analyse it. There are at least three ways: the Community as a political regime; as an umbrella organisation of different amalgamation projects; or as a social space. Each option sets researchers on different tracks as far as questions and problems are concerned, and provides different opportunities for marking out an original sociological field within the discipline of EU Studies. The three options can be described as follows.

(1) The prevailing perspective is to view the Community as a *political system*. As a union of nation-states, the EU can be characterised as a “fusionist state” (Wessels 1997). Its nature becomes more clear if one works with Deutsch’s famous typology of political communities (Deutsch et al. 1966). In amalgamated communities, formerly independent units merge while building a common government, either unitarian or federal. A new decision centre is established, which supersedes the old ones. In pluralistic communities, on the contrary, the units remain legally independent, and no common centre is established. The EU stands somewhere in between, carrying elements of both types. Its supranational institutions mean that it is clearly more than pluralistic; but at the same time it is not fully amalgamated, since the member states share only parts of their sovereignty, albeit a growing part (see Schmitter 1996). In this unique system, intergovernmentalism determines the historical, “super-systemic” decisions, while at the “systemic” and especially the “sub-systemic” level of EU everyday business, supranationalism comes to the fore (Peterson 2001b: 294). Viewing the Community as a political system, or a *governance regime*, points to its character as a system of institutions set in place to mediate conflicting nation-state interests and to transform them into compromises and consensus (Lepsius 2000, 1993). Theorists of multi-level governance (summarising Rosamond 2000) have shown that a variety of actors, state and non-state, in a variety of places, not only Brussels and Strasbourg, influence what is going on politically at the European level. However, when the political system is analysed, the nation-states’ governments and the supranational EU institutions are seen to be the central collective actors (Moravcsik 1998). Sociological research on processes of integration between these collective actors would not necessarily duplicate the work already done by other disciplines, since such research could strengthen informal and “soft” relations between governments (their social integration) rather than the formal relations which are sealed by contract.³ Nevertheless, this option can not claim the greatest originality, since it adopts the mainstream perspective of the Community as a political system, and hence is not further pursued in this article.

(2) The second option is to view the Community as consisting of several *amalgamation projects*, of which there are many, including the single market, the single currency, Schengen, cohesion policy, eastward enlargement and the European constitution. Each of these projects may follow different logics, and approaching one can severely limit the opportunity for approaching another. Sociologically speaking, the Community faces the problem of *system*

integration, to apply the classical concept of Lockwood (1969). In the most general terms, tensions between specialised subsystems must be restricted to a level that ensures the stability of the system as a whole. This is not easy to achieve, because subsystems follow their own programmes and codes of operation, without consideration for other subsystems (Luhmann 1986). The co-ordination between subsystems is managed by special mechanisms of balancing out, sometimes referred to as double interchanges (Parsons), structural coupling (Luhmann), or interpenetrations (Münch) (cf. Schimank 2000) – but success is not guaranteed. Like other functionally differentiated systems, the EU is confronted with problems of system integration. Its single amalgamation projects must not be allowed to affect other projects negatively in a way that calls them or even the whole system of European co-operation into question. This issue was taken up by Lepsius (1991), who has analysed the rationale of supranational regime building. For decades, the dominant rationale was to develop the “four freedoms” of the Common Market, and so projects tended to complement one another. However, the more the EU has extended its scope of activities, the more the hegemony of this rationale has been challenged by other rationales, like the stability of the European currency (EMU), distributional justice (regional policy), or social protection (European Social Model). As a general rule, the more the Community develops into a fully-fledged supranational state, the more amalgamation projects with different and sometimes even contradictory logics of operation there will be, which will considerably increase problems of system integration. To sum up, system integration tells a specific part of the integration story, by showing how weak or strong the *functional frictions between different EU amalgamation projects* are. This is a perspective not often taken by EU scholars, hence sociological analysis can add value.

(3) The third option, which is in my opinion the most promising one, is to view the Community as a *social space*. Political integration has resulted not only in a pooling of sovereignty of the member states’ governments and the building up of common institutions, it has also resulted in a coupling of the member states’ societies to a common “social space” (Bach 2000, 2003). The Community currently consists of 378 million people, and an additional 75 million will join in 2004. Clearly, this social space is less than a fully-fledged society, if one defines the latter by a complete set of political institutions, a certain degree of cultural homogeneity (common language), and social inclusion via citizenship and welfare state institutions (cf. Bach 2003, Flora 2000). Nevertheless, amalgamation has created a kind of European proto-society, with the different peoples as component parts. A growing body of common legal rules are in force in all member states (cf. Threllfall 2003) and are, and this is decisive, enforceable by EU citizens. The latter characteristic clearly sets the EU apart from international organisations, which only recognise states, not individuals, as actors. This distinctive membership space the Community is forming is also territorially marked by the borders between member and non-member countries – borders which have been expanded several times in the past 30 years (for the expansion logic of the EU, see Vobruba 2003). While barriers have been re-erected at the outer border of the Community, the internal borders have

become much more permeable for transactions and have also been attached to new social meanings. "Borders equal states and states equal territorial borders": this simple formula is no longer valid (Bartolini 2000: 34).

