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Sociology and the European Union

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Abstract

In the 1950s and 1960s, the first scholars who studied the post-war institutions that would develop into the EU were influenced by the dominant social science paradigm of their times and sociologists such as Talcott Parsons. They were interested in European integration, the complex process whereby supranational political institutions would generate strong cross-border economic cooperation, thus leading to social interactions between people in the member states and creating new allegiances towards a new political centre and a sense of shared identity beyond the nation-state. Sociologists then disappeared from the field until the 1990s for reasons that we will examine. The core of the chapter then focuses on the "return" of a research agenda inspired by major sociological traditions. "Bringing sociology back in" first meant focusing on the social bases of political integration at a time on the one hand and the effects (or lack thereof) of EU rules. This agenda has developed as many observed the end of the permissive consensus underpinning the European project, what Neil Fligstein labelled the "Euroclash". Beyond extending the realm of EU studies beyond the study of EU institutions and laws, sociologists brought a number of theoretical perspectives and tools of empirical analysis. There are thus sociologies of the EU and the chapter will provide examples of this diversity.

Six keywords

Sociology ; European Union ; Mainstreaming ; EU studies ; Political sociology; Historical sociology

In his classic exposition of the principles of his new discipline, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim emphasized that any truly scientific study requires the application of a specific method to a specific object (Durkheim 2001 [1895]). This implies, first, to clearly define the phenomena under scrutiny by distinguishing them from others; this also suggests that sociological investigation, to be scientific, needs to stay clear of other types of discourses, be they political, or other scientific approaches to the same phenomenon.

Accordingly, the use of rigorous sociological methods to investigate the social transformations brought about by the emergence of the European Union (EU) constitutes the core of the scientific subfield known as 'sociology of the EU'. It revolves around concepts such as European identity, transnational fields, Europeanization or social integration. The sociology of the EU is practiced by a number of professionals using qualitative or quantitative methods, writing in journals and book series specializing in EU studies as well as sociology, and it is routinely taught in academic curricula introducing to European integration and its politics.

In both regards, however, the sociology of the EU faces dilemmas. The aim of this chapter is to offer a – necessarily selective – overview of the achievements of sociological studies of the EU in facing these dilemmas, as well as to point at some avenues where it can be developed by future research. We will mostly focus on empirical sociology, based on qualitative or quantitative studies, rather than on a social theory which, given its broad ambition, exceeds the field of EU studies strictly speaking (Outhwaite 2022; G. Delanty 1998). The chapter first presents the historical development of the sociology of the EU, and the early debates it faced. Then, it delves into the main issues with which sociologists of the EU are busy today, and reflects on the new directions the discipline has been following in recent years.

WHAT IS THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE EU?

On the one hand, the very *object* of the sociology of the EU remains questionable: Is it about the slow formation of a 'European society' whose boundaries and very existence remain bitterly disputed – or is it mostly concerned with an institutional process, the organization of that society by a set of relatively stabilized institutions – specifically here, that of the EU? Each process raises distinct questions – for instance, do members of this emerging society actually share an identity, and if so how is it (re)produced? Or, how do transnational elites manage to use the supranational institutions in order to achieve certain goals? In this chapter, we will focus on sociological studies directly approaching the construction of European political, economic and legal institutions. In this perspective, the *sociology of the European Union* is concerned with the study of the social processes linked to European integration, and more precisely, to the construction of the European Communities (EC) and later the EU.

However, both dimensions and processes can hardly be completely separated: The interactions between the social changes at work in European societies and the building of new institutions also beg for clarifications. For instance, are these institutions the mere reflection of a solidifying pre-existing social order, or do they trigger the development of such an order? That is, what is the relation of social integration and of political integration? Of course, sociologists have long faced similarly intricate issues in analysing the social processes at work within nation-states. But attempting to equate the sociology of the EU and the sociology of national societies might well be methodologically and theoretically problematic, too.

