Usage of European Integration – Europeanisation from a Sociological Perspective

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Keywords

Europeanisation, integration theory, multi-level governance, policy-coordination, polity-building, participation, political opportunity structure, European public space, structuration theory, sociology

Abstract

The effect of European integration on its member states constitutes the new research agenda within the study of European integration. Marked by the "the institutionalist turn" of Anglo-Saxon political sciences, the most dominant theories on europeanisation focus on structural arrangements. Institutional incompatibility between the European and the national level, so the hypothesis, creates pressures for change. Actors are often only considered as mediators of these pressures. Consequentially, few approaches try to explain adaptational change initiated by policy actors in the absence of institutional pressures. Using a political sociology approach, the central concern of this paper is to insist on the political discretion of national actors in translation of European requirements. We believe that understanding not only "adaptation to" but also "usage of" the process of European integration is important to understanding the transformation of European member states. By insisting on *usage*, we aim at analysing both the strategic interaction of rational actors with the European institutions and the more sociological effect of "usage" – as "daily practice" – on the interest and identities of the actors.

Kurzfassung

Europäische Integrationstheorien sind geprägt von Institutionenforschung. Besonders in der Europäisierungsdebatte dominieren Annahmen über Zwänge, die aus struktureller Inkompatibilität zwischen dem europäischen und den nationalen Ebenen entstehen können. Oft wird dabei den Handlungsträgern, den politischen Akteuren, nur zweitrangige Bedeutung zugemessen. Mit den analytischen Mitteln der politischen Soziologie untersucht dieses Projekt die Bedeutung der Einzelhandlungen politischer Akteure im Integrationsprozess. Hierbei wird vor allem auf die Anpassungsdynamiken der nationalen Ebene an europäische Vorgaben Rücksicht genommen. Der Effekt europäischer Integration auf die nationalen Systeme, so unsere These, ergibt sich aus dem Gebrauch, den politische Akteure von Elementen der europäischen Integration machen. Die Idee eines "Gebrauchs" dient einerseits der Analyse strategischer Interaktionen zwischen Akteuren und Institutionen und anderseits dem Verstehen der diffusen Konsequenzen von Gewohnheitshandlungen – oder "Bräuchen" – auf die Interessen und Identitäten der politischen Akteure.

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1. Theorizing about European Integration

What can be the interest of regarding European integration from a sociological perspective? In our eyes, the answer resides in the evolution of theorizing about European integration. Early theories had the objective of explaining a regime, a form of international cooperation. Consequently, the most dominant theories came from the field of international relations. For a long time, theorizing was divided between neo-functionalist explanations (Haas 1958; Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 1998) and the realist critique of liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1993; Moravcsik 1998). For both camps, the ambition was to explain the creation and stability of a case of interstate cooperation and the public policies that were consequentially produced at the supranational level. National politics came into play as a factor determining the choices made at the supranational level, but in-depth research of national public policy developed in relative isolation from European studies.

While US theories on European integration became somewhat trapped between the opposition of neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism (Lequesne and Smith 1997), European integration research reoriented during the 1990s. Faced with the "European Union", with a completed single market and ambitious new projects, European scholars tackled a new issue: explaining the complexity of the European construction. Research on policy networks (Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch 1996) and the interaction of the different levels of policy making (Marks, et al. 1996) flourished and developed into theories of multi-level governance (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999; Marks 2001). Still, the study of supranational politics, policies and their implementation remained the principal objective of EU research.

Meanwhile, the increasing complexity of European politics drew comparativists towards this research object. There was a sense that the EU had developed into a full-grown policy realm whose analysis could gain from the tools of classical public policy theory (Majone 1996; Muller 1995; Streeck and Schmitter 1991; Hassenteufel and Surel 2000). Likewise, the EU became an important factor for the analysis of national policy development, so that comparativists increasingly incorporated the European variable into their research (Mény, et al. 1996).
The "institutional turn" of political science, which marked especially Anglo-Saxon literature (Aspinwall and Schneider 2001; Jupille and Caporaso 1999), helped to bridge the study of European integration by scholars of international relations and comparative public policy. While international relations research started analysing institutional dynamics (March and Olsen 1998) and the pressures the international system imposed on domestic politics (Keohane and Milner 1996), comparativists tried to understand the effects of European integration on the politics of the Member States.