The European social space does not simply replace national societies, but rather exists parallel to them (Bach 2000). At the same time, citizens are part of at least two social spaces, their national society and the European social space. How intense the interactions within these two social spaces are is an empirical question. Presumably, the European social space is still quite "empty", compared to the national ones – but it may turn out that it is far away from being a vacuum, thanks to business contacts, holiday travel, student exchange, song contests and sporting events.

This view of the Community as a pan-European social space in which individuals and associations act and interact across nations is the most promising field for sociologists. Since social integration, and its forms, preconditions and consequences, has been a major issue of sociological thinking from the very beginning of the discipline, sociologists are playing on home ground as far as this issue is concerned. Moreover Sociology can add real value to the mainstream Integration Studies, which focus nearly exclusively on the EU as a political regime. Viewing the EU as a social space can reveal the degree to which amalgamation between states (which is managed from above by governments and diplomatic corps) is accompanied by a growing integration from below (which is mainly a consequence of street-level interactions between European citizens). It may be that the "ever closer union of people" the Community is striving for is no more than wishful thinking on the part of Eurocrats; or it may be an emerging reality. This third option is further pursued in this article.

3 Integration and Europeanisation: taking stock of basic approaches

What concepts are currently available to help us to understand aspects of integration and cohesion among the member countries? I start with self-description by Brussels, before turning to scientific approaches.

Self-description by EU bodies

EU bodies seldom use the term integration when referring to the member countries; instead they frequently refer to a related concept, *cohesion*. The main official source of information is the Commission's bi-annual "Report on Economic and Social Cohesion". Covering 300 pages, the latest edition provides a detailed picture of income differences between EU countries and their regions, and of differences in economic structure, unemployment, human capital, and infrastructure (Europäische Kommission 2001a). It analyses why countries like Ireland and Finland, or urban regions like Hamburg or London prosper, while Greece or Calabria fail to catch up. In addition it describes the impact of various EU policies on these developments. Some paragraphs dealing with the growing exchange between member states' economies are included, but in general, the main focus is the social and economic situation from a comparative perspective.

What is striking here is the special use of the term cohesion as the absence of marked territorial (i.e. inter-country or inter-regional) inequalities. By using cohesion as a synonym for equality of living conditions, Brussels applies one of its most central guidelines on social reporting: that the Community aims not only to improve citizens' welfare, but also to achieve increasing similarity of living and working conditions within the Community. Roughly speaking, the Commission equates cohesion with *convergence*. Hence it would be much more appropriate to speak of convergence reports and convergence policy instead of cohesion reports and cohesion policy.⁴

Reporting on welfare disparities is certainly important, and not only because disparities have strong consequences for the EU-budget; more fundamentally, homogeneity within a given territory is a central social foundation for nation building, as Rokkan has argued (Flora/Kuhnle/Urwin 1999). But the inherent limitation of the convergence approach is obvious: it only shows how *similar* countries are, not how *interrelated* they are. And since, in essence, the sociological understanding of integration (and of cohesion) is a relational one, empha-

sisting bonds and ties, the official concept largely misses the point. Even very similar countries can co-exist without taking any notice of each other and without any “we-feeling“. A telling example is the former Czechoslovakia; for decades there was a constant levelling-out of socio-economic differences between the Czech part and the somewhat less advanced Slovak part (Machonin 1997), but this did not prevent the common state from being dissolved. Like socio-economic equality, similar values are also of limited value when defining integration:

“The populations of different territories might easily profess verbal attachment to the same set of values without having a sense of community that leads to political integration. The kind of sense of community that is relevant for integration ... turned out to be rather a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties; of ,we-feeling’, trust, and mutual consideration; of political identification in terms of self-images and interests; of mutually successful predictions of behaviour, and of co-operative action in accordance with it (...)” (Deutsch et al. 1966: 17; a similar argument is given by Blau 1977).

If Durkheim were the author of the cohesion reports, the central topic would be European solidarity. However, the EU is not unaware of issues like solidarity. In the new golden triangle heralded by the heads of government at the Lisbon summit in 2000, strengthening social cohesion in the member states was one corner, alongside sustainable growth and the creation of more and better jobs (Europäische Kommission 2001b: 13). In this particular context, strengthening social cohesion means combating poverty and exclusion and increasing solidarity amongst the population. But it is noticeable that this *European level* initiative has a strict *national* orientation – the cohesion of British society should be strengthened, as should that of French society, German society and so on. But many well integrated national societies put together do not necessarily result in a well integrated Community. National integration can even be a foe to European integration. Thus the intellectual leap, from focusing on single member countries to taking the EU seriously as a community of countries, is not achieved by these programmes.