Indeed, on the other hand, the *methodological and theoretical apparatus* specifically defining the 'jurisdiction' (Abbott 1988) of the sociology of the EU as a scientific discipline remains contested. This is not only because of the general situation of sociology – that is, the entanglement of sociologists with their object of study – but also because the study of an object reaching beyond national boundaries confronts different national traditions. Each carries with it a distinct representation of what it means to practice sociology for sociology has

professionalized along different national lines. It results in a diversity of approaches to the EU by national sociologists – from wide-ranging conceptualizations dear to social theory, to in-depth qualitative studies, through quantitative researches bringing together an immense amount of data. As a consequence, the sociology of the EU often overlaps with cognate disciplines, in particular political science. Thus, one has to pay attention to these different, and at times conflicting, national disciplinary practices.

But this is only part of the issue. It should also be clear that applying concepts developed to account for national societies is normatively loaded, as it inadvertently prescribes a familiar horizon to European integration – eventually bound to turn into something similar to a nation-state. This certainly reflects the entanglement of European studies with the political construction of Europe (Rosamond 2016). More generally, though, it might well be that the concepts and methods applied to the study of the EU are 'hopelessly confused by borrowing the conceptual vocabulary of the nation-state' (Delanty 1998, 106) – that is, that the 'methodological nationalism' built-into most of the social sciences leads to misrepresenting the actual processes unfolding in the EU (Beck 2014). This is not to say that the sociology of the EU should ignore national sociologies and instead seek salvation by borrowing from 'globalization studies'. Rather, this means that the concepts and methods it uses need a thorough examination before they can be meaningfully put to work. To that aim, a short historical detour will prove useful.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Sociological studies have accompanied European integration, as well as its uncertainties and crises. The formal beginnings of the European Communities (EC) in the 1950s prompted dedicated sociological research on the construction of Europe. It benefited from the growing institutionalization of sociology in universities (Calhoun 2007; Ruegg 2011, 375–86). Furthermore, in the post-war context, studies of European integration were also shaped by political motivations (Rosamond 2016; Canihac 2020): Understanding Europeans and their endless struggles for power – as well as the way to overcome them. In this context, two approaches stood out during the early years: Transactionalism and neo-functionalism. Both regarded the first Communities as extraordinary attempts to consciously build a new type of supranational polity. But, in line with the functionalist theory developed notably by Talcott Parsons, both sought to analyze the EC as social systems. In particular, they set out to sociologically understand the process of 'integration' allegedly taking place in Europe.

Transactionalism was mostly developed from the late 1950s around Karl Deutsch. An eclectic scholar, he tried to move beyond the study of political institutions only. To that aim, he proposed to start from the distinction between 'community' and 'society' inherited from the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. While society is united by division of labour and mutual interest, a community is a function of the communication taking place between its members: It is not so much a certain type of institutional organization, as 'a group of persons united by their ability to exchange information' (Deutsch 1951, 243; 1967). Accordingly, he submitted that these various 'transactions', i.e. communications, are key in understanding the construction of national, as well as supranational, communities. He hypothesized that an intensification of communications would lead to the construction of shared values, habits and, eventually, a common 'way of life' (Deutsch 1957). In turn, this may result in a shift of 'loyalties' towards the new community. From this perspective, integration is the social process of constructing a 'sense of community' among the members of the integrated units.

Neofunctionalism, arguably the most famous early approach to European integration, elaborated on these ideas while slightly changing their empirical focus (see Saurugger's chapter). It was initially theorized by Ernst B. Haas, a German-born scholar emigrated to the

USA, whose book on the ECSC published in 1958 was to become a classic (Haas 1958). For E. Haas, too, integration was both an institutional and a social process: 'Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states' (Haas 1958, 16). This is to say that the Communities are institutional systems following an expansive logic. The concept capturing this logic is the famous 'spill-over', i.e. the mechanism by which institutional integration in a limited area requires an extension to neighbouring areas by the force of practical and economic necessities set in motion by the actors. When looking at the EC as social systems, on the other hand, E. Haas proposed to focus less on individuals in general, and more on the activity of certain groups – the political, economic and social elites. These groups were expected to redirect their 'allegiances' towards the new centre being built, and thus to increasingly shift the focus of political action from national polities to the new European organizations. It is thus at the intersection of the institutional dynamics of overcoming the state and the social dynamics of recomposing national communities that neo-functionalism located the sociological originality of the first European Communities.

