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The EU crisis and the comparative study of Latin American regionalism
EU studies and the study of Latin American regionalism a complicated relationship with ups and downs

- Curiosity (N-1 problem) (1960s)
- Estrangement (1970s-1980s)
- Admiration (EU as benchmark) (1990s)
- Deception (Latin America bashing) (2000s)
- Separation (EU bashing / de-eurocentring) (2010s)
- Mature relationship (comparative regionalism)
- Relations under stress (crisis and disintegration)
The influence of EU based integration theory is related to the power and influence of the EU in international politics.

- 1990s EU one of the winners of the cold-war and a role model for regional integration
  - Maastricht treaty and creation of EU (1992)
  - EU expansion to Eastern Europe
  - EU as competitor of the US in LA

- 2010s EU crisis and global power transitions
  - Euro crisis
  - Brexit
  - Refugee crisis
  - Rise of anti-European populist parties
  - Rise of China (and Asia) as a mayor LA economic partner
• Has Brexit changed the perception of the EU in Latin America? Is the EU still a model?

• Have the Euro crisis (plus the refugee crisis) and the Brexit been good or bad for comparing the EU and Latin American regionalism?

• What makes the current EU crisis different (background: narrative of successful EU crisis management)?
“I have always believed that Europe would be built through crisis, and that it would be the sum of their solutions.”


“Crises have been an integral part of the process of European integration and, by and large, they have had positive effects. Collective reactions to crises by national actors have led to an increase in the authority and/or an expansion of the tasks of the institutions of the EU and its predecessors.”

Zoe Lefkofridi and Philippe C. Schmitter, Transcending or Descending? European Integration in Times of Crisis, European Political Science Review (2015), 7:1, 4
“For many Europeans, the EU is no longer seen as a solution to a problem or set of problems, but as a problem in itself.”

What makes the current crisis different?

• It is multi-dimensional

• It is unusual in regard to its duration

• It has high costs of inaction

• In contrast to earlier crisis it has been accompanied by a high extent of mass mobilization

• In the first three decades of integration, when the creation of a European legal system was driven by the demand for adjudication of economic disputes between firms the implications for most people (except perhaps for farmers) were limited or not transparent. Public opinion was quiescent. These were years of permissive consensus, of deals cut by insulated elites.

• The period since 1991 might be described, by contrast, as one of constraining dissensus. Elites, that is, party leaders in positions of authority, must look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues.

• The European Union is no longer insulated from domestic politics; domestic politics is no longer insulated from Europe. The result is greater divergence of politically relevant perceptions and a correspondingly constricted scope of agreement.

• Less constraints in Latin America?
• Has Brexit changed the perception of the EU in Latin America? Is the EU still a model?
"The Brexit crisis has to an extent reinforced the view that the EU is not a body to be replicated elsewhere, ... While some argue that the Brexit referendum result has threatened the EU’s example of regional integration, the idea that the EU was ever an archetype of integration has long been dismissed by scholars, practitioners and the general public. Brexit will likely consolidate existing perceptions in Asia about the EU — that European style integration has little relevance for ASEAN, even though there are some areas of inspiration — as opposed to triggering novel insights with regard to the nature of regionalism."

Laura Allison-Reumann and Philomena Murray, The EU and ASEAN after Brexit, Eastasiaforum, 3 January 2017
http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/01/03/the-eu-and-asean-after-brexit/
• In an article titled “No Brussels here” published on July 7, 2016 The Economist quotes Chilean foreign minister Heraldo Muñoz saying that the lesson of Brexit is that integration must be “flexible, concrete... and not bureaucratic”.

• As a conclusion The Economist writes “Latin American governments do not want to cede sovereignty to a supranational body. Unlike Europe neither history nor geography has encourage them to do so. Mercosur has a small secretariat; the Pacific-Alliance is purely inter-governmental. .. If it is to happen at all, Latin American integration will be very different from the EU.”

• The EU has lost appeal and is no longer perceived as a model for regional integration, which is reflected in

  • the downgrading of the construction of supranational regional institutions in the discussion about regional economic integration (core of the debate regional integration versus regional cooperation; bye bye Andrés and Philippe).