To sum up, Brussels uses the term cohesion in two different ways – on the one hand there is a more sociologically driven concept of cohesion for the single member countries, and on the other there is one centred on territorial disparities in living conditions for the EU as a whole. This lack of consistency does more than cause confusion; it has the much more serious result that deficits in self-knowledge occur because of a lack of systematic reporting on issues of integration and cohesion from a sociological perspective.

Sociological and social policy perspectives

It might console Eurocrats to know that Sociology is not well advanced in this respect either. It is common wisdom that for many years sociologists, unlike political scientists and economists, did not recognise the EU as important (cf. Immerfall 2000, Kohli/Novak 2001: 2f.). Certainly some important topics had been examined; for example the rational of institution building on the European level (Lepsius 1991), bureaucratisation and problems of legitimacy (Bach 1999), the lack of a European public sphere (Gerhards 2001), the relationship between national and supranational identities (Münch 2001a, Kohli 2000), European citizenship (Saraceno 2001), and socio-cultural differences between European countries (Flora 2000), to name a few. Nevertheless, EU Sociology remains a marginal sub-discipline. More importantly, there is seldom any systematic reference to the problem of social integration, which seems connected to the fact that within the discipline, no consensual definition of European integration exists, and therefore no systematic idea of what form social integration at the European level could take.

Because the Community stands somewhere between an international organisation and a fully-fledged supranational state, it is an unwieldy object for a nation-state oriented science. On the whole, Sociology analyses social processes within nation-states; this has evoked much criticism and even sarcastic comments (e.g. Beck 2002). The booming branch of comparative sociology deals with European societies, but not necessarily with the EU; and it is much more concerned with similarities and differences than with ties and bonds. The search for European patterns and convergence has attracted great interest, either by giving general overviews (Therborn 2000), or by concentrating on single structural or institutional features of society (Hradil/Immerfall (eds.) 1997). A notable exception is the German Historian Kaelble (1987, 1997), who has written both about the convergence of (West) European societies and their interlinkages.

With mainstream comparative research, the problematic fixation on the nation-state has not been overcome (cf. Bach 2001: 165). Moreover, comparisons rarely succeed in showing that social change is induced by the fact that Europe exists as a new level of regulation and social action (Schäfers 1999: 4). But even if this problem were to be sorted out, to conclude that the more countries converge, the more integrated they are, would be to see things too simply: “Becoming more alike does not yet mean becoming one society (...)” (Kohli/Novak 2001: 4).

In principle, this criticism also holds true for the *social policy approach* recently presented by Threlfall (2003). She argues that the EU “would be socially integrated if its component societies had lost the geographical and legal boundaries to their social institutions and social practices, and functioned instead as a ‘single social area’” (ibid.: 124). The more individuals are freed from the regulations of their home country and the more they experience living and working in the EU “as if it were a single country” (ibid.: 122), the deeper social integration will be. The allowance of cross-national consumption of social services, which is a direct result of European social-policy making, is seen as especially crucial to arrive at this aim.

Although appealing at first glance, Threlfall's conceptualisation has some shortcomings. First, her criterion for social integration fluctuates between uniformity of working and living conditions and uniformity of regulations. In some paragraphs, her general criterion that the EU has to function as a single country (so that it does not matter to Europeans which country they choose to live in) refers to living conditions. To mention one example, if the risk of work accidents were evenly distributed across countries, it would make no difference to workers whether they lived in France or Germany, or elsewhere. Hence, Threlfall follows the Commission in equating social integration with equal living conditions. In other paragraphs, however, she focuses on the achieved harmonisation of regulations. This is most obvious in her list of "single social areas" like the single labour market, consumer rights, medical treatment and arrest warrants – areas of life where national barriers have been effectively removed and a common set of regulations applied in all member countries. Following this logic, social integration is equated with harmonisation and standardisation of social policies and regulations, which is, in my opinion, part of the political integration story, rather than the social. My argument is that regulations are *de jure* processes from above, which do not tell us how much ordinary citizens are *de facto* involved in European integration processes. This is not to argue that state action and citizen rights are irrelevant to social integration. On the contrary, human behaviour is heavily structured by national and supranational regulations, so when looking for what *influences* social integration, the state-citizen relation will be of utmost importance. However, I find the social policy approach less helpful for *defining* European social integration, since it reveals the life domains in which people *could* act as if they were living in a single European society, but fails to show whether people actually act in this way in reality. In theorising the "social dimension" newly added to the common market, it describes more the legal backbone of the European social space, than how extensively people interact across nations while making use of these supranational or harmonised regulations.