1.1. Research on Europeanisation ⬆

The question of these effects is at the heart of the research which focuses on the Europeanisation of national political systems, a research agenda with has flourished in recent years. European integration becomes the independent variable with influences the politics of the Member States – a perspective that is exactly the inverse of traditional integration research. Essentially, the term "Europeanisation" is used to signify the transformation of a variable at the national level which adapts to a European model, logic or constraint.(1) Since most authors use the term only as a vague concept guiding their empirical investigation, a recurring discussion revolves around the ambiguous utilisation of the meaning of "Europeanisation" and the great diversity of studies which all claim to deal with the topic (Radaelli 2000; Olsen 2002).

One can nonetheless distinguish studies of Europeanisation according to the object which is supposed to go through the process of adaptation. Sidney Tarrow (1995) or Gary Marks and Marco Steenbergen (2004) examine a possible relocation of the political struggle - *politics* – towards the European level. Klaus Goetz and Simon Hix (2001) or Jeffery Anderson (2002) analyse the evolving constellation of political institutions – the *polity*. Pierre Muller (1997) or Christophe Knill and Dirk Lehmkuhl (2002) focus on the transformation of public *policies*. Again others analyse the whole or a part of these objects for one country in particular (Cole and Drake 2000; Ladrech 1994; Falkner 2001; Lavdas and Lavdas 1998).

Because of this diversity, the attempt to establish a general theory or explanatory models has most influenced the study of europeanisation (Börzel and Risse 2000; Caporaso, et al. 2001). The central element of these works, which try to clarify the mechanisms of europeanisation, has been called the *misfit* model.(2) The occurrence of divergence or convergence of the level of adaptation between different Member States is explained by the degree of compatibility between the national and European conditions. Incompatibility – misfit – between the two levels create adaptational pressures, which are then transmitted by mediating institutions. « *The lower the compatibility (fit) between European institutions and national institutions, the higher the adaptational pressure,* » (Caporaso, et al. 2001: 7). At the heart of this model is an assumption taken from historical institutionalism which underlines the rigidity of institutional arrangements (cf. Pierson 2000; Steinmo, et al. 1992).

1.2. Critical assessment ⬆

As in the studies of Europeanisation, the object which we would like to focus on is – very generally speaking – the effect of European integration. Contrary to the dominant strand of literature, however, we would like to insist on two dimensions in particular: the role of actors in the concrete translation of these effects and the motives of action that can be identified. These two aspects seem so far underdeveloped in the current discussions, which have a tendency to focus on structural elements and institutional pressures with less attention to the mechanisms through which these induce change.

The misfit explanation is a good example of the lack of interest for the elements that we would like to develop further. Let us look at both of them in turn. First of all, the strong concentration of the literature on institutional dynamics leads to an underestimation of the discretion and role of political actors in the adaptation process. In a perspective which emphasises the macro level where national institutions are confronted with European policies, the adjustment process of national politics seems to be driven by adaptive pressures alone. National actors only come into play as "intermediary variable". To be sure, the authors of the misfit model insist that adaptation pressures can simply have no effect if actors refuse to react to them (Caporaso, et al. 2001: 2). Yet this means only that actors have the discretion to potentially block the translation of specific pressures. However, an actor cannot initiate adaptation independent of the pressures coming for institutional misfit.

