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The Europeanization of Regions as 'Spaces for Politics' A Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT: Through its collective regulation the European Union (EU) has institutionalized as a critical space for public action. Yet, frequently regions are considered 'objects' of EU politics, rather than 'subjects' of its daily government. Moving away from dominant narratives on the relationship between the 'region' and the 'EU' we propose a new research agenda which draws on sociological applications of the Europeanization literature and re-frames the problematic towards studying regions as 'spaces for EU politics'. Significantly, this approach identifies actor political usages of social representations of 'territory' as critical in explaining regional actors' transformation from 'objects' to 'subjects' of EU government.

Keywords: European Integration; Spatial power; Sociological Institutionalism; Europeanization; Regional Political Capacity

Introduction

The transformation of European institutions¹ and markets brought about through collective European Union (EU) regulation has institutionalized the EU as a critical space for public action. Yet, frequently regions are considered 'objects' of EU politics, rather than 'subjects' of its daily government. In an EU increasingly characterised by newly empowered regions stabilized through projects of de-centralization, devolution and federalism, this image of the relationship between the region and the EU appears inconsistent. Nonetheless, prevailing narratives within EU studies which construct regions as 'winners' or 'losers' of integration result in this image being a hard one to shift. To move away from these narratives and the lines of argumentation which they have advanced, in this article we propose an alternate way of conceptualizing regions' relationships with the EU. This derives from conceptualizing regions first and foremost as 'spaces for politics'. More precisely, through developing a framework for new research grounded in a political sociological analysis of regional strategies of EU engagement, we hypothesize the conditions under which regions *change* from 'objects' to 'subjects' of EU politics - and the consequences this holds for the institutionalization of power structures within them.

Within political science, dominant ways of studying EU effects on regions have been shaped by two core narratives which have captured scholarly debates since the 1980s ó the 'de-centralization of power' and the 'centralisation of power' narratives (Weatherill, 2005; Loughlin, 2001; Jeffery 1997; Keating and Loughlin 1997; Marks and Hooghe, 1996; Keating and Jones, 1985). Read together these accounts suggest that European integration has set in motion a dynamic of 'multi-level governance' which appears at one and the same time to both empower and disempower regions. First, scholars have argued that the instruments of EU regional policy have led regional actors to create new arenas and networks, providing direct opportunities for their mobilization at EU 'level'. EU rules and norms have accordingly

resulted in a general empowering of regions and in particular as against state organisations - what we term the 'de-centralization of power' narrative. By contrast, others have argued that the centralist tendencies of the EU decisional system consistently empower *national* governments, and this against regional actors. These scholars emphasize that regional actors have limited access to EU-centralist decision-making processes - the 'centralization of power' narrative. Academic debates structured by these narratives have encouraged a polarization of views within the literature on whether EU effects on 'sub-national politics' have been 'transformative' or, on the contrary, merely 'slight and transitory' (John 2000: 891).

In this article, we hold that both narratives, whilst having produced a rich and significant body of empirical work, nonetheless hold limitations in terms of developing future research agendas. First, and as we set out more fully in Section 1, both sets of narrative, either explicitly or implicitly, endorse an ontology of power as 'nested' in 'levels' of governance (Marks 1993: 392). Within political sociology, scholars have argued against conceptions of the EU which view its politics as fundamentally cleaved in this way (Carter and Smith 2008; Rumford 2002). As Rumford has argued, 'it is more appropriate to examine the broader field comprising the forms of rule which are at work in the EU' (2002: 52) and get away from 'the idea that the central issue in EU studies is the level at which state rule is exercised' (2002: 47). Indeed, as is argued in the Introduction to this Special Issue, early sociological treatments of spatial power were against constructions of regions in terms of 'levels' of administration (Grémion 1976: 34).

To operationalize these ideas in Section 2 of this article, we develop an alternate research design whereby a region's on-going construction (boundaries/interests/identities) is viewed as *the central political process* to be researched. How actors deploy and align social and political representations, cultural values, territorial discourses and regulatory interests and stabilize them as representative of 'the region' is the starting point for research. From this, analysis can go on to examine EU 'effects' on this process, by which we mean how actors politically make use of EU-wide institutions (rules, norms and ideas) in their on-going construction of the 'region' and regional interests - and in the development of their strategies of EU engagement. To study this process in a systematic way, we draw upon the new axis of the 'Europeanization' literature underpinned by sociological approaches (Parsons, 2007, Jacquot and Woll, 2004; Radaelli, 2001). We argue that within this strand of Europeanization literature, scholars conceptualize the 'transmission mechanisms' (Bulmer 2007: 50) of Europeanization in sociological ways and pertaining to norms, cognitive beliefs and ways of governing which can permeate and shape already-existent logics of action within domestic systems (Jordan 2003). However, for the most part these approaches have been applied to studying change at the centre of states. Our first aim in Section 2.1 is thus to re-visit this strand of the Europeanization literature with a view to considering its analytical purchase when applied to the research agenda of studying regions as spaces for politics.