Transactions, sense of community, and international relations: Karl Deutsch

A truly international approach, which focuses on the *relations between* member countries' citizens, is needed. I will refer to this approach as the *interconnection approach*. While convergence looks at countries side-by-side, interconnections look at them in their relationship to each other. Both approaches are suitable for analysing Europeanisation, but the latter is clearly more suitable for dealing with issues of integration (cf. Kohli/Novak 2001: 4).⁵

How should European social integration be defined sociologically? In order to get on the right track, we can take inspiration from the seminal work of Karl Deutsch (1912-1992). His heritage is a treasure of insights, concepts, and theories of national and supranational state building. One can identify three different conceptualisations of (inter)national integration in his writings.

(1) The most popular notion is *sense of community*. It is connected with Deutsch's typology of international political communities, presented in "Political Community and the North Atlantic Area" (Deutsch et al 1966: 3). Four constellations of international co-operation are distinguished: pluralistic security-communities, amalgamated security-communities, states' systems (not amalgamated, not security-communities), and empires (amalgamated but not security-communities). The backbone of this typology is the distinction between amalgamation – a formal merger of political units and the establishment of common political institutions – and integration, which first of all is conceptualised as an informal phenomenon among the general population: the formation of communities through attainment of a sense of community by ordinary citizens:

“By integration we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a 'sense of community' and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a 'long' time, dependable expectations of 'peaceful change'“ (Deutsch et al. 1966: 2).

Security-communities can rely on a certain amount of sense of community, which includes mutual feelings of solidarity, trust, “we-feeling“ and perceived common interests among peoples. According to Deutsch, integration is a mass project, and it is only the conversion into political fusion that is the task of elites (cf. Puchala 1981). Without supportive mass perceptions and attitudes, Deutsch's theory goes, amalgamation is hard to achieve.

(2) A second meaning attached to integration by Deutsch is *transactions*. The more two territories exchange information, capital, goods and people, the more he regards them as integrated (Deutsch 1972). The emphasis on exchange is the reason why Deutsch is often referred to as a “transactionalist“ (Puchala 1981, Rosamond 2000). This seems to be all the more justified by the fact that Deutsch usually puts his two main ingredients, sense of community and transactions, in a causal order when he says that the level of communication and transactions between peoples is a major source of sense of community among them.⁶ Transactions do not guarantee emerging solidarity, but they can have an assimilatory impact upon people. People learn trust, solidarity, and identification. Half of the twelve preconditions for amalgamated political communities filtered out by Deutsch et al. (1966: 37/38) from historical case studies concern cross-border transactions, with the mobility of people being the most essential.

(3) A third meaning can be found in his article “Power and Communication in the International Society” (Deutsch 1966). Integration is described as one end point of a continuum of international relations, with the other being conflict. In between lie “normal”, “correct” and “ambiguous relations”. Roughly speaking, Deutsch proposes a U-curve ranging from warm relations between territories, to cool relations and war. In contrast to meaning (2), integration is discrete. It is achieved – or not. More specifically, integration is synonymous with *successful international relations*. Successful because actors of two systems are mutually relevant to each other and co-vary positively in their rewards and interests. Mutual relevance and compatibility of interests are employed to assess international relations in a two-dimensional scheme. Transactions are the main indicator of mutual

relevance: the larger the share of mutual transactions in each system's transaction flows, the higher the relevance. No single indicator is given for compatibility of rewards and interests. But Deutsch clearly points out that both the intensity of the covariance of rewards and interests, and its direction (positive or negative) are decisive. A high level of interdependence, as well as compatible interest patterns and "adequate self-steering capabilities of each partner to permit mutual co-ordination" (ebd.: 304) are needed to achieve integration. Without the latter two, it can be dangerous to increase mutual relevance if one has not first checked that interests are complementary. The words relevance and interests, used by Deutsch are well-known in International Relations. But he makes it clear that they can not only be used to describe relations between states, but also between countries or people.⁷ At these different levels, relations need not be congruent: "States could be integrated, even if their peoples were apathetic, if State [sic!] (i.e. elite) transactions and interests were favourable" (ebd.: 302, footnote to Table 1). This is, however, somewhat contradictory to his above-mentioned assumption that sense of community has to come first, and amalgamation later; but, again, it is not the place here to check for consistency of his causal thinking.