This assumption runs counter to several empirical studies. In his study of the implementation of European directives in several Member States, Oliver Treib (2002) shows that more than one third of the directives have been implemented in the absence of institutional misfit. Similarly, Christoph Knill and Dirk Lehmkuhl (1999a) demonstrate that the European policy of road haulage has had an important effect on French road haulage policy, even though there has been a perfect fit between the two levels prior to the reform.(3)

Secondly, the qualification of different motifs for actions seems to be dealt with only as an afterthought. In their collective work, Caporaso, Cowles and Risse (2001) suppose that both rational calculation – based on veto points and available resources – and the transformation of actors' identities – through organisation culture or social learning – can influence the mediation undertaken by actors. Drawing on March and Olson, Börzel and Risse (2000; 2002) extend this reflection by distinguishing between two logics of action: one taken from rational institutionalism and another one from sociological institutionalism. This distinction is very helpful, but remains trapped between misfit pressure and institutional change. It only aims to answer the question, "How does the actor chose to react?" We believe that it is necessary to consider a political actor who can "choose" and "learn" outside of institutional pressures. On the contrary, we maintain that one should begin by analysing the actions of individuals in order to be able to evaluation the dynamics of change. As cognitive theory emphasizes, any social action requires an understanding of the environment, in this case the political context (Christiansen, et al. 1999; Surel 2000). In order to be able to act, actors need to interpret European institutions as well as the pressures that are supposed to emanate from them. This cognitive effort, as well as a number of other behavioural elements, constitutes the essence of the political work that lies at the heart of the European integration process.

2. A Comprehensive Sociology of European Integration ⬆

In an article on the analysis of public policy, Pierre Muller (2000:2) wrote that one of the greatest merits of the cognitive approach was to "sociologise" the political science vision of the State. He underlines that "instead of taking the State from the top and as a whole, it allows us to observe the bottom and to pay attention to the details." With respect to European studies, our approach is comparable. Our intention to "sociologise" integration studies implies emphasizing the role of actors in social interactions as well as the recognition that their mediation is a fundamental part of the integration process. To adopt a sociological perspective also means rethinking mechanisms of structural determination in order to show that these can only operate through continued interactions. As Georg Simmel has suggested almost a century ago, the complexity of networks of social interaction do not produce uniform effect, "only contradictory and conflicting effects."(4) If one accepts this proposition, one has to accept a very high degree of causal complexity when analysing the micro level of social interaction. Paying attention to the role of actors therefore implies studying the mechanisms of appropriation, re-appropriation, engagement and disengagement of the process of European integration.

Of course, our intention is not to ignore the importance of other explanatory variables. Actors clearly evolve "within the framework of 'global' structures upon which they do not have the possibility to act," (Muller 2000: 193). Still, our approach necessitates the consideration of the actors' place, choices and strategies. Again, following Simmel (1983 (1917): 42), the specificity of a sociological analysis is not to determine a new research object, but to provide "an approach, a method of science," which focuses on the forms of interaction between individuals. In this perspective, an actor is faced with institutions who frame his behaviour, who open a "realm of possibilities", but who do not determine his behaviour entirely.

By defining what one could call a "sociology of the usage of European integration", we would like to insist two specific elements of the process of European political transformations: the central role of individual actors and the interaction between the micro-level of the actor and the macro-level of the political institutions. The perspective is sociological because it aims to understand how the actor and his behaviour are constructed and how the institutions evolve dialectically with individual behaviour.(5) For us, these individual actions constitute the dynamic of national adaptation to the European level, hence the dynamics of Europeanisation.

The following section proceeds in three steps. First, we present the concept of "usage", the central element of our approach. Second, we try to place the concept in a categorisation of analytical perspectives focusing on the transformations triggered by European integration. In conclusion, we try to insist on the heuristic benefits of the analysis of usages.

2.1. The concept of usage ⬆

The word usage has two dictionary definitions: 1) "the action of using something or the fact of being used" and 2) "habitual or customary practice".(6) By insisting on the term, we wish to cover both the strategic interaction of rational actors with the European institutions and the more sociological effect of usage – as "daily practice" – on the interest and identities of the actors. The concept thus ties political changes and transformations to the utilisation an actor is able to make of the European integration process and the less conscious, habitual practice that might evolve out of this utilisation. In our analysis, the term *usage* covers, more precisely,

practices and political interactions which adjust and redefine themselves by seizing the European Union as a set of opportunities, be they institutional, ideological, political or organisational.