Following from this, in the rest of this section we set out a number of claims regarding the usefulness of Europeanization's concepts for identifying moments of change in regional actor behaviour away from 'objects' to 'subjects' of EU government. In particular, we consider the usefulness of the analytical tool of 'regional EU capacity' drawn from urban sociology (Stone, 1993), to study the institutionalization of *ex ante* and *ex post* strategies of EU engagement. We un-pack this concept into four types of practices which can be the object of research: (i) 'politicization' of regional territory; (ii) 'framing' through ideologies of EU polity-building; (iii) building and usage of intra-regional networks; (iv) intra-state territorial politics. Through studying these different practices, we contend, research can reveal the extent

to which regional actors systematically build capacity in a wide range of policy areas to engage as ‘subjects’ and/or ‘objects’ of EU government and the concomitant effects this has on a region’s institutionalization as a ‘space for politics’

Overall, therefore, our research agenda seeks to identify interactions between the mobilization and institutionalization of regional actor EU strategies on the one hand, and the anchoring of EU effects in the institutionalization of regions as spaces for politics on the other. Critically, we argue that the political sociological framework we propose will not only enable research to capture the complexity of regional actor strategies of EU engagement, but also by studying regions as spaces for EU political activity, research is more able to grasp the substantive effects of ‘the government of the EU’ (Smith, 2004) on the organisation of regional society. Consequently, we seek to move towards political sociological re-evaluations of ‘state’-society relations more generally (Rumford, 2002) - and the role of the EU in that process of transformation.

1.6 European integration, regional governance and the emergence of ‘multi-level games’ the story so far

In this section, and drawing on secondary literature, we set out two approaches to the study of the correlation between European integration and regional governance which have come to dominate studies on regions and the EUⁱⁱ. These approaches can be identified from a large body of research and are presented in the form of two strong (and competing) narratives – the ‘de-centralization of power’ narrative and the ‘centralization of power’ narrative. Each narrative assumes an organisation of public authority as one of ‘multi-level governance’ defined as ‘a polity-creating process in which authority and policy-making influence are shared across multiple levels of government – sub-national, national, and supranational’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 2). However, each paints a different picture of the balance of power and distribution of influence within that system. Neither is exhaustive in our exposition, nor do we suggest that these are necessarily espoused by particular disciplines or particular scholars. Our aim in presenting them, and the objective of this first section, is to take stock of both the research terrain, as well as the key lines of argumentation, which they have advanced.

1.1 Narrative 1: ‘De-Centralization of Power’

The ‘de-centralization’ of power narrative takes as its source the acceleration of integration in the second half of the 1980s and finds its expression in the metaphor of ‘Europe of the Regions’ (Elias, 2008). This narrative analyses European integration as a new opportunity structure, providing political and economic resources for regional governments to strengthen their positions vis à vis central administrations (Hooghe 1996, Marks 1996, Marks and Hooghe, 2001). In the 1990s, the nature of change brought about by this process was theorized by scholars who studied European integration as having both ‘supranational’ and ‘sub-national’ effects, the mobilization of which was putting in motion a system of ‘multi-level’ governance (Marks and Hooghe, 2001). In this context, ‘Europe of the Regions’ became a frequently deployed reference to signify the growing powers of regional governments from the mid-1990s onwards. Recently, and no longer referring to a predicted end-point of European integration and the emergence of a collective regional tier of government rivalling that of the nation state (which has not to date been the reality of the effects of European integration – Anderson, 1990), the metaphor has been deployed instead to refer to a more general link (the object of research) between European integration and the

empowerment of regional governments (Elias 2008). In short, this narrative identifies a multi-level game played jointly by the European Commission with regional actors which is *normative*. The Commission and regional actors are understood to be engaged in a governance process which seeks to institutionalize relations between them in ways which will enable both sets of actors to *by-pass* or *evade* the centre *qua* central government, with a view to strengthening the supranational and regional *tiers* of the system.

This narrative has to date driven research in specific ways and in particular towards the study of four empirical phenomena *ó* the strategy of the European Commission in regional policy design, the implementation of the EU Structural Funds policy, the institutionalization of regional representation at EU level, and the transnational activity of the regions.

First, although the involvement of sub-national actors in the EU political sphere is not a new phenomenon, the strategy of the European Commission in the creation of a European *polity* has been viewed as one which was both new and which offered regions new opportunities to mobilize partnerships and resources on a much larger scale. For example, Tömmel (1998) argued that the increased involvement of the regions in European political processes could not solely be explained by economic arguments about globalization effects on regional strategies. Rather, in his view, the growth in regional engagement was the direct result of the strategy adopted by the Commission in the implementation and administration of the Structural Funds. Specifically, he suggested that the Commission, lacking the powers to intervene directly in internal domestic processes, instead developed indirect political instruments to achieve the same objective and, in so doing, created *natural* allies for itself (Tömmel, 1998). Overall, a key claim was made that the European Commission espoused a political regional agenda, aimed at the empowerment of itself as a political organisation working with the *region*. Following from these kinds of claims, the reform and the implementation of the Structural Funds in 1988 has been the second main focus of study, viewed as a turning point in the engagement of the regions in the public sphere of EU governance. Specifically, the operationalization of the principle of *partnership* at the regional level has been seen to bring together regional actors (public and private), officials from national administrations and the European Commission. The effects of *partnership* were said to institutionalize both horizontal and vertical dimensions of multi-level governance. Through establishing horizontal relations between public and private actors at the regional level, regional governance was seen to intensify. New non-hierarchical relations between actors were argued to be established independently of pre-existing political relationships (Hooghe 1996). Additionally, scholars argued that the integrated involvement of the Commission in the administering and evaluating of the SFs at the regional level through partnership encouraged a strengthening of direct relations between the regions and the EU level.