We cannot overlook the fact that conceptually, transactions are close to mutual relevance, and sense of community to co-variation of interests. A systematic discussion of how compatible Deutsch's ideas are with a basic sociological understanding of social integration follows. To use a footballing analogy, it seems that Deutsch has laid on a beautiful pass to sociologists, but that they are hesitant to score a goal (disciplinary segmentation, i.e. playing in different stadiums, could provide an explanation). We should also check whether territories, which are very prominent in Deutsch's thinking, are the most appropriate constitutive elements of the European social space.

4 A sociological concept of European social integration

Social integration as transnational, macrosocial integration

A mainstream sociological definition of integration would refer, in general terms, to the *relations between the elements* of a social system: the focus would be on the links between a system's elements, and on the impact of these links on the system as a whole. This approach is taken by Parsons (1971). Depending on whether focussing on functional subsystems or social actors, one deals with either *system* or *social* integration (Lockwood 1969).

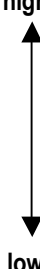
Social integration deals with how many elements – individual or collective actors – of a system interact (“extent”), how often they interact (“intensity”), and how they interact (“quality”) (cf. Münch 2001b: 7591). In principle a variety of elements can be considered, ranging from individuals to families and to large collectivities. In order to analyse the European social space, I propose to view the different member countries' nationalities – which are large collectivities – as the decisive elements, and to focus on the interrelations taking place between these different national collectivities. In doing so, the European social space is primarily conceived as being structured by one salient “nominal parameter” (Blau 1977), nationality. Nationality divides EU citizens according to a distinctive group membership. Hence, peoples (as national collectivities, or groups) are the theoretically important component parts of the European social space. Although the national groups may take different positions in the European stratification system, there is no inherent rank order among these groups. Social integration of the European social space rests on the intergroup relations of members of these different nationalities, not on the extent of in-group relations. Because of that, European social integration can be defined as *transnational* and *macro-social*, to use Blau's term (Blau 1977: 5). Most of these transnational intergroup relations will indeed be cross-border transactions between member countries, since the vast majority of EU Europeans live in the country in which they were born; but it is worth noting that transnational relations as defined here can also take place within single societies. This is the case for example when EU citizens live permanently outside their native country and associate with other Europeans in their host country. Assuming that each transnational interaction is automatically a cross-border transaction, would be to make the same mistake “container sociology” is blamed for; that is, treating nation, society, and territory as congruent. Differentiating them has the advantage that processes of European social integration can be detected *between* societies as well as *within* single societies, the latter being an example of

Europeanisation internalised (cf. Beck 2002: 394, who has coined the phrase “globalisation internalised”). In consequence, this definition means that not all cross-border interlinkages are necessarily examples of European social integration (although most are), and that some intra-societal relations are examples of European social integration (although few are).⁸

Having identified the salient unit of analysis, we can turn to what exactly is meant by “relations” and “interlinkages”? Should one focus on face-to-face associations alone, as Blau (1977) does? Or should one also include emotional aspects, like Deutsch’s sense of community? To repeat Münch’s definition, social integration is about how many elements of a system interact (“extent”), how often they interact (“intensity”), and how they interact (“quality”) (2001b: 7591). He subsumes the extent and intensity of interlinkages as “actor integration”, which is to be distinguished from “action integration”. Actor integration does not touch the question of what quality the interactions are. Whether conflictual or harmonious, it refers simply to mutually responsive actions. Even conflicts can fuel integration, since the opponents are closely tied to each other (Coser 1956). In contrast, action integration refers to the quality of relations. Referring to Durkheim, Münch (2001b) distinguishes two modes of relationship. Actions based on negative solidarity simply avoid harmful consequences for others; an example of this is compliance with law. Positive solidarity goes beyond that, in demanding that actions aim at benefiting others. Such actions are dependent on co-operation and support. According to Münch, both forms of solidarity are necessary to maintain social order in complex societies. However, this issue has been the subject of heated debate between different sociological schools of thought. Whereas negative solidarity is regarded as a necessary safety device against the Hobbesian civil war by all schools, positive solidarity divides them, with communitarians as advocates (“necessary”), and utilitarians as opponents (“neglectable”).

For the following argumentation I want to record that it is useful to distinguish between a quantitative and a qualitative component of social integration. For the former, I propose to adopt Deutsch’s label *mutual relevance*. Why mutual relevance and not transactions? Relevance is preferable because it is a broader concept, embracing not only several kinds of directly observable transactions, but also cognitive “transactions” such as mutual attention, comparisons, and references. For example, if the Italians were to use other European countries as yardsticks for evaluating their own living conditions as satisfying or dissatisfying, this would be a sign of transnational relevance, and thus of European integration. I propose to name the latter, qualitative aspect *cohesion*. Cohesion means that the elements behave in a way that at least prevents negative consequences (negative solidarity) or, at best, causes positive consequences (positive solidarity) either for other actors or for the system as a whole. Cohesion is similar, but not identical with Deutsch’s term covariance of rewards and interests, which is, however, too formal a criterion. True, compatible interests can be a powerful source for co-operation. But actors can behave cohesively even against their direct interests. Such altruistic behaviour is a class of action not covered by Deutsch. The term cohesion is also more preferable than sense of community, since the latter makes one think of cognitions and