  • New debate, does regional integration need strong institutions?
    • “Must RI encompass institutionalization?” (Murray 2010: 317)

  • But surprisingly, there are different reactions in Latin America
    • inter-governmental institutions instead of supranational institutions
    • no Brexit risk in LA due to weak institutions (critic or good news?)
    • light institutions – but risk of a light “Sudamexit”
Inter-American Development Bank Annual Report for 2017:

“If anything can be learned from more than a half-century of integration, it is that complex architecture like a customs union with supranational institutions should be avoided. Instead, the objective should be a “plain vanilla” free trade zone, with a focus on goods and services. ... Likewise, the institutional architecture should be inter-governmental rather than supranational in nature, ....”

“The Brexit vote has also led many in Latin America to also wonder about the pros and cons of regional integration. As the EU braces for tough times ahead, some people in Latin America are breathing a sigh of relief thinking that countries who have not embraced similar integration initiatives will never have to suffer from a Brexit-like trauma. … Thus, while some people are relieved that a Brexit will never happen in the region, the very fact that there is currently no such bodies strong enough to make it worth any country considering leaving is a testament to the failure of Latin American integration initiatives.”

http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/216960/the-impossibility-of-a-%E2%80%98latamexit%E2%80%99
“Yendo al meollo de la cuestión, una de las consecuencias más palpables del fenómeno Brexit-Trump pasaría por un movimiento de “resoberanización” de la política internacional. … la deslegitimación del proyecto comunitario europeo contribuiría a profundizar las pulsiones cortoplacistas orientadas a flexibilizar lo máximo posible los organismos de integración y cooperación. El objeto de ello sería mitigar, o directamente eliminar, las supuestas ataduras –normativas, institucionales– que impiden a los Estados de la región integrarse de manera efectiva en el sistema internacional.”

• On April 20, 2018 the Foreign Ministers of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru informed their Bolivian colleague (Bolivia hold the presidency pro tempore of UNASUR at this moment) about their decision to suspend the participation in UNASUR including their payments to the budget of the organization.

• Three months later the president of Ecuador Lenin Moreno decided to convert the UNASUR building in Ciudad Mitad del Mundo in a university for higher indigenous studies. Before he had described the UNASUR headquarters as a “white elephant” for which a new role has to be found.

• And in August, in one of his first foreign policy decisions the new Colombian president Duque announced that Colombia will withdraw from UNASUR. Other countries might follow.
• While Europe is confronted with Brexit, South Americas has to confront Sudamexit.

• Is it possible to compare the processes of disintegration in Europe and Latin America?

• Have the Euro crisis (plus the refugee crisis) and the Brexit been good or bad for comparing the EU and Latin American regionalism?
• Can concepts and research tools from the study of the EU crisis travel to the Latin American context?
• While the Euro crisis and the Brexit had negative repercussions for the EU, they might improve the options for comparing European regionalism (and regional integration) with regionalism in other regions.
• The EU is no longer the “integration snob” as indicated in 2010 by Philomena Murray:

  “The problem of the scholarly focus on EU achievements in integration and of the EU advancing its own achievements as a paradigm means that there remains a perception of the EU as an ‘integration snob’.”

Philomena Murray, Comparative regional integration in the EU and East Asia: Moving beyond integration snobbery, International Politics Vol. 47 (2010), 3/4, 308–323
• New focus in EU studies on the analysis of “disintegration”; which also brings new insights in regard to the processes of integration

  • Historical and regional context matters
  • Ideas and strategies matter
  • Domestic politics matter

• Not so helpful „neo-functionalist analysis“;
  • too much EU focused;
  • difficult to apply in a region without supra-national institutions

Philippe C. Schmitter and Zoe Lefkofridi, Neo-Functionalism as Theory of Desintegration, Chinese Political Science Review 1 (2016), 1-29
• Caveat: It may be difficult to compare European and Latin American crisis of regionalism

• because of the lack of supranational institutions and a supranational bureaucracy in Latin America, which may give continuity to regional projects in times of political conflicts between governments and which make exits more costly.
• Moreover, transnational links and economic interdependence (regionalization) are also much weaker in Latin America.
• Both factors lower the exit costs from regional organizations in Latin America.
• Exits have less repercussions.
• Nevertheless some approaches and concepts to explain the EU crisis might also be adapted to the crisis of Latin American regionalism.