The third object of research from within this approach has been the study of the institutionalization of regional activity *in Brussels*. In this regard, the Committee of the Regions (CoR), established by the Treaty on European Union 1993 (TEU), has been a focus of inquiry and viewed as the (logical) institutionalization of the consolidation of direct links between the regions and the EU (Warleigh 1999). Acknowledging that internal divisions within the CoR have at times undermined both its effectiveness and its political visibility, research has laid emphasis on the growing importance of the CoR highlighting *inter alia*: the *modus vivendi* established within the committee between local and regional representatives and, in particular, between members of its two main networks *ó* the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR); the increasing number of opinions given by the CoR since 1994; the intensification of relations

between the CoR and other EU organisations, namely the European Commission and the European Parliament; the increase in networking between cities and regional networks, and local and regional associations; and, finally, the further empowerment of the CoR under the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty which confer rights regarding the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, and specifically, the right of judicial review to protect its own prerogatives. Finally, the study of mobilization via the CoR is linked to the fourth key object of study from within this narrative, namely the acceleration of inter-regional co-operation and the diversity and intensification of transnational regional activity (Hooghe 1995; Marks et al. 2002; Smets 1998). In response to the forces of globalization, it was argued, regions were increasingly viewing themselves as transnational actors whose economic and political interests are predominantly mediated at the EU rather than the national level. The deepening of integration had resulted in an increase in the number of policy areas over which regions shared authority with the EU – environment, transport, culture and public services. Regional adaptation in response to this process had resulted in the establishment of direct links with the EU, which according to the de-centralization narrative was evidenced by the setting up of a number of regional offices in Brussels and the creation of regional associations and networks (Jeffery 1996). In order to better follow EU level decisional processes and negotiations, it was argued, regions required regional offices in Brusselsⁱⁱⁱ and the mobilization of pan-European organisations of local and regional authorities (Weyand 1997).^{iv}

Overall, the ‘de-centralization’ of power narrative has driven research in particular directions as we set out above. Ultimately, this approach is one which broadly views the EU as providing opportunities for regions to pursue strategies to ‘evade’ central government. Moreover, integration processes resulting in multi-level policy instruments are analysed as ones which bestow a new type of legitimacy on regions acting in this way. As a result, the effect of European integration is to weaken the central tier of government, whose authority is squeezed from both above and below.

1.2 Narrative 2: ‘Centralization of Power’

The second strong narrative to be considered is the ‘centralization of power’ narrative, one which is well-rehearsed in the literature (Bomberg and Peterson 1998; Jeffery 2005; Weatherill 2005). According to this narrative, the deepening of European integration over the years has brought about a gradual and increasing transfer of policy competences from the Member States (MSs) to the European ‘level’ with the result that today’s EU exercises considerable legislative power over a wide range of public policies. Many of the EU’s policy competences are competences over which regional governments have legislative or administrative authority at home and as set out in their domestic constitutions (Jeffery 2005a: 34) and which have now been transferred ‘upwards’. The centralizing effect brought about by this transfer of competences to the European ‘level’ creates different types of ‘regional deficit’ which are the object of extensive study.

First, it has been argued that regions with legislative powers sharing competence with EU institutions over a number of policy areas – e.g. environment, agriculture, transport – find themselves increasingly ‘transformed’ within their own territorial jurisdictions from political legislative regional actors (exercising primary powers within their territory) into administrative regional agents – implementing EU law and policy legislated upon through EU policy processes. Second, regions with administrative powers find their scope of regulative autonomy reduced, with rules set at EU level. In addition, and for both types of region, the more that decisions to regulate policy problems are taken at the EU-centre, the more the scope

for regional action is reduced through the closing of policy options at the regional level. Furthermore, it is argued that centralization processes occur even in those areas of policy where competence has not been transferred (Burrows *et al* 2004) and/or in the implementation of EU regional policy itself, when national governments act as 'gatekeepers' (Anderson 1990; Bache 1999; Laffan 1996). In short, according to the 'centralization of power' narrative, the 'regional problem' is in the first instance a 'competence problem' (Jeffery 2005) and is one which becomes ever more acute as integration deepens and as MSs intensify legislative and regulative action at the EU-centre.

The second 'regional problem' identified from within this approach is the 'problem of access' to EU decision-making fora (Bomberg and Peterson 1998; Jeffery 2000, 2005). The centralizing effects brought about by the transfer of competence are further exacerbated, it is argued, by the centralist character of the EU's organisational architecture. The authority to develop common policy is placed in the hands of national governments acting within the Council of Ministers^v. National government ministers represent the 'state' and negotiate on behalf of the regional governments within that state. And, although post Maastricht, and with the signing of the TEU, Council membership was altered to allow representatives of regional governments to negotiate in Council, this did not grant regions an independent voice over EU policy outcomes. Even when regional ministers sit in negotiations over those policy areas which fall disproportionately to their 'region' or over which they have a devolved policy competence, their representative function when they did so, was to speak on behalf of their 'state' and not their 'region' binding their state (and other regions within that state) to any decision taken. According to this narrative, sub-national mobilization thus remained ultimately constrained by state-centric organisational structures (Bache, 1999; Laffan, 1996).