In spite of these early developments, sociological studies of the European Communities would stall from the late 1960s. This relative *eclipse* was driven by multiple factors. Changes in the main paradigms in the social sciences led to the domination of modes of explanation less sensitive to issues of community-building, shifting loyalties and socialization (Guiraudon and Favell 2011, 6); at the same time, the institutional study of the European Communities started to be taken over by the small but dynamic field of Community law, which remained largely impervious to sociology (Vauchez 2015). Besides, sociologically-oriented researchers experienced an 'existential crisis', as their theories seemed to be refuted by the political developments of European integration. K. Deutsch observed early on that it was hardly possible to empirically confirm the emergence of a true European 'community' (Deutsch 1963). Most importantly, the 'empty chair crisis' – when the French President de Gaulle stopped French participation in the institutions of the Community – seemed to confirm the 'obstinate' force of nationstates (Hoffmann 1966). Neofunctionalists thus questioned their own ideas, and E. Haas himself wrote about the 'obsolescence' of his theory in the mid-1970s (Haas 1975).

The preparation and signing of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), however, brought the European Communities, now EU, back on the agenda of sociology. Indeed, the Maastricht reforms not only marked a significant extension of EU competences. It was also meant to complement the economic achievements of European integration by fostering the development of a 'citizens' Europe': Placing concepts such as citizenship, legitimacy or identity centre stage, the heated debates surrounding its ratification raised questions familiar to sociologists (Trenz 2016, 6). Both dimensions of the 'Maastricht moment' triggered numerous studies seeking to illuminate the *Europeanization* of the categories and practices usually attached to nation-states (Caporaso, Cowles, and Risse 2001; C. Radaelli 2004). This new research, that unfolded throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, schematically followed three main paths (for a slightly different presentation, Guiraudon and Favell 2011).

The first one tended to apprehend the EU as a special type of international organization (IO). Much work here attempted to account for the way the EU is governed. Updating neofunctionalist insights, the institutionalization of distinct European 'social fields' was carefully scrutinized (Fligstein and Stone Sweet 2002). But in line with the 'constructivist turn' in the study of IOs, many researchers displaced the focus away from formal institutions and legal rules. Instead, the 'social construction of Europe' (Christiansen, Jorgensen, and Wiener 2001) was explored through the emergence of *shared norms, ideas and strategies* (Parsons 2003; McNamara 1998). This led to empirical studies of the actors populating EU institutions, such as MEPs (Abélès 1993) and European Commissioners (Ross 1995; Smith 2004), or of

policy sectors usually closely related to national sovereignty, such as defence or immigration (Guiraudon 2003; Mérand 2008a).
Crucially, on the other hand, the increase of available data, for instance the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey, also opened a path to analyse the EU from the vantage point of its *citizens*. It led to discussing the production of a European public sphere (Koopmans and Erbe 2004), of European social movements (Imig and Tarrow 2001), or of a European identity driven by the institutional development of the EU, in particular the new European citizenship (Risse 2003; Duchesne and Frognier 1998; Inglehart 1977). Finally, others still used the tools of comparative sociology to move the inquiry from the EU itself, in order to explore its differentiated *interactions with national societies*. It was, for instance, illustrated by ambitious comparative social histories of Europe (Kaelble 2011; Crouch 1999) or by studies of everyday practices transformed by European integration, such as transnational mobility (Favell 2008a; Mau and Mewes 2012).
While echoing some older concerns of transactionalism and neofunctionalism, these works significantly broadened the scope of sociological research on the EU. They contributed to 'normalizing' it by demonstrating that the EU could be apprehended with the usual concepts and methods of sociology. However, they largely failed to approach it as an object deserving interest in itself: Instead, it was analysed either as a (special) case of IO, or as a 'secondary variable' explaining other processes. It is only slowly, in the wake of the intense controversies that surrounded the failure of the projected European constitutional treaty (2005), that the process of *'mainstreaming sociology'* in EU studies (Saurugger and Mérand 2010), that is, of treating it as a standard object of sociology, was further taken up. This still ongoing process means that the sociology of the EU is now confronted with standard debates about sociological theories and methods; conversely, it also led to the fruitful re-evaluation of general issues of sociology through the lenses of the EU.

SOCIOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION TO EU STUDIES

Even though sociological approaches have gained importance over the last decade in EU studies, students or researchers will at some point face the question of disciplinary boundaries: What place is there actually for sociology in 'EU studies'? Indeed, more than ten years after Favell and Guiraudon's (2009) agenda for a sociology of the EU, the field remains dominated by integration theories (see Saurugger's chapter) and neo-institutionalist approaches (see Bulmer's chapter). Dialoguing with this literature still is one of the big challenges for sociologists of the EU. In this part, we try to contribute to this dialogue by highlighting the new theoretical and methodological paths opened by sociology for studying the EU.

Sociology of the EU and European integration theories

EU studies gained autonomy as a disciplinary field through the *a posteriori* rebuilding of theoretical debate between functionalists and intergovernmentalists to explain European integration (Rosamond 2016). The 1990s-2000s have thus seen the multiplication of 'integration theories', still discussed, developed and updated today (see for example Schmidt 2018). Sociology remained rather at the margins of the field (Ross 2011), diverging from integration theories on at least three main aspects. First of all, they share the same object but differ in their purpose. One of the 'big questions' integration theories try to answer is 'who got the power' between the intergovernmental, supranational and parliamentarian institutions of the EU as *sui generis* object. On the other hand, the objective of sociology is to understand objects such as public policies, identities, or power struggles through the EU as a *case* among others.

It thus aims to understand the broader social dynamics the EU is embedded in (Georgakakis 2009).
Second, sociologists adopt an actor-based rather than institutions-based approach (Saurugger 2008; 2020). EU integration scholars tend to reify EU institutions to understand the distribution of formal powers and to a lesser extent informal powers between them, as an explanation for integration dynamics. Sociology of the EU, where constructivist structuralism (Kauppi 2018) tends to dominate, is on the other hand more interested in both the *internal* and the more *structural* power struggles. The first means opening those 'institutional black boxes' and looking at agency within and between the EU institutions and their representatives. The second implies to analyze actors by replacing them in larger social structures, such as education (Michon 2019) or religion (Foret 2015) The attention paid to structures depends on one's epistemological posture. That being said, if not all sociologists are structuralists, they all share an interest for social relations. By doing so, they often offer nuanced and refined understanding that not only contribute to the analysis of processes such as institutionalization, professionalization or politicization, but also more indirectly of where power lies within the European space. In doing so, they often reject the hypothesis that power can be assigned to monolithic institutions (Smith 2010).
The third divergence lies in the theoretical ambitions of sociological approaches. Integration theories aim at producing a general theory of European integration, prioritizing theoretical discussions and deductive reasoning. On the contrary, sociologists value empirical-based analysis and more inductive or abductive reasonings. Thus, a contribution of sociology to EU studies is bringing in 'new' methods. Micro-sociology for instance brought fieldwork into the picture (Adler-Nissen 2016). Sociologists study their objects notably by interacting with them, through semi and unstructured interviews, as well as participant and non-participant observations (see below for examples). Macro-sociology also contributed greatly to the renewal of EU studies by bringing in tried-and-tested methods to explore new dimensions of EU integration. For example, it opened a research agenda on European social classes through the use of aggregated data-basis (Dìez Medrano 2011; Lebaron and Blavier 2017).
These rather fundamental divides often lead to a mutual disdain between scholars sharing the same object, even though sociology of the EU progressively gained space in EU studies. For example, it is now more common to find dedicated chapters to sociological approaches in handbooks on EU studies (for example, see Jones and Menon 2012; Brack and Gürkan 2020; this handbook).