• On the one hand one might differentiate between unidimensional or multidimensional crisis as the current EU crisis; or


• one might differentiate between endogenous or external shocks leading to crisis; and external and internal crisis.

Moreover, one might identify different types of disintegration: Horizontal disintegration, vertical disintegration and sectoral disintegration.


- **Horizontal disintegration** refers to the number of countries participating in regional projects.
- It is more difficult to adapt **vertical disintegration** to the Latin American context, because this dimension refers to the reduction of competences and powers of supranational organs.
  - In the case of Latin America – due to the intergovernmental and inter-presidential character of regional projects - it might be redesigned as **diminishing intergovernmental interactions** and a **weakening of administrative structures and linkages**.
- **Sectoral disintegration** refers to the number of issue / policy areas covered by regional projects.
• How to define a crisis of integration? Can the definitions developed in regard to the EU crisis “travel” to Latin America?

• Schimmelfennig (2017) defines a crisis in European integration
  • “as a decision-making-situation with a manifest threat and a perceived significant probability of disintegration.”

• And disintegration means
  • “a reduction in the existing level, scope, and membership of integration.”


• While developed for a European type of integration, it might also be used to analyze a crisis of intergovernmental regionalism in Latin America.

Critical integration theory

- European integration not as a single coherent and unified project but the outcome of competing hegemonic projects.

- Power contestation around economic and political ideas are at the heart of understanding integration.

- Interests as well as the mechanisms of interest articulation and legitimation are basically grounded at the domestic level; and when something changes at the domestic level(s) the integration projects may become affected.
• Critical integration theory might open new perspectives for comparing Latin American and European integration processes with a stronger focus on the domestic embeddedness of regional projects

“The plethora of regional and pluri- or minilateral trade agreements signed across the world over the last decade or so cannot disguise the fact that most regions in the world remain at best only very weakly politically integrated and regional organizations therefore cannot be relied upon to institutionalize and secure peaceful cooperation among their members. ‘Benevolent’ regional hegemons, of the kind that Germany long incarnated at least in an attenuated fashion in the EU, are notable for their scarcity … .” (360)

Crisis of regional leader(ship) = crisis of regional integration

“A polity is disintegrating when there is a weakening in boundary control and system-building, a decreasing congruence of boundaries and increasing permeability, as well as when there is diminishing enforcement of behaviourally conformity and declining behavioural conformity and loyalty to the polity and fellow actors.” (1149)

• Might also be adapted and applied to processes of regional disintegration in Latin America (Venezuelan crisis)

• “Partial exits” in Europe and Latin America
Differentiated disintegration

„The EU may thus well come to exhibit a stronger ‘variably-geometric’ pattern than hitherto. But this will likely be less the product of the process of differentiated integration that characterized the post-Cold war period than one of differentiated disintegration, whereby: individual member states leave the EU entirely, or withdraw, or are expelled from specific EU institutions; or some issue areas are – de jure or de facto – renationalized and/or the authority of supranational organs vis-à-vis national ones grows weaker.”

• Crisis of Latin American regionalism or crisis of UNASUR?

• Because of the competition and overlapping of regional organisations, it makes no sense to look at them in isolation, ‘thus neglecting the specific properties of an institutional architecture (that is, how different regional organisations are assembled together) and the impact that these properties have on regional order’.

• In the end, the whole architecture – that is, the combination and interaction of different regional organisations in Latin America – is more important than its parts – that is, individual regional organisations.

• Focusing on one isolated regional organisation might lead to inaccurate conclusions about the state of regional integration.

• Consequently, it makes more sense to discuss the entire regional architecture rather than to investigate separate regional organisations.
• Crisis of Latin American regionalism or crisis of UNASUR?

• Other organizations still active: Mercosur, Pacific Alliance

• Reconfiguration of Latin American regionalism as we also see a reconfiguration of European regionalism.
Thank you for your Attention

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Any questions?