Centralist institutional tendencies are also seen to result in weak (rather than strong) direct representations of the regions in EU fora. According to this narrative, the emergence of the CoR is *not* seen to re-dress the balance of power lost through processes of integration (Jeffery 2005). Rather, this committee is regarded as largely weak and ineffectual. First, it does not hold institutional status, but only consultative powers. Second, it is ill-conceived organisationally and has severe representative difficulties given the different types of regions which it represents and who, as we set out above, suffer different types of regional deficit which they are aiming to close. Initiatives to reform this institution and increase its powers are, in addition, viewed as largely unsuccessful (e.g. the proposed reforms made within the European Convention) (Keating 2004). With regard to inter-regional co-operation, here too it is the 'weakness' rather than the 'strength' of these initiatives which is identified (Balme 1995; Mazey 1995). For example, proponents of the 'centralization' thesis would point to the lack of clearly articulated goals for these networks which, it would be argued, ultimately undermine their effectiveness (Weyand 1997). Finally, the principle of subsidiarity, studied here as a legislative instrument framed within the constructs of the narrative, is regarded as an insufficient mechanism to redress problems identified.

Overall, the centralization of power narrative identifies a 'regional deficit' analysed in terms of a 'competence problem' and an 'access to decision-making' problem for regions. Through integration processes, national governments are seen to be able to 'take back' hard-won regional powers and exercise authority over them within EU fora. Regions are increasingly reduced to the role of agent in their own territory. Centralist tendencies of integration are thus viewed as ones which empower national governments over regional governments and construct MSs as 'single' actors for the purposes of Council decision-making. Ultimately, from this approach, although 'multi-level governance' appears to pull in different directions,

nonetheless there is a dominant pull of centralization, formalized by a strong supranational legal order, whereby regions lose powers to the centre (or whereby new regional actors are *a priori* losers to the centre).

Summary

In summary, past debates within the literature examining relationships between European integration and regional governance have frequently been couched in terms of these two strong narratives. Overall, they have provided a rich context for the study of regional governance within the EU. Yet, over time, they have also framed the relationship between the region and the EU in particular ways which are hard to shift.

First, taken together, the narratives construct EU government as a multi-level system, altering the balance of power between regions and central state institutions in deterministic ways and creating conflict between them. For regions, the predominant friction espoused by both narratives is one of seeking to evade the central tier in order to self-represent independently at the EU level (where EU politics are represented as taking place) and in order to mitigate against appropriation of powers by central state authorities (Marks and McAdam 1996). Collectively, both narratives thus assume a dominant conflict between regional and central state governments. But, does this conception of political conflict conform to the totality of regional strategies of engagement across a range of policy areas?

Second, the circularity of argument to which both narratives inevitably gives rise has become limiting in terms of generating new research programmes. In particular, and as we argue elsewhere, this is because viewing regions as winners or losers in processes of integration ends up by polarizing research in its evaluation of *exogenous* effects which EU membership has had on regional compared to national governments (Carter and Pasquier 2006). As others have argued, it is perhaps irrelevant to compare regional actors with other types of European actors in this way: what is interesting is the implication of Europeanization for local politics (John 2000: 891). Yet, the ontology of power (implicitly) underlying these narratives endorses a treatment of the region as a level of governance, somehow segmented from the national level and independently either empowered or disempowered in the EU multi-level game. From this perspective, EU impacts are predominantly studied as having top-down external and deterministic structuring effects on regions, whether positive or negative. Moreover, whether judged empowered or disempowered, regions still emerge as objects of EU rules (Goldsmith and Klausen 1997).

Starting research from within the logics of these narratives thus holds certain analytical consequences to be addressed. These include the laying of emphasis on formal rules to determine hierarchies of power and, within regions, regional governments as key actors exercising that power; the overlooking of the connectedness (Allen et al 1998) of regions across a range of policy areas, and not just in EU regional policy (John 2000: 885); the under-problematization of territory which is often implicitly treated as settled and whose myriad political usages by regional actors is largely under-explored (Carter and Smith 2009). Consequently, we contend that moving beyond these narratives, and the research questions which they address, can only be attained through the development of new research frameworks. More specifically, re-casting the lines of debate to generate new knowledge on the connections between the EU recent transformations of the state and regions as spaces for politics requires *first*, that we tighten our analytical concepts in our analysis of the

region and *second*, that we clarify what we are studying when examining relationships between the EU and regions. We turn to this more fully in Section 2 below.

2.6 Developing a new research agenda: the Europeanization of regions as spaces for politics

In this section, and in keeping with the intellectual project of this Special Issue, we propose a new research agenda for studying relationships between regions and the EU. A core analytical premise of this agenda is precisely *not* to frame our research object and lines of questioning from within the paradigm of the two narratives as set out above and consequently *not* from within a multi-level governance frame. Instead, the starting point for research is the conception of regions as spaces for politics and hence also as spaces for European government. This means conceptualizing regions *a priori* as institutionalizing spaces for politics (with *sui generis* power structures, logics of action and multiple actor competitions) and, from this basic understanding, identifying how actors politically make use of EU-wide institutions (rules, norms and ideas) in their on-going construction of the region. We ask whether regional actors, across a range of policy areas, recognize the EU as a critical operating environment (Jordan 2003: 263) for articulation of regional interests? Do regional actors self-represent as inter-connected in EU public policy processes? Do they seek to either deploy or shape EU norms and ideas in the daily government of the region? What kinds of strategies of EU engagement do they systematically pursue?

