

Differences between intergovernmentalism and constructivism regarding the eu poli...



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When considering these two theories in defining approaches to describe the European Union, we face the debate of agents versus structures. A constructivist approach means that it considers individual actors inside the structures in which they operate to have a significant impact on shaping their identity and behavior. Moreover, 'constructivism conceives of structures not only as material, but also social. Furthermore, these structures are not only constraints on behavior. Actors' environment has a constitutive effect on actors' identities on the basis of which they conceive their interests' (Sedelmeier, 2005). Clearly, constructivism then takes into account the social factor, the one ignored by rational theory of maximum utility. For the EU, this means that it is not only an economic environment, one based on a materialistic approach. In fact, it is a cultural and social environment which 'shapes actors identities and interests' (Sedelmeier, 2005). For constructivists the claim is that they study the integration of the European Union as a 'process' (Cini, 2007). For constructivists then the focus becomes the formation, origins and evolution of identities, behavior related to languages and its role in political discourse, the role of social institutions etc. When we talk about constructivists we should see how the behavior regarding evolution of economic units, political institutions etc. emerges not because of material differences emerging in the economy but because of the process of 'emerging European identities' (Cini, 2007) and the role social factors such as language, ideas and societal norms in these emerging identities.

The liberal intergovernmentalist (LI) approach is based on political bargaining of states between governments, as in the case of treaties and

reforms. In this approach, the power does not rest in social behavior or agents; in fact it is the political elite which has the power to improve interstate relations. The interaction then is between two forces; the member states and the EU Councils. In other words, " This generally involves a two-stage process of negotiation. First, governments must resolve the policy problems that confront them; taking decisions to that effect; and only after that do they try to reach agreement on institutional mechanisms which would allow them to implement those decisions" (Cini, 2007). As mentioned before, the political elite, meaning the ' governments' of the member states are the main actors and the EU remains a forum for bargaining (Akiba, Fukuda, 2003). This theory holds that ' only the member state governments have the autonomy and can design the institutional system of the EU' (Akiba, Fukuda, 2003). The limitations that this approach faces, especially when compared to constructivism is the fact that both theories slightly undermine the pace and the extent of the integration process and the autonomy that the EU has gained over the years in the sense that it has been increasingly ratifying treaties which have given more power to the Union.

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How do Multi-Level Governance understandings of the EU describe, and explain the advent of, the present EU political system?

When discussing the integration of the EU as an institution, the arguments between intergovernmentalists and constructivist, as well as supranationalist, federalist and confederalist approaches are somewhat diminished by the theory surrounding multi level governance of the EU; indeed, it has given way to the fact that the EU operates more as a 'single European Regime' or 'European polity' (Akiba, Fukuda, 2003). Multi level governance considers the role of the State in decision making as important, but not entire. In fact, 'decision making competencies are shared by actors at different levels rather than monopolized by national governments' (Hooghe, Marks, 2001). This of course means that the decision making rests with the supranational institutions- the European Parliament, European Commission and the European Court. These institutions have independent influence in policy making (Hooghe, Marks, 2001). The two other important factors which are taken into account by multi level governance are the collective decision making process; i. e. policies enforced across the EU without wholehearted from all the national states and the sharing of control and autonomy relating to domestic politics between national governments and supranational institutions. This obviously refers to the fact that politics at the international and domestic level are greatly interconnected, a theory on which the multi level governance model is based. One of the examples of multi level governance and the perceived limited autonomy of the nation state in the EU is displayed by the majority voting system in the EU Council

of Ministers. This voting can be on issues relating to internal trade, the environment, research policy (Hooghe, Marks, 2001).

So in relation to the definitions discussed above, how would a multi level governance system explain the EU of today, and secondly, why would such a system be supported considering that it is taking power away from national actors and placing it with bodies at a supranational level? The answer is to consider the other actors present in nation states who might on one hand affect policy making, actors such as pressure groups and interest groups. The Council of Ministers is only represented by governments, not other actors. This might be looked on as an advantage by national governments in policy enforcement. Secondly, the EU itself has huge arenas of policy making and regulation under its umbrella, a most important one being trade. The trade benefits that member states receive are a result of greater integration of the European market. The concept of multi level governance is parallel to that of integration but analyzed differently because it focuses more on the various territorial levels policy making has stretched over and how authority has shifted. There has been a drift of authority from the national to the European level which forces us to think of it as ' a political system across multiple levels including national and subnational arenas of action as well as the institutional environment of Brussels (Cini, 2007). Parallel to integration, we can see that the governance itself rests with multiple bodies of policy making and legislation, in the form of the evolution of the EU from a mere economic body to that of an organization consisting of its own Parliament, a Court (ECJ) and a Council of Ministers, all far reaching institutions that a single treaty establishing a European Coal and Steel Community.

The idea behind this argument rests in the framework with which Europeanization scholars define the process of integration and the institutional changes taking place in the EU. The focus has shifted from thesis defining the framework to closely analyze the causal relationship surrounding the procedural changes, for instance, that of EU's domestic impact. It might be termed as a 'second generation' of European studies (Gualini, 2004). The stress however, has recently shifted from policy at the international level to the way in which integration has 'affected national governments' (Archer, 2008). The rationale behind this shift is the question that how European integration has affected 'domestic administrative practices and structures' (Archer, 2008). This is more of a 'top-down' approach toward Europeanization (Borzel, Risse, 2003). It is necessary to see the way Europeanization has affected domestic policies and institutions because it helps in understanding the integration process better because according to one theory, policies enacted by the European Union must create some 'misfit' in the administrative policies on a domestic level and this is one reason why change or adaptation takes place on the domestic level (Borzel, Risse, 2003). This opinion is supported by 'rational choice institutionalism', simple that the process of change is initiated by greater distribution of power among the domestic administrative powers because interest groups might find opportunities in EU policies which could provide them with ways to pursue their own interests, if only they recognize such opportunities. Secondly, it also suggests that 'Europeanization leads to domestic change through a differential empowerment of actors resulting from a redistribution of resources at the domestic level' (Borzel, Risse, 2003). The distribution of power is one reason why theorists have shifted from analyzing

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Europeanization in theory only, but in fact, have concentrated in recent times to see what extent change at the domestic level has been brought around by the process of Europeanization.

The second way in which domestic change has been analyzed is through the lens of the constructivist perspective or 'logic of appropriateness'. In this case, European policies and norms affect domestic processes by exerting 'adaptational pressures' (Borzel, Risse, 2003) through change agents and other informal actors in the political processes. This is also supported by the collective learning process and connects more with the opinion of how new identities are formed through collective learning and social change.

Essentially it is important to note that Europeanization as a policy offers new standards of policy to be implemented on the domestic level through political processes of implementation which in turn affects 'polity' which affects domestic-level institutions, e. g. judiciary, public institutions, economic institutes etc. As one analyst puts it, 'The issue is no longer whether Europe matters but how it matters, to what degree, in what direction, at what pace, and at what point of time' (Borzel, Risse, 2003). This is the reason through which the European Union, less as a policy and more as an institute of political change at the domestic level, is studied to understand the causal mechanisms of change.

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Why has the EU relied so much on economic integration to deepen the integration process as a whole?

In 1951 the Treaty of Paris established the European Coal and Steel Community, one of the first formal steps taken toward European integration. Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister at that time was of the opinion that a united Europe was essential for peace in the region. The reason why EU has relied so much on economic integration depends mostly on the objectives of integration. After a war torn Europe, the idea was to rebuild Europe and also to defend against a future war which would serve as a destabilizing and destructing force for all of Europe. Economic integration was, and is, a rationale to serve a higher purpose, which is both economic and political (Molle, 2006). The economic integration would mean that the states would rather serve as a collective economic entity than an individual one. The benefits of this are increasing chances of peace and security in the reason because economies are interdependent. Greater dependence on each other economically means that chances of armed conflict between them would be minimal (Molle, 2006). The framework for the European Union can be said to have laid down when the Marshall Plan was introduced with the objective of the reconstruction of Western Europe. The introduction of the thought of a unified European Steel production body thus was seen by both Schuman and Monnet as a realistic way in which conflict could be avoided. In Schuman's word, " the solidarity in the production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely

unthinkable but materially impossible" (Jovanovic, 2005). In other words, the objective of peace is much more easily obtained when economies are linked together.

Another important factor which proved once again the success of economic integration, relatively to integration progress in other areas, was the abolishment of all internal tariffs. This took place approximately a year and half before the Treaty of Rome was ratified (Jovanovic, 2005). The result was economic benefits which ranged over a variety of industries, exports and imports and was the main attractive feature which caused Britain to apply for membership to the EC. Economy, it was seen, was a core feature which resulted in expansion of the EU and caused potential member states to right their situations, to improve their economic performance to be eligible to be apart of the EU. The arguments which have been used by pro-integration forces have therefore been focusing on the benefits obtained from economic integration, namely, increase in welfare by an increase in GDP per capita. A common economic ground formed on the basis of integration gives way to common policy ideals or support of policies which would strengthen, not weaken, the economic integration and vice versa.

The Treaty of Lisbon came into effect as a result of the global financial crisis and what it meant for the economy of the EU as a whole. The purpose was to control the situation financially inside the EU markets to promote financial stability and to offer security against unstable financial markets in whatever way possible. Since the monetary and financial markets of the EU are connected through means of a common currency, i. e. the Euro, financial crisis has the power to economically destabilize the entire region and there <https://assignbuster.com/differences-between-intergovernmentalism-and-constructivism-regarding-the-eu-politics-essay/>

should be safeguards to minimize this threat. As a result, a European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and a European Stability Mechanism (ESM) has been set up to provide financial aid packages to countries severely affected by the financial crisis. For changes introduced in the European political sphere, the Lisbon Treaty takes into account the difference between delegated and executive acts, a distinction which was not considered by previous Treaties (Ponzano, 2008). Overall, this change means that the European Parliament has been granted a much stronger role than before ' whereby the Commission takes responsibility for delegated acts under the direct control of the European Parliament and the Council, giving each of the possibility of opposing the measure or revoking the delegation (Griller, Ziller, 2008). The second important political change the Treaty brings about is the double majority voting in the Qualified Majority Voting System in the European Council. The European Council also gains the status of a full European Union institution. The result of course, shows that the Lisbon Treaty granted more powers to the European Parliament, followed by the European Council.

The Treaty of Lisbon has its roots in the failed ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. Establishing a Constitution for Europe has been a long-term shadow over European integration, a step that not many of the member states have been willing to take. Some questions put forth by Piris show considerable insight into the Lisbon Treaty and the circumstances surrounding it. For instance, is the Lisbon a ' mere repackaging' of the ' Constitution of Europe' (Piris, 2010)? Indeed the Lisbon Treaty has granted powers to the Parliament, the Court of Justice and the Commission to ensure

greater balance of power in the EU. Secondly, the European Parliament, along with the national Parliaments of member states have been given the 'possibility of intervening directly in the EU legislative process' (Piris, 2010). It definitely provides national Parliaments enough power to affect legislative process in the EU. A major difference however, between the Lisbon Treaty and the Constitutional treaty is the abandonment of transforming the EU into a federal body. That objective, according to Piris, has been fully deserted to be replaced by Euro-sceptic elements which to some extent limit the power of the EU.