Table 1: A general concept of social integration

	Cohesiveness of actors' behaviour and attitudes	
Mutual relevance (share in each actor's transaction flows)	cohesive ←	→ non-cohesive
high  low	(highest level of integration) <i>tied amity</i>	(highest potential for conflict) <i>tied hostility</i>
	<i>untied amity</i>	<i>untied hostility</i> (lowest level of integration)

attitudes alone, not actual behaviour showing solidarity. It is also worth noting that this definition of cohesion clearly contrasts with Brussels' unsociological cohesion concept discussed in section 3).

The concept of *mutual relevance* between actors and their *cohesiveness* helps us to develop a general concept of social integration, which can be applied to a variety of social systems, not just to the Community. Its advantage is the distinction between a value-free meaning of integration (mutual relevance) and a value-loaded one (cohesion).⁹ The level of social integration increases both with growing relevance and cohesiveness. The notion "level" points to the fact that integration cannot be understood as either present or absent; rather, it is ordinal since one system can be more or less integrated than another (cf. Friedrichs/Jagodzinski 2000: 14). With a two-by-two-matrix, however, ideal-types of social integration with different consequences for the system can be described (see Table 1). Integration is strongest when mutual relevance is high and of a cohesive nature ("tied amity"), and weakest when transactions are rare and predominantly of a non-cohesive nature ("untied hostility"). The most dangerous situation, however, is "tied hostility", where actors are mutually relevant but behave in a non-cohesive manner. Presumably, "tied amity" is exactly the condition Monnet had in mind when speaking of uniting the peoples of Europe.

Now we are able to put the parts together: As a process, European social integration can be defined as increasing levels of *mutual relevance between and cohesion among the different EU nationalities*. Correspondingly, as a condition, the level of integration of the Community is defined as the achieved level of *mutual relevance between and cohesion among the different EU nationalities* at a certain point of time. Empirically, these macro-social interlinkages can be measured as the aggregated relations between non-state social actors of one nationality and another, either associations or individuals. In this article, I focus on individual citizens. Individual exchanges are not necessarily of private nature or based on personal initiative alone; rather, they often take place when citizens perform certain roles, often professional ones, in associations and organisations. Hence, by providing a sort of “infrastructure” for exchange, organisations like companies, unions, employers’ federations, political parties, churches, environmental activists, scouts, sport clubs play a crucial part in establishing transnational links between people. This is especially true for those organisations which have been especially established for promoting exchange. To give an example, the German-French youth office (OFAJ/DFJW) organised exchange programmes with more than 7 million participants between 1963 and 2003. Each year, 7,000 meetings with 200,000 participants take place (Zahlenbilder 2003).

Indicators of European social integration

Table 2 gives some concrete examples of how transnational social integration, as defined above, can be pictured. Since the single aspects mentioned here tap into quite large research fields on their own, it goes without saying that the format of this article does not allow for them to be explained in detail, or for references to relevant literature.

There are a variety of indicators for mutual relevance. Certainly, “exchange mobility” (Blau 1977), such as intergroup marriage and migration, is an indicator of strong ties. Other indicators aiming at face-to-face relations between Europeans are transnational friendships, acquaintances or, at a low stage of involvement, cursory personal contact. Finally, how often citizens travel to other member countries, or how often they buy goods or services across the border can be used as indicators of weak ties. As outlined above, relevance also includes socio-psychological processes of paying attention to other peoples and their concerns, or of using the populations of other member countries as yardsticks for comparisons. Even interest in and knowledge about other nationalities and member countries are signs of whether the “other Europeans” are relevant for us, or not.

The second component, European social cohesion, can be measured by how positive mutual perceptions and attitudes are, how much sense of community and we-feeling there is, and by the extent such we-feeling translates into supportive action. Operationalisations are,

Table 2: Some examples of European social integration

Quantitative dimension Relevance (transactions)	Qualitative dimension Cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ communication flows ▶ stay, travel, cross-border purchases, ▶ intergroup friendships, acquaintances, and contacts ▶ intergroup marriages and migration ▶ mutual attentiveness, interest and knowledge ▶ transnational social comparison and yardsticks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ help across borders ▶ non-discriminative behaviour against EU non-nationals ▶ attitudes towards other EU nationalities: trust in people from other EU countries; labelling of non-EU nationals as “foreigners” ▶ perception of compatible interests ▶ European identity

for example, how much transnational trust there is among the Europeans (Delhey 2004), whether they perceive EU-non-nationals as fellow countrymen rather than as “foreigners”, whether they have a feeling of shared interests and regard themselves as being Europeans as opposed to nationals. In terms of actual behaviour, cross-border charitable donations in case of emergencies can signal cohesion, as well as non-discriminative behaviour against EU-non nationals.