Sociology of the EU and neo-institutionnalism(s)

Among the calls for more sociological approaches within EU studies that flourished in the late 2000s, Jenson and Mérand (2010, 75) defended the stimulating stand that sociology of the EU actually shares common roots with (neo-)institutionalism, especially its historical and constructivist variations, that tend to dominate EU studies since the mid-1980s. They argue that bridges can be built between the two literatures. The common ground between institutionalism(s) and sociological approaches lies in a shared acknowledgement of the importance of *actors*' *strategies, ideas, identities, norms* and *interests*. The main difference then is that where institutionalism(s) treat them as separate independent variables, sociology doesn't distinguish between them (Jenson and Mérand 2010). Indeed, institutionalists distinguish between a logic of consequences (interest-driven) and a logic of appropriateness (idea-driven), where sociologists consider them to be interwind (Mérand 2008b; Jenson and Mérand 2010). Interestingly, this debate was taken a step further in another close but distinct field: international relations (IR). For instance, Samuel B.H. Faure and Christian Lequesne (2017) critically

discussed the relevance of distinguishing a third logic, that is "of practicality" (Pouliot 2008) - creating an analytical separation between actors' interests, ideas and practices.
Following this critical perspective that first arouse in IR (Bigo 2011), Didier Georgakakis (2021) underlined how political sociology, and especially the classical *field theory* (Bourdieu 2022), applied to the EU, provides a theoretical framework that encompasses all the preoccupations of the different variants of institutionalism. Indeed, like historical neo-institutionalism, it pays particular attention to the historical patterns that structured the field; like constructivist neo-institutionalism, it looks at the norms that sustain actors' representations; like rational neo-institutionalism, it seeks to objectify the resources that drive actors' strategies; and finally, like discursive neo-institutionalism (V. Schmidt 2008; Crespy 2010), it includes actors' stances in the analysis. Further, applying the concept of field to the EU, both nourishes the debates around its heuristic value, and contributes to EU studies by covering understudied actors of EU integration (Kauppi 2018). For instance, Antoine Vauchez's (2015) analysis of the EU legal and judicial arena as a 'weak field' both offers a take on how to apply field theory to a transnational object, and highlights the key role of lawyers in the building of the European community. Interestingly, US-based sociologists Doug McAdam et Niel Fligstein (2015) took a side-step from Bourdieu's understanding of the concept. They suggest that social life is composed of 'strategic action fields', where actors develop specific 'social skills'. The difference lies in the fact that power relations are not part of the construction of their object, as such, they are closer to constructivist neo-institutionalism (Jenson and Mérand 2010).

EU STUDIES' CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIOLOGY

The 'mainstreaming' of sociology not only brought traditional sociological debates about concepts and methods back in EU studies. It also produced works that, while empirically analysing the EU, contributed in their own right to more general sociological debates. Here, we briefly illustrate some of these contributions to the debates about historical sociology; identity; elites; and public policies.

Historical sociology

One area in which the study of European integration has lent insights of major sociological interest is historical sociology. *Historical sociology* is concerned with the long-term historical social processes that have shaped the present – e.g. at the macro level, state formation and nation building, or, at the micro level, behavioural norms of politeness and citizenship (Gerard Delanty and Isin 2003). Similarly, a number of works (especially in the French-speaking tradition of '*socio-histoire'*) have relied on in-depth analyses of shorter episodes of European integration to bring to light the social and historical processes at work in the EU (Déloye 2006; Cohen 2007).Applying socio-historical lenses to the study of the EU has both contributed to normalizing the EU, and has allowed to shed new light on the processes of polity-formation (McNamara 2010; Vauchez 2015; S. Faure 2019). For instance, following early attempts by sociologists (Elias 1991; Marks 1997) or historians (Milward 1992), Stefano Bartolini has forcefully argued that it represents the sixth major transformation of European polities since the 16th century (following state building, capitalist development, nation building, democratisation, and the emergence of the welfare-state). However, as an essentially economic project, the EU has not been built through the usual processes of monopolization of legitimate violence and cultural homogenization: It is a 'disjointed' polity in which economic, military or cultural boundaries do not overlap (Bartolini 2005). By showing how it departs from to the standard account of nation-state building, this thus allows to conceptualize more systematically, in a non-state-centric manner, the general processes at work in the building of a polity .