To develop these points, this section is organized as follows. First, drawing upon the sociological axis of the Europeanization literature we identify two core types of Europeanization strategies potentially pursued by regional actors – *ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization (2.1). Second, in order to study whether and how these strategies are mobilized and maintained, and the consequences they hold for the on-going construction of the region, we examine four types of actor practices which we contend collectively build and stabilize a region's EU capacity (2.2).

2.1 From objects to subjects of EU politics: *Ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization

As others have demonstrated, the Europeanization literature is an eclectic one (Graziano and Vink 2007). This notwithstanding, the overall focus of scholars working within its general framework has been to assess the type of political change occurring within MSs systems resulting from their engaging in EU decision-making (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Jordan 2002; Goetz and Hix 2000; Ladrech 1994). Within that, a core conceptual goal has been to specify and encapsulate absorption versus transformative EU effects on domestic policies and organisations (Börzel and Risse 2007; Graziano and Vink 2007). Although initially investigating the possibility that MSs national policy styles would converge towards a common European approach, more recently scholars have sought to explain resilience of political systems to change (Parsons 2007). Within this context, research has examined the processes by which EU effects are incorporated into either domestic policy content or bring about change in (national) organisations. To these ends, scholars have identified factors to explain adaptation (and non-adaptation) and its outcomes (convergence vs. diversity; transformation vs. absorption vs. resistance) (Baisnée and Pasquier 2007; Jordan 2002; Cowles *et al* 2001).

Yet, to apply Europeanization approaches to regions as spaces for politics, clarification on both object and method of research is required. First, given that the study of Europeanization

is fundamentally a study of political change, how we theorize both the conditions for change and the processes by which it takes place depends on the underlying theory adopted. Scholars working within Europeanization studies differ on their theoretical positionings (Bulmer 2007) and hence on first, the meaning of 'effects' and second, on choices and hierarchies of factors and 'adaptational pressures' which are considered to mediate those effects. Within these debates, recent work informed by sociological accounts of change conceptualizes EU 'effects' as not only pertaining to changes in formal rules, policy instruments and organisational structures, but also to changes in ideas, operating culture, attitudes and expectations (Parsons 2007; Jacquot and Woll 2004; Jordan 2003; Hay and Rosamond 2002; Radaelli 2001). Critically, these scholars understand the 'transmission mechanisms' (Bulmer 2007: 50) of Europeanization in sociological ways. For them, Europeanization is evidenced when 'local policy-making becomes an aspect of the EU, and European ideas and practices become transferred to the core of local decision-making' (John 2000: 882). This approach thus aims to identify a 'deep Europeanization' as actors 'learn to think European' (Jordan 2003: 263).

Staying within this sociological understanding of Europeanization, we seek to capture EU 'effects' as interactive processes of institutionalization (Radaelli and Pasquier 2007: 37). Consequently, our treatment of both the causality of Europeanization - its 'transmission mechanisms' and its impact is not limited to formal institutions (e.g. policy instruments, rules) but critically also includes ideational elements. For example, we take account of the transmission (through 'learning' or 'socialization') of norms, ideas, discourses, cognitive frames, territorial representations and visions of the EU (Hay and Rosamond 2002; Jacquot and Woll 2004) which can bring about change (intentional or unintentional) in regional politics. Ideational elements are studied as causal in bringing about change in the way actors frame their relationship vis á vis the EU as a space for public action and hence their 'operating environment' (Jordan 2003). Critically, the distinctive position to be defended here is the necessity of grasping the *interplay* between informal and formal transmission mechanisms in shaping strategies of regional action.

Second, the Europeanization literature is broad in scope and covers a number of different objects of study. Within this, scholars isolate two types of Europeanization: 'top down' (Börzel 2003) or 'reception' (Bulmer and Burch 2000) Europeanization - whereby domestic rules and norms are 'aligned' to EU requirements in the implementation of EU legislation - and 'bottom up' (Börzel 2003) or 'projection' (Bulmer and Burch 2000) Europeanization - when domestic policies are 'up-loaded' (Börzel 2003) to the European level for negotiation. With regard to effects on regions, whereas the former process has been examined extensively through studies on the implementation of EU regional policy (Bache 2007; Gualini 2004), the latter process has been relatively under-studied within regions and particularly within new legislative regions. However, building on current research findings is not straightforward because frequently this work has been framed by the 'multi-level governance' decentralization narratives outlined above (e.g. Marks and Hooghe 2001) and/or adopts mixed theoretical positionings which treat formal and informal institutions as unconnected processes of institutionalization (Bursens and Deforche 2008). Indeed, the terms used to describe both types of Europeanization stem from an MLG analytical starting point: 'a theory of the EU as a multi-level polity requires both a 'bottom up' and a 'top down' perspective' (Börzel and Risse 2007, p.484). Furthermore, both types of Europeanization are frequently viewed as separate processes and little attention is paid to relationships between them (Carter and Pasquier 2006).