The basic differences between social integration as defined here, and political integration can be shown when these examples are borne in mind. Amalgamation is negotiated between political and administrative leaders, and formally laid down in contracts between governments (Wallace 1990); hence it means de jure integration (Higgot 1997). The nature of amalgamation is predominantly supranational, since the pooling of sovereignty implies strengthening a new decision centre which supersedes the old ones, at least partially. In the case of Europe, the degree of amalgamation achieved is by and large invariant to enlargements, because all new members are obliged to take on the whole body of EU laws and regulations and all duties of membership. The admission of new countries does not alter the scope and level of political integration already achieved, although of course it can influence the prospects for further amalgamation. Finally, once decreed, it influences citizens’ lives from above, top-down, by changing national rules and regulations, and to a lesser extent also by distributional activities. Social integration, in contrast, can not be decreed. It takes place informally and de facto at the grassroots of societies, although it can be stimulated by administrative action. It may or may not influence amalgamation or other social processes, but at any rate, the direction of impact is bottom-up. It is transnational in character, since it rests on bilateral relations between the nationalities (although social integration also carries a certain supranational element as far as European identity is concerned). Finally, the overall

Table 3: Conceptual differences between political and social integration

Criterion	Political integration	Social integration
EU viewed as	political system	social space
Main elements of integration	nation-states (governments); plus EU government	nations (people)
Form of integration	de jure, formal	de facto, informal
Direction of integration	top-down	bottom-up
Mode of integration	supranational	transnational (supranational)
Sensitivity to enlargements	invariant	variant

level of integration within the Community is not invariant to the size and number of nationalities, nor to their characteristics such as geographical location, economic level and culture. Hence, the admission of new member countries can effect social integration one way or the other.

Benchmarks for EU social integration

It is well-known that EU research has the $N = 1$ problem. How, then, do we know whether the level of European social integration is “high” or “low”? Comparisons across time and space can help us escape this problem. Time (the EU with different degrees of amalgamation) and space (the EU in different stages of enlargement) can serve as “internal” benchmarks. Other regional integration projects or large federal states like the U.S. can serve as external benchmarks. Immerfall (2000: 487) proposes a combination of both by saying that the degree of transnational integration has to be operationalised as the difference between two probabilities, the probability of exchange between two randomly drawn elements from two member societies, minus that of exchange of each of the elements with other, non-member societies. Hence, the level of integration between EU societies is assessed against their integration level with societies outside the Community.

The more fundamental question, however, is whether we have touchstones for *completed* European social integration at our disposal. Is it possible to say when it will be fully achieved, and how far away the Community is from forming a close union of peoples? A useful idea can be found in Deutsch (1972), who distinguishes between “nations” and “universal states”, depending on the level of mobilisation achieved among the population. Whereas in nations, each strata or group takes part nearly equally in transactions and communication, in universal states only distinct social groups, usually elites, do. The resulting pattern is a “layer cake-pattern” of involvement (Deutsch 1972) with elites being active (i.e. integrated) and the masses being passive. For our purpose we should note that the more transnational integration includes all status groups, high and low, within the different nationalities, the higher the level of European integration. This is the first touchstone. Another idea I want to propose is to simply use the level of integration of the single nation-states as a yardstick. According to this logic, European social integration would be fully achieved if intergroup relations between the EU nationalities were mutually as frequent and cohesive as in-group relations within these nationalities – in this case, the component parts of the European social space would be dissolved because Europeans act (and think) like citizens of one single nation. Obviously, Europe is far away from such a degree of integration.

5 Closing remarks

A definition of European social integration has been developed in this paper. First I have argued that the Community should be viewed as a social space, not as a political system. Second, by looking at interconnections and affiliations instead of convergence, I have defined integration as *mutual relevance between and cohesion among the different EU nationalities* which are the component parts of this European social space. This definition clearly contrasts with Brussels’ concept of economic and social cohesion and with related ones which equate social integration with convergence of living and working conditions between member countries; it also contrasts with the social policy approach, which equates social integration with similarity of everyday life regulations and social policies (which are instead a part of the amalgamation story).

Making Karl Deutsch an important intellectual starting point does not mean propagating transactionalism as the only or even the best approach for explaining the how and why of *political* integration. Rather, the task was to provide a meaningful definition of European *social* integration; whether aspects of social integration have an impact on amalgamation processes – and if so, through what channels – is an empirical question (cf. Puchala 1981).