Identity and citizenship

More recently, other studies have sought to complement this perspective by exploring the micro-foundations of such macro processes. This has for instance been applied to the (non-) emergence of a shared feeling of belonging about European citizenship, and to the issues it raises for the legitimacy of the EU (Delmotte, Mercenier, and Van Ingelgom 2017), or to the possibility of an EU-wide sense of solidarity in relation to social policies (Börner and Eigmüller 2015). Moreover, EU-building opens new avenues to study the effect of increased transnational mobility on identities (Favell 2008b), which leads to new multi-layered identities and, eventually, social conflicts (Fligstein 2009). In this perspective, Kristine Mitchell (2015) has demonstrated the existence of an "Erasmus effect" positively impacting the European identification of its participants. European integration also constitutes an opportunity to conduct transnational qualitative inquiries on citizens' attitudes toward a shared object, the EU (Gaxie et al. 2011). Thus, questioning identities and citizenship in relation to the EU also allows to cast a new light on preexisting (national, local) groups (see Van Ingelgom's chapter). For instance, Juan Dìez Medrano (2010) showed how differentiated European integration from one member state to another can be explained by national histories.

Sociology of (EU) elites

The EU as a sociological object is a great 'laboratory' for those interested in studying 'elites' in a broad sense. Indeed, the EU and its myriad of actors constitute a timely case to study the emergence of *transnational elites*. Sociology of the EU notably participated in the understanding of the constitution and evolution of bureaucratic and political elites *beyond* states' structures. In that sense, it takes up with Ernst Haas early works on elites as social groups, leaving aside the neofunctionalist assumption of a shift of loyalty. It points out both common trends and peculiarities, testing state sociology concepts by applying them to the EU. For example, following Yves Dezalay's work on global elites, Antoine Vauchez and Lola Avril thoroughly documented the early formation of a group of European lawyers (Vauchez 2008; Avril 2020a), showing how the constitution of an elite is deeply intertwined with policy- and polity-building. In a different vein, Willy Beauvallet and Sébastien Michon (2010) studied the *socialization* of eurodeputies and demonstrated the unstable nature of the European Parliament's institutionalization. Further exploring the 'field of Eurocracy' through the study of EU *bureaucrats* (Georgakakis and Rowell 2013), Didier Georgakakis (2017) highlighted how new public management overflowed national state administrations and affected the European commission. In her study of diplomats, Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014) pointed to the struggle for *symbolic power* between state and European diplomatic corpses, underlining the tensions between national and transnational elites. Recent works have paid special attention to the *practices* (Adler-Nissen 2016) of the latter within the institutions, showing how they concretely participate in the building of non-state polity. For instance, Laura Landorff (2019) has looked at the *informal practices* of parliamentary actors. Andy Smith (2019) and Frédéric Mérand (2021) have both highlighted the heuristic value of the concept of *political work* to study the policy and polity making practices of political elites. Aside from the usual suspects, sociologists have also paid attention to rather unexpected actors within EU politics, such as football players (Gasparini and Heidmann 2012), writers (Bonnamy 2017), wine producers (Smith, Maillard, and Costa 2007) or even surfers (Weisbein 2015). As such, the sociology of the EU paid great attention to lobbying practices and actors (Morival 2019; Beauvallet, Robert, and Roullaud 2021), extending the scope of the sociology of elites, and building bridges with the sociology of mobilization (Balme, Chabanet, and Wright 2002).