These practices and political interactions happen as the actors go back and forth between the European level and the national, local, sectoral or institutional level on which they act (or wish to act), creating a context of reciprocal influence.

Concentrating on practices, and thus on usage, allows us to translate the notion of political action or political work. Our intention is to focus on the substance of political relations. Through the concept of usage, it becomes possible to study the nature of the political work of different actors. How does their political role materialize? How do they translate their social position (their institutional situation, their interests, their visions) into practices who are in turn framed by specific political settings?

A usage is guided by a complex set of strategies whose objective is to obtain a particular goal. However, we maintain that the objective can be both "more or less explicit and more or less constructed," (Muller and Surel 1998: 31). A conscious and rational action does not require that the goal that motivated the action in the beginning be identical to the objective followed later, nor that the final effect are completely known or manageable (Merton 1936; Boudon 1977).

Political opportunities, i.e. resources and constraints, provided by the European system provide the necessary conditions for the practices we wish to analyse, but they should not be confused with these practices. Usage implies an intention at work and can therefore not be defined by opportunities alone. Whatever might be the nature of a specific opportunity (e.g. political, financial, institutional or symbolic), *actors need to seize them in order to transform them into political practices.* The whole process of transforming resources or constraints into political practices constitutes a usage. Opportunities are a necessary but not sufficient condition of usage: they are the contextual element that usage is based on.

2.2. A categorisation of different analytical approaches ⬆

Our proposed approach is thus a sociological one that focuses on the micro-level of individual interactions between the European and the national level. In order to place this perspective in the larger context of European studies, we propose to categorise the literature on the impact of European integration along two axes. A first axes goes from the macro level of the institutional structure to the micro level of the political actor. A second axes distinguishes analyses based on assumption of rational choice theory from analyses in a more sociological tradition. Let us consider these two dimensions in turn.

It seems to be useful to distinguish studies focusing on large institutional structures from studies concentrating on actors, even though a strict dichotomy between the two and an exclusive focus on either one is clearly outdated (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995; Scharpf 2000). In Europeanisation studies, for example, there is a consensus that "*national institutions and actors matter, in the sense that they have a profound, if not determining, effect on how European integration as a force of polity and politics change plays out in the domestic context,*" (Goetz and Hix 2001: 20). When it comes to more concrete models or explanations, however, the hierarchy established between the two levels of analysis varies considerably. The authors of the misfit theory as well as Duina (1999) or Pollack (1996) place a definition emphasis on institutional structures and only turn to the question of political actors in a case of divergence between countries. Dyson et Featherstone (Dyson and Featherstone 1996; Dyson and Featherstone 1999), by contrast, focus on the strategic action and interaction of individuals placed in specific institutional configurations.

The second axis distinguishes between the rational or sociological nature of the underlying assumptions. In the case of Europeanisation studies, these two assumptions are taken up by studies in the tradition of economic institutionalism (North 1990) and studies in the tradition of sociological institutionalism (March and Olsen 1989). The principal difference between the two perspectives resides in the continuity of preferences. In a rational economical analysis, actors' preferences are both exogenous and stable and therefore essential to explaining a certain phenomenon such as institutional change. For sociological analyses, preferences are endogenous to the institutional setting that the individual needs to act in. Consequently, they often become the primary object of a sociological study, which aims at understanding their transformations. However, the focus is essentially on the relationship between institutions and individuals rather than the individuals' interactions among each other. For the case of Europeanisation, the interest of a comprehensive sociology is to combine these two analytical dimensions: the sociology of cognitive change and the evolution of preferences with an analysis of strategic interaction. Only few studies have analysed these questions from a consistently sociological perspective (Bach 2000), even though our approach reflects a trend in recent political science literature to start analysing the dynamics of strategic and cognitive interactions (Fallend Grabner and Lenschow 2003; Trondal 2002; Schimmelfenig and Sedelmeier 2002).