Moreover, we currently have very limited knowledge about how the two central dimensions of social integration as defined here, relevance and cohesion, are interrelated, and whether cohesion really increases with a growing number of transactions, as Deutsch has postulated.

Empirically tracking some of the issues listed in Table 2 would result in much better reports on the EU's social cohesion than the current ones; the concept can be utilised for descriptive purposes in this way. The most urgent issues are firstly to determine whether social integration increases over time, that is with membership years; and secondly whether enlargements have strengthened or weakened social integration. Enlargements are usually only classified according to whether they increase disparities and heterogeneity or not (e.g. Zapf/Delhey 2002, with regard to modernisation levels and living conditions; and Fuchs/Klingemann 2000, with regard to political cultures). Presumably, disparities and heterogeneity play a decisive role for social integration, since people tend to associate with those who are like them, and they tend to have prejudices against those who are unlike them. Therefore, the admission of countries which increase inequality and heterogeneity within the European social space is likely to weaken EU integration.

Such consideration opens the floor for more analytical questions. What we need now is nothing less than a *theory* of European social integration – or at least some axioms from which hypotheses which can be tested against data can be derived. First of all, such a theory has to make predictions about which characteristics of member countries and their nationals are decisive for promoting or impeding integration, and what other conditions (like legal harmonisations, the development of EU citizen rights, or institutionalised exchange programs) impact on it. This can not be elaborated here, but it seems obvious that *costs of exchanges* like geographical distance, problems of communication (language) and economic costs will certainly play a major role. Integration increases when costs of exchange are reduced, and vice versa. For this macro-social perspective, it seems particularly fruitful to use Rokkan's comparative macro-model of nation building; it is not by accident that the six founding countries of the Community, in Rokkan's typology, belong to the central belt of independent cities. In a micro-social perspective, individual factors promoting social integration, that is the structuring of exchange and cohesive behaviour and attitudes by age, gender, education or social strata, have to be explored. Presumably, the "winners" in society tend to be the promoters of Europeanisation, while "losers" might calm their fears by upholding national traditions (cf. Alvarez 2002, Münch 1993). The impact of individual language skills on integration activities should be closely examined, since the babel of tongues is often regarded as the major obstacle to forming a true European society (Flora 2000).

The link to mainstream political integration studies can be achieved by analysing how social integration and amalgamation are intertwined. Some scholars believe that social integration results from social policy-making and standardisation of social regulations, or as a product of Brussel's symbolic policy of European flags, number plates and money (for the symbolic policy of the EU, see Shore 2000). Others hold the opposite view, that transnational

society is a major stimulus for amalgamation activities. Case studies can help to explore cause and effect in more detail, since common regulations can be a prerequisite for increasing levels of transactions, as well as a reaction to it.

One question remains: does the EU really need integration beyond the level of states? Is the EU not merely an interest-driven bargain club with little demand for mass legitimacy or effective bonds among the different nationalities involved? As far as the current EU is concerned, this assessment has surely not been plucked from the air. But two facts must be considered: Firstly, the growth of the EU has been predominantly, but not exclusively, an elite project. By 1999, 16 referenda on EU membership or major treaties had been held (Christin/Hug 2002). Hence, some mass support is needed. Secondly, the EU has ambitious plans: constitution, social rights, common foreign and defence policy, own taxes (cf. Armingeon 1999). It seems unlikely that EU citizens will agree to such far-reaching state-building without having feelings of solidarity for the other European nationalities. The Community of the future will be much more than a bargain club, and at the very least, it needs strong social integration among its nationalities.

Notes

- 1 The term “EU” is used for the different stages of the Community project since 1951 and includes its institutional predecessors.
- 2 In order to avoid a mix-up between the political process of integration as state building and integration in the sociological sense, the former is explicitly accompanied by the word ‘political’, or termed amalgamation.
- 3 The kind of social integration the Community has to achieve at the regime level is that of inter-governmental social integration, with the governments as collective actors.
- 4 Meanwhile, however, in EU vocabulary the term convergence has been adopted by the convergence criteria of the monetary stability pact (the Maastricht criteria).
- 5 In history too, “connected history” and “Histoire croisée” have been established as alternatives to cross-national comparison (cf. Werner/Zimmermann 2002).
- 6 This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of Deutsch’s *causal* model (for a discussion see Puchala 1981, Rosamond 2000).
- 7 It is not clear, however, what is meant by “country” in this context, as opposed to state and people.
- 8 However when researchers try to count acts of European social integration empirically, they will often be restricted to cross-border exchanges as the “second-best” solution, since this is the usual way international statistics are collected.
- 9 This has an advantage over definitions that see integration as a “success term” from the outset.

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