Consequently, to stay within Europeanization debates yet move the research agenda beyond the two narratives outlined in Section 1 above, we need to reframe our object of study. To do

this, we propose making a definitional refinement to distinguish between different types of Europeanization strategies developed within regions as spaces for politics. We discern between what we term *ex post* Europeanization strategies of public action on the one hand, versus *ex ante* Europeanization strategies of public action, on the other. We refer to the first set of strategies as *ex post* strategies, in that there requires to be some already agreed EU regulatory decision, rule or norm around which actors mobilize or which they *use* to solve local problems (Héritier and Knill 2001). *Ex post* strategies can consequently be mobilized and institutionalized by actors either through the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, or through reflexivity or learning (Kauppi 2008), or through the dissemination of norms and *good practice*. They can consist of (re-) distributions of resources, alliance building, actor powering, jurisdictional decisions and struggles around degrees of entanglement with EU (and centre-state) norms in the development of regional instruments.

These types of strategies are different from δ but interlinked with *ex ante* Europeanization strategies to engage in (state-) EU policy formation. *Ex ante* Europeanization strategies pertain to the shaping of EU norms and rules. They include the recognition of the EU as a critical set of spaces for pursuit of regional interests; the building of shared regional scripts through framing of local interests as requiring EU-wide public policy responses; strategies of problematization and/or politicization (Smith 2010); alliance building, mobilization of intra-regional networks and usage of inter-governmental (centre-periphery) politics; strategies to access decisional arenas. Significantly, we hypothesize that these differ from *ex post* strategies in that *ex ante* Europeanization requires the evocation and transmission by actors of an ideology of *Europe* to be present δ a vision of the *future* EU which builds in part on past decisions (*ex post*) and to which actor strategy is directed (we return to this below).

Critically, both types of strategy can be proactive and/or receptive, i.e. regions can engage as subjects or objects in both. Either type of engagement may lead to shifts in regional discourses, policy reforms and/or bring about change in the balance of power between the constellation of actors which make up the regional space.

Finally, to discover more specifically the effects which regional EU engagement has on the construction of regions as spaces for politics, a central element of the research agenda must identify the core relationships between *ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization strategies and how these play out within the region. Theorizing the space between *ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization is thus a critical focus for this research agenda. This requires developing analytical tools capable of researching the interactions between these strategies to explain why in situations where there is a strong *ex post* Europeanization within the region δ for example, where regional actors are active *reproducers* of EU institutions - this at times fails to spillover (and at times succeeds in spilling over) into the development of a strong *ex ante* EU strategies δ actors as *producers* of EU institutions δ whereby new ways of thinking result in *ex ante* engagement.

A central line of inquiry would be to isolate causes whereby policy engagement by regional actors in the implementation of EU rules and norms generates pro-active EU logics within regions to engage in policy formulation (either directly or indirectly) and the shaping of EU norms. To put this another way, if we conceptualize the *space* between *ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization as providing an opportunity for *agency* - what conditions are necessary for regional actors to exploit this opportunity and these potential resources through the development of strategies of action? Or, in situations where regional actors are very active in

one policy sector, what factors constrain or encourage the politicization of other policy sectors to generate strategies of action in these too?

To study these processes research must identify the multiple actors within the region and their relationships; the arenas in which interactions between them take place and are institutionalized; and the cognitive processes by which these institutionalizations are framed. In so doing, we thus seek to generate analytical tools which are capable of explaining regional actor EU strategies and how different actors within regions *choose* particular courses of action, including the choice not to act.

2.2 Strategies and logics of engagement: Regional EU Capacity

Following from the above, we now turn to the question of research tools and in particular the analytical tool of regional EU capacity. For us regional EU capacity refers to a complex process of interest definition, organisation and coordination of collective action which enables institutions, public and private groups to regulate a wide range of public problems (Pasquier 2004, p.28). This concept, coming from urban sociology^{vi}, focuses analysis on the social construction of logics of action. Capacity building most obviously comprises regional political organisations, but also involves developing trusting relationships (Cole 2006; John 2001). With this concept, we hypothesize that one must understand EU capacity of regional actors as a sociopolitical process rooted in an on-going social construction of territories and centre-periphery relationships. It is rooted too in identities understood as a set of social practices, beliefs and visions of the world, socially constructed, which shape and guide the strategies of regional actors. Therefore, the EU capacity of regional actors results from a complex interaction between inherited practices and beliefs and new dynamics of political change and encompasses both formal and informal institutional processes.

EU capacity of regions can be conceptualized as comprising four closely related but distinct practices: (1) politicization of regional territory, (2) framing through ideologies of EU polity-building, (3) building and usage of intra-regional networks, (4) intra-state territorial politics. The variables of politicization of regional territory and ideologies of EU polity-building enable us to analyse how visions and intellectual projections of territorial elites influence *ex ante* and *ex post* Europeanization strategies. The two last variables – intra-regional networks and intra-state territorial politics - are centred on the study of territorial coalition-building to influence EU policies resulting from those social constructions. Variables 1 and 2 therefore pertain to constructions and usages of territory as resources for capacity-building; variables 3 and 4 pertain to constructions and usages of relationships and rules as resources for capacity-building.

Variable 1. Politicization of Regional Territory.