Other research has furthermore studied elements of these interactions, such as discourse (Diez 1999; Hay and Rosamond 2002; Schmidt 1997), cognitive framing (Marcussen 1998; Muller 1992), or on the role of European institutions as a normative entrepreneur (Jabko 1999; Wendon 1998).

On a side-note, we should mention that we do not deal with historical institutionalism, because it seems to be different from economical or sociological institutionalism only in its diachronic optic, not in its presuppositions. According to Hall and Taylor (1996: 939), « *historical institutionalisms tend [...] to conceptualise relations between institutions and individual behaviour in relatively large terms.*» Indeed, depending on the author, historical institutionalism can be based either on rational assumptions (Pierson 2000) or on sociological ones (Mahoney 2000).

We suggest crossing the two dimensions we have just identified in order to better isolate the focus of different approaches.

Table 1

In quadrant I, institutions and preferences are given. Studies in this perspective focus above all on the compatibility or conflict of national and European structures, and how these situations might affect the interests of a national actor in a very general sense. In quadrant II, a given institutional opportunity structure provides the context for an analysis of the strategic behaviour of an actor who decides to react strategically in order to maximize his benefits. In quadrant III, the central interest lies in the constitutive relations between institutions and actors. The analysis combines a definition of actors in terms of identity and interests with the procedures of legitimation employed by the European institutions. Quadrant IV finally allows analysing the adaptation of actors' preferences. The focus will therefore be on the general and reciprocal process of interaction and transformation of actors and institutions, with a central interest on the changing resources, opportunities, legitimacy and identity of national or transnational political actors.

By proposing a comprehensive sociology of usage, we intent to put into light the interaction of actors with the realities of European integration and the consequences of this interaction. According to this approach, usage of the EU, as strategic as it might be in the first place, will through repetition lead to cognitive and/or normative adaptations, which in turn change the behaviour of the actor or his or her social positioning. Our primary interest is thus in both the second and the fourth quadrant: the analysis of an actor faced with a world where her preferences and the institutional constraints transform due to her behaviour and the behaviour of others like her. The advantage of such a perspective is to draw attention to this succession of adaptations.

However, as all approaches that one could cite under the label « structuration » (Giddens 1984), this approach suffers from the fact that both actors' preferences as well as the shape of the institutions are endogenous to the process in question. The action chosen has an impact on the institution which likewise impacts on the interests and the learning potential of that actor, and so on. Despite it conceptual value, the approach entails thus explicative and methodological difficulties. At which moment should an analysis of a particular situation start? If institutions are not stable, but can also not be explained out of one particular set of actions, is it useful to concentrate on the actions of specific actors or does one need to begin with the institutions?

In order to avoid some of these difficulties, it therefore seems heuristically necessary to analyse any given case study by distinguishing actors and institutions. We suggest dividing empirical investigations into a part where the actor adapt (strategically or cognitively) to specific institutional realities and another part where the European institutions contribute to the formation of the actors' interests and representations. Thus, a short term analysis by means of usage would need to focus on both strategic mobilisations and cognitive adaptation. For a long term analysis, it becomes necessary to understand how the resulting interactions generate dynamics that affect the construction or transformation of identities and interests.

2.3. Actors and European transformations – no impact without usage ⬆

The prime concern of our perspective is thus to underline the central role of actors and the effects of their behaviour at the heart of the European integration process.(7) Too often actors only enter an analysis as secondary or intermediary variable. Frequently, they become a facilitating or blocking part of the transmission of political adaptation, while their role in the evolution of institutional structures is ignored.

To summarize our propositions, political usage describes the mediation done by an actor to transform a material or immaterial resource provided by the European institutions into a political action. At the same time, the word usage implies the repetition of such actions, which make them customary – