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Introduction

Teaching and Learning 'Europe' in 'the Periphery': Disciplinary, Educational and Cognitive Boundaries of European Studies

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Abstract

This introductory article argues that there is a need to introduce a renewed approach to the field of European Studies which takes into account various perspectives from the 'periphery' to unfold complexities and challenges of teaching and learning 'Europe' away from the immediate geographical and conceptual focus of the European studies. By elaborating on the notion of 'periphery' and exploring how European Studies resonate beyond 'the centre', we aim to explore the complexities and challenges of European Studies in its relationality of the broader processes such as EU accession and global university education. This endeavour will contribute to the ongoing disciplinary debate on the future of European Studies as well as the introduction of new methods of teaching and knowledge production by presenting alternative narratives on the challenges of European integration and Europeanisation in the 'periphery'.

Keywords

Periphery; European Studies; De-centring; Teaching and learning Europe; Curriculum; EU accession

DE-CENTERING THE TEACHING "EUROPE"

Research and teaching on the European Union and the European integration process has been a largely Eurocentric exercise. While this may seem hardly surprising, it has significant and problematic consequences. Within the EU, the disciplinary navel-gazing of European Studies has led to a lack of critical perspectives, a linkage of policy advice and analysis, and a bias towards the existing modes of EU governance. Outside the EU, and specifically in the immediate neighbourhood, EU scholarship has been dominated by research and material produced within the EU, reinforcing dependency structures and the model that European integration has set. Alternatively, those critical of the EU, rather than constructively engaging with European governance, often tended to be drawn too quickly into simplistic discourses of power politics and imperialism, covering up rather than illuminating the nuanced and differentiated way in which the EU and European integration have been part of a postcolonial predicament.

Much of this has been tied to an unreflective belief in the idea of normative power Europe (Manners 2002), which all too often has led to a *"mission civilisatrice"* (Nicolaidis, 2015). European integration has been taught to promote the EU and its historical development, as a way that others should follow. In particular in the EU near abroad, future elites were to be "socialised" into EU institutions and procedures, to be "prepared" for future membership. In the context, "Europe" and the EU have often been equated. This left little room for critical engagement, for local perspectives, or for a dialogue between different visions of integration and trans- or supranational forms of governance.

To some extent, EU institutions have realised the deficiencies of such an approach and have thus sponsored a number of projects to investigate how the EU is seen from outside. However, the aim of these projects was not so much to engage in dialogue than to improve the EU's standing and thus ultimately an exercise in the context of public diplomacy, even though the research as such has often taken a more critical stance.

What is missing for the time being is a critical assessment of how "Europe" is taught in the EU neighbourhood, i.e. in those spaces that are often represented as the "periphery" or as "liminal", and how this "periphery" is constructed in this context. This is thus the main aim of this Special Issue. In the following, we first set out in more detail the context and challenges of teaching Europe in the "periphery", before outlining the core questions that we would like to address. We end with an overview of the contributions to this special issue and an overall assessment of their findings.

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Teaching never takes place in a vacuum and is always subject to a range of discursive, societal and political influences. This is all the truer in relation to teaching processes and institutions that are social and political in their very nature. A such, European Studies is a discipline which is 'always already there and still in formation' (Calhoun 2003). Yet the process of its continuous formation needs to be scrutinised more than they have been done in the past.

A first influential factor in the development of European Studies is the being "always already there" – the traditions of thought existing within the discipline, the concepts that have been established, the works that are seen as canonical. These definitions of core concepts, theories and publications give meaning to a "discipline" – they have a disciplining force. Yet they also instil and reproduce biases, power structures, and marginalisation. Analysing the teaching of European Studies thus needs to investigate the core concepts and theories taught, the textbooks used, and ways in which these reproduce existing power structures.

Second, teaching “Europe” is always shaped by political realities. The structural differences and divergent trends within European integration, frequently described as a fracture along North-South, East-West or centre-periphery lines, thus create a challenge to teaching and learning European integration in diverse settings which are at different points of the integration process. The picture gets more complicated when it comes to teaching European Studies in “the periphery” where linkages to Europe and the EU in particular are not yet settled and remain contested, making European integration even more of a moving target than it is anyway. In membership candidate countries, European Studies faces the danger of being defined by the problem of how the country in question is doing with regard to the EU accession rather than an autonomous scientific discipline.