Sociology of (EU) public action

Sociology of public action also paid greater attention to the development of European public policies (Balme and Smith 2015). One of its entry points had been the conceptualization of a *Europeanization* of public policies process (Radaelli 2002), which both contributed to public policies analysis and theories of integration (see Bartenstein and Wessels' chapter). Studying European public policies participates in the understanding of the transfer of powers among sovereign states, especially through cases extremely closely related to core state powers, such as defence policy (Irondelle 2003; Hoeffler and Faure 2015; Faure 2016) or immigration policy (Guiraudon 2003). The EU also constitutes an interesting case for the sociology of instruments of public policy (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2005). For example, through her analysis of the EU gender equality policy, Sophie Jacquot (2010) shows how *gender mainstreaming* constitutes a *tool* of public action, along with others such as benchmarking and the open method of coordination (Bruno, Jacquot, and Mandin 2006). In her work on the Schengen visas policy, Juliette Dupont (2022) showed how short-term visas can play both as a security *and* a marketing tool, going beyond border control. Analysis of European public policies contributed greatly to the literature studying regulation policies and more generally State-Market relations and the intertwining of polity- and market-building. Considering the EU as a regulatory state (Avril 2020b), it notably pointed to the inner tensions between liberalism and protectionism that irrigate European industrial public policies, from defence (Hoeffler 2012) to agri-food (Smith 2021). Finally, recent works in sociology of the EU applied a programmatic action framework (Hassenteufel and Genieys 2021) to EU public policy cases, as well as in a comparative perspective between member states bridging further sociology of elites and sociology of public action (Genieys and Joana 2015; S. B. H. Faure 2020). As such, this emerging literature contributes to a double dynamic of mainstreaming of sociology in EU studies and to EU as an timely case for sociologists.

CONCLUSION

Today, sociology constitutes one of the most fruitful and dynamic disciplinary approach to the EU. This is the result of a long process of 'mainstreaming' sociology in EU studies – that is, of turning it into a normal way of studying the EU. Conversely, this has produced insights of interest for sociologists more generally, especially for those studying identity, elites, state formation and public action. It also has proven to be a timely case for sociological history. This process of normalization is still ongoing, though, on at least three respects.

First, the sociology of the EU has hardly touched on some traditional areas of sociology. For instance, questions and methods of the old field of sociology of knowledge have only recently been applied to the EU (Adler-Nissen and Kropp 2017). Likewise, despite isolated research in the 1990s, such as George Ross's (1995) work on the Delors Commission, ethnographic methods remained rather unexplored territory. In this regard, following previous works such as Kathleen McNamara's work (2015) on the role of everyday social practices in EU-building, Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2016) called for a 'practice turn' in EU studies. She seems to have been heard both by experienced and young researchers that recently conducted ethnographic fieldwork in various EU spaces such as the European Commission (Mérand 2021a), far-right groups within the European Parliament (Delaine 2021) or the College of Europe (Behar 2021).

Second, the EU itself is an evolving object. Sociological studies have to integrate this inherent historical dimension to specify how, exactly, they can contribute to sociology at large. The numerous crises of European integration, the study of the 'resistances' it triggers (Crespy and Verschueren 2009; Hamm 2022), as well as the prospects of 'disintegration' or

of‘differentiated integration’ they bring about, have become major objects of study for sociologists of the EU, opening new paths for further research.
Finally, the debates on the place of sociology in EU studies seem to have set aside its pluralistic dimension, with its own internal debates and controversies (Weisbein 2011). While sociology of the EU tend to be dominated by approaches inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s and Norbert Elias’ fields and configurations’ theories, other major authors such as Bruno Latour or Luc Boltanski remain at the margins. For instance, one can wonder why, whereas pragmatic sociology has proven heuristic to study national public policies (Zittoun 2013; Zittoun and Chailleux 2021), ten years after Julien Weisbein’s call (2011), it remains anecdotic when studying the EU. It opens new paths for mainstreaming of sociology in EU studies : bringing long going ontological and epistemological controversies of the first into the latter.

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