Studying regions as spaces for Europeanization starts with the examination of institutionalizations of frontiers, membership, representative actors and type of regional space to distinguish different types of regions as spaces for politics and different types of actors within them. Research has shown that in this process new types of actor become prominent and more specifically that new actors deploy social constructions of territory in the development of strategies for regional transformation (Le Galès 2002). Regional actors frequently use European resources and norms as part of this process. Recent research shows that Europeanization of regional identity can affect the representation of groups and organisations such as political parties, administrations, trade unions, interest groups and/or firms. At issue is the establishment of a positive linkage between European integration on

the one hand, and the different features of the regional territory on the other. For example, European integration can provide new framings for social movements and political organisations who defend specific territorial identities and who want to ‘modernize’ the territorial structuring of their region (Perron 2008). Indeed, EU fora exist whose goals are to spread alternative visions of European territorial organisation. For example, the MEPs of regionalist and nationalist parties have their own political group at the European Parliament, the European Free Alliance (de Winter et. al. 2006). Moreover normative texts coming from European organisations, such as the ‘European charter of regional and minority languages’ or the ‘European charter of local self-government’ become sources of conflict within regions, often in discussion with central governments. Cultural associations, regionalist and nationalist parties use these European repertoires to require compliance in regional and state policies. The existence ó or non-existence ó of territorialized ideologies within the region, their effect on political capacity and usage of EU norms to re-frame territorial identities and agendas is thus the first set of variables around which to study questions of strategy.

Variable 2. Framing through ideologies of EU Polity-Building.

We have termed the second set of variables which may constrain or facilitate the shift from *ex post* to *ex ante* Europeanization strategies of public action as the ‘ideology of EU polity-building’. As we suggest above, one of the distinctions between *ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization is the absence of an ‘ideology of EU polity-building’ in the former. That *ex ante* Europeanization implies the existence of a ‘frame’ or ideology of EU polity-building is not obviously apparent. However, if we take into account the political appeal of the centralization narrative (outlined in Section 1 above), the institutionalization of *ex ante* strategies by national governments can be legitimated by entrepreneurs through references to central governmental ‘empowerment’. Holding a certain vision of the integration project, albeit a latent (and contested) one, ‘projected’ Europeanization might be facilitated by this imagined understanding of the effects of European integration. This question of empowerment is also present in Europeanization strategies adopted by national parliaments. There parliamentarians not only make adaptations to internal structures to build capacity to redress a perceived imbalance of power between parliament and government resulting from EU membership, but do so within particular visions or frames of the EU polity itself (Raunio 1999). In other words, *ex ante* Europeanization strategies of key actors or departments within national governments may not be contested by others (within that government or more broadly) precisely because of the evocation of an ideology of EU polity-building which views integration as a process which empowers the central ‘level’.

Types of ideology of EU polity-building within the region may thus serve to mitigate against or facilitate a spillover from *ex post* to *ex ante* Europeanization. For, findings generated by the two research programmes set out in Section 1 above suggest that regional empowerment through integration processes is contested. Arguments claiming regions as either ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ are often deployed by actors to mobilize strategies of engagement and non-engagement. On the one hand, regions might engage when the EU is seen to provide a wide range of potential resources, including re-distributive, regulative and cognitive resources. On the other hand, why would regional actors design strategies to engage in a project of European integration whose outcomes are socially constructed as ultimately resulting in a disempowerment of regions? The research question could thus be posed whether regional actors have a ‘vision’ of EU polity-building ó do they have a view of the ‘common good’ of the integration project ó or does the EU remain, as Jeffery puts it, ‘a problem’ to be resolved? (Jeffery 2005). Clearly, the answer to this question is likely to depend on the policy area or

sector being examined and hence serves to underlie once again the importance of studying regional practices across a range of public policies and not just in EU regional policy.

Variable 3. Building and Usage of Intra-Regional Networks.

The third set of variables is the building of relations within the region so defined and around EU policies. This is because political capacity is, at least in part, a process of mediation in which institutional elites and social groups produce a vision of the world that allows them simultaneously to structure relations amongst themselves and to define the very interests that they are pursuing collectively. This done, they can mobilize material and cognitive resources to elaborate strategies of action designed to attain desired objectives. We hypothesize that the capacity of regional elites to organize relations among relevant policy actors according to a coherent shared vision of a desired outcome varies significantly from region to region. (Smyrl 1997). Along with it varies mediating factors which condition how regional policy makers adapt to social and economic change. So, in order to build a political capacity, public authorities within regions will develop relationships with other regional actors, e.g. local governments, socio-economic actors, interest or industry organisations in different policy fields (agriculture, fisheries) (Smith 2008). Furthermore, actors engaged in these institutionalized networks with problem-solving capacity (for example, in the regulation of sectors within the region) will constantly be seeking to legitimize their membership of them, for example through mobilizations around references to territory. Having examined how these infra-territory networks are being framed and consequently institutionalized, we ask to what extent regional actors use them both to problematize and legitimize regulatory problems and their solutions in order to empower their position inside arenas elaborating EU policies. Do public authorities deploy broader territorial coalitions around EU policies to build capacity? Can we identify stabilized territorial coalitions developing *ex post* and *ex ante* strategies on EU policies and affairs and which affect the development of pro-active regional strategies? Or, is the usage of regional networks marginal and/or passive?

Variable 4. Intra-State Territorial Politics.

For many regions building regional capacity to enable an active European policy to be developed includes primarily the building of, and engagement in, domestic inter-governmental arenas to influence the formulation of a state's EU policy preference (Bursens 2004). Studying the space between *ex post* and *ex ante* spillover effects must therefore include a discussion of the institutionalization of different styles of intra-state territorial politics, i.e. the set of norms and rules which shape interactions between regions and central governments. Yet, for the most part, the focus of the Europeanization debate has not been centred upon the effects which transforming styles of these centre-periphery relations are having on absorption/transformation processes within domestic political systems. In considerations of style research would seek to identify the existence (or not) of institutionalized codes of conduct, joint decision-making arenas, sharing of information between actors (regional and central public authorities; regional governments and regional parliaments and/or stakeholders), and controversies over jurisdictional politics. In studying these, we want to move away from assumptions about formal divisions of competences between different territories within the state and focus our research instead on the processes by which assignments of power (Carter and Smith 2008) are constantly institutionalized through regulation. Questions of assignment are pertinent to both *ex post* and *ex ante* strategies and their interconnections. With regard to *ex post* strategies, we might consider actor mobilizations around politicizations of regional identity to do things differently from the centre and/or other regions within the state when EU directives allow for flexibility of implementation; or when actors appropriate EU norms to solve local problems. With regard

ex ante strategies, the same references to territory might be deployed to justify access to intergovernmental arenas and the making of arguments for taking the lead in state-EU policy development. In short, and in keeping with our objective to study regions as spaces for EU politics, we do not assume an *a priori* organisation of power either within the region or between the regional public authorities and the central state ones, or between the regional public authorities and EU government. Rather we seek to apply our tools to study how engagement in EU regulation legitimates daily assignment choices.

In summary, to generate new comparative knowledge and move away from the two narratives set out in Section 1, we propose studying *ex post* and *ex ante* strategies of action across a representative range of sectors. Throughout, we are keen to emphasise that for us all four variables which make up regional EU capacity contain both formal and informal institutional mechanisms. This is crucial because political capacity results from a continuous process of interaction between actor practices and inherited (and transferred) beliefs which frame and give reality to dynamics of social change. These elements always renew the repertoire for regional agency. So, whereas the first stage of research is to separate out different processes of institutionalization in order to analyse them, the second and critical stage of research is to put them back together to study their interaction within regions as spaces for politics.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to develop a new research agenda capable of generating a body of sociologically-informed theoretical and empirical research on the Europeanization of regions as spaces for politics. In particular, we seek to study recent transformations of the state resulting from processes of de-centralization and devolution unfolding across a number of MSs of the EU, and capture effects which endogenous Europeanization dynamics are having on such transformations. In so doing, we wish to develop a research agenda capable of enhancing understandings of EU patterns of change taking place within states by rendering visible their effects across the polity and how these are legitimized through constructions of regions as spaces for politics.

We have argued that European integration produces complex dynamics of *ex post* and *ex ante* Europeanization within regions. To study institutionalization of strategies of engagement and interactions between different types of strategies institutionalized in response to these dynamics, we developed the analytical tool of regional EU capacity. Capacity was understood to be composed of both formal and informal institutions and could, we argued, be researched by four sets of inter-related variables: (1) politicization of regional territory; (2) framing through ideologies of EU polity-building; (3) building and usage of intra-regional networks; (4) intra-state territorial politics. In particular, we hypothesized that a key variable will be ideology of polity-building - something we suggest is also true for state actors *ex ante* strategies and which our study might further reveal. Through a consideration of interactions between all four sets of variables, our aim is to grasp the diversity of regional actors affected by European integration, including as well as public authorities, for example, cultural movements, environmental associations, economic interests.

In this manner, we have re-framed the object of research and proposed the sociological treatment of regions as spaces for politics as relevant units of analysis for the evaluation of macro-level processes of change, in this instance, European integration. We have hypothesized that treating regions as a single level of governance, and hence as collective winners or losers in a competition with central state authorities can obscure other

processes of transformation taking place within states resulting from Europeanization effects in regions. For example, EU effects might result in the emergence of private actors versus public authorities, or certain types of actor over others, or the creation of more pluralist spaces. To analyse the type of political change which European integration is bringing about in the transformation of regions from objects to subjects of its government, including how any transformation of regional society is legitimized, requires new and systematic comparative studies which take into account the variation of sectors, institutions, social groups and territorial beliefs which make up regions as spaces for politics. Finally, whereas in this article we focus upon usages of Europeanization as resources in capacity-building, we suggest that the approach developed here could be adapted and applied more generally to capture the interplay of usages of other types of resources ó global, (EU), state, local ó in the (re-) institutionalization of regions as spaces for politics.

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ⁱ By which we mean rules and norms.

ⁱⁱ See also Bourne 2003 who identifies a 'no impact' account of these relationships which we do not discuss here.

ⁱⁱⁱ The first of these were set up in 1984 and 1985 by the city of Birmingham and the regions of Hambourg and Sarre). By 1993, there were 64 regional offices, 118 by 1997 and more than 244 by 2002.

^{iv} Two types of association have been identified: those which primarily serve a representative function and those which are 'issue-based'

^v The role of the EP is not always acknowledged in this narrative.

^{vi} See particularly the study of Clarence Stone (1993), who defines urban regimes as 'a capacity to govern', i.e. the capacity of actors coalitions (private and public) to produce collective regulation over the long-term.