Third, teaching (as much as research) takes place within structures of research and education. The relevance of the centre-periphery framework to education has generically been used to analyse the relationship between universities in industrialised countries and those in the Third World as well as universities within nations (Galtung 1971, Altbach 1981; 1998). In this framework, universities in the international knowledge equation are stratified into “centre” and “periphery”. The centre, mostly located in developed Western countries, plays the dominant role in giving directions and providing research, whilst the peripheral universities in the Global South only ‘copy developments from abroad, produce little that is original, and are generally not at the frontiers of knowledge’ (Altbach 1998: 20). Thus, it has been argued that being in the ‘periphery’ means being marginal to ‘knowledge empires’ (Altbach 2007). Arguably, global science (which is also understood as a centre-periphery hierarchy) ‘remains structured by a Euro-American inclusion/exclusion binary that operates at two levels: first, in the determination of what is included in the global system; and second, in the ordering of value inside it’ (Marginson and Xu 2021: 7). This structure is grounded in history, resource inequality, institutions, and language, cultural homogeneity and research agendas (Marginson and Xu 2021).

Approaches which have criticised the field of IR to be an essentially Western discipline also echoed similar arguments to the above centre-periphery framework. This tendency overlaps with a call for the creation of a post-Western IR that reflects the global and local contexts of the declining power and legitimacy of the West (for a good debate on post-Western IR, see Owen et. al. 2017). The suggestion here is to introduce a more global and distinctly post-Western IR that takes into account both the contemporary shifts in power away from the West and the legacies of the West in the ways in which international politics is talked about (discourses) and enacted (practices) (Owen et.al. 2017: 280). This is also reflected in knowledge production in the “periphery”. For instance, in line with the international academic division of labour, IR scholars from Central Eastern Europe as well as Turkey and Russia are discouraged from theoretical contributions (Drulak 2009: 170). They tend to be invited to international projects as regional experts who can provide local data but from whom no theoretical contributions are expected. Here, the metaphor of the centre imposing its theoretical frames on the periphery is in order, especially given the importance of theory in the Western IR discipline (Waeber 2007).

Last but not least, teaching “Europe” is shaped by the broader global context, the developments in the global economy and the prevailing structures of international society. For instance, there is already a pressing challenge faced by the higher education globally posed by the need to answer to the needs of a knowledge society. The increasing commodification of university education and a substantial rise of the flow of students across national borders are significantly influencing the way we study social phenomena. ‘The extensive international comparisons of educational achievement are spurring new and often globally converging policy responses’ and shift the research agendas of a variety of disciplines including social sciences (Gopinathan and Altbach 2005: 118).

Departing from the claim that teaching and learning “Europe” in its “periphery” needs a critical and multi-faceted perspective which would unpack the notion of ‘Europe’ and the process of European integration as well as the educational and pedagogical dimensions of

the European Studies, this Special Issue intends to explore this puzzle of “periphery” (which is the common concern in all contributions of the Issue) through two dimensions: First, it is necessary to take stock of the geographical and conceptual limits of ‘Europe’ and European Studies through contextualising ‘Europe’ as a region and European Studies as an academic discipline and how this is reflected in textbooks, syllabi and other teaching material. How can we make sense of “Europe” as a region and in terms of centre-periphery axis? How does European Studies resonate beyond the “centre”? Secondly, we also need to take a look at the practical and empirical hurdles of teaching and learning Europe beyond the immediate geography of the EU. Could we possibly uncouple practical hurdles of the EU integration process from academic research on “Europe”, especially in the “periphery” where these hurdles are most intensely experienced?

We argue that we need a renewed approach to the field of European Studies which takes into account various perspectives from the “periphery” to unfold the complexities and challenges of teaching and learning “Europe” away from the immediate geographical and conceptual focus of established European Studies. By elaborating on the notion of “periphery” and by tackling with the conceptual categories of “periphery” in Europe, we will aim to explore the complexities and challenges of studying and teaching Europe and the European integration process in its relationality to broader processes such as de-Europeanisation and EU accession. This endeavour will contribute to the ongoing disciplinary debate on the future of European studies as well as the current “future of Europe” debates by presenting alternative narratives on the challenges of the European integration and Europeanisation in the “periphery”.

CORE QUESTIONS

Against this background, the core research questions of this Special Issue will be reflecting the overall concern of addressing the challenges of teaching and learning “Europe” in the “periphery” as follows:

- 1- How can we make sense of the conceptual category of “periphery” within the framework of European studies? (conceptual)
- 2- What are the challenges of producing knowledge on the European integration in the “periphery”? (epistemological)
- 3- How can we develop new and innovative teaching curricula and provide a thorough understanding of specific topical European integration issues which takes into account various perspectives from the “periphery”? (educational)
- 4-To what extent can this endeavour of focusing on teaching and learning “Europe” in the “periphery” speak to the ongoing “Future of Europe” debate? (conversational)

THE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS ISSUE

Against this background, the contributions in this issue address various aspects of teaching and learning “Europe” in the “periphery” at various settings in line with the research questions framed above. Makarchev and Troncota’s article aim to problematise the educational aspect of Europeanisation in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries by focusing on the promotion of EU studies in higher education institutions. Through qualitative data from reports of four EU-funded cooperation projects developed by the University of Tartu (Estonia) in partnership with other EU-based and non-EU universities from the EaP and two student focus group interviews, the authors critically explore how the EU is taught in the Eastern neighbourhood, focusing on local perspectives on EU-funded projects in higher education. The teaching of the European integration is also the departure point for Boschetti, who focuses on the representations of Europe in history textbooks at Italian secondary schools. Her paper looks at how the idea of “a centre of an integrated Europe” is presented to pupils in Italy, thereby assessing the links between EU integration and Italian domestic and foreign policies. After outlining the historical development of the introduction of EEC/EU as a topic, Boschetti focuses on content, lexical and visual analysis of Italian textbooks, chapters or paragraphs dealing directly with European integration in

particular. On a different note, teaching of EU law in Turkey is at the core of the article by Çakmak, Özçelik and Akdemir, which explores how the process of Europeanisation and legal and political language of reforms envisaged by the Copenhagen Criteria are taught at Turkish higher education institutions. Through a review of the EU law curriculum at universities and by comparing EU law to European Studies courses in general, the authors attest that the European Studies curricula in Turkey do not pay particular attention to the teaching of the EU law *par excellence*, and instead pursue a historical assessment of Turkey-EU relations or an advanced analysis of the EU polity itself. This, according to the authors, shows how Europeanisation is viewed and defined in Turkish European Studies curriculum, which lacks a particular analysis and review of the EU *acquis per se*. Parker's piece develops a rather more general perspective on "peripheral thinking" on the EU, by focusing on teaching the EU at a "new periphery": Brexit Britain. Through adopting a 'critical-pluralist approach', the paper suggests that a 'question driven approach' might be one pedagogically practical way of presenting such a plurality to the students of European Studies. Parker suggests presenting to students a range of legitimate questions related to the EU as object of study, thereby permitting them to explore various theoretical approaches to the study of the EU. In particular, the paper focuses on how Brexit was used to critically engage with mainstream theories of European integration and draw students' attention to a range of various political arguments and normative perspectives on the EU in the university classrooms in the UK. Last, but not least, departing from the challenges of knowledge production "in the periphery", Turhan and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm explore the degree of 'epistemic injustice' featured by the discipline of European Studies in Turkey, through a mapping exercise of the evolution of EU-Turkey studies after 1996 until today. The authors draw on a dataset involving 300 articles on EU-Turkey studies published in 26-SSCI indexed journals to scrutinize the extent of epistemic diversity persisting in the discipline. They argue that in order to overcome the epistemic injustice in EU-Turkey studies, the discipline should place greater emphasis on the explanatory power of unorthodox IR theories that locate this very relationship within the multilateral system and the global political order and include more unconventional, avant-garde research topics into its research agenda.

CONTRIBUTION

This Special Issue is not the first endeavour to introduce a critical perspective to European Studies. Different ways of approaching the teaching and the learning of European Studies, which reflect the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the discipline, have been proposed by various studies starting from the early 2000s (Field 2001, Gonzalez and Wagenaar 2005, Manners 2009, Bache 2004). More recently, more critical approaches to European Studies have been aired, with the aim to provide the discipline with 'another European trajectory which have been largely excluded and left unheard in mainstream discussions over the past decade of scholarship and analysis' (Manner and Whitman 2016: 3). For instance, a JCMS 2016 Special Issue titled, 'Another Theory is Possible: Dissident Voices in Theorising Europe' rightly aimed to address the analytical and normative crisis of the European Studies. Nevertheless, this volume did not include any authors from outside the EU. Perhaps, it is about time to propose a critical account which would include plural perspectives exploring the centre-periphery divide and inviting alternative voices on European studies from the 'periphery' to the debate to be able to question *the ceteris paribus* assumptions of European Studies (Manners 2007: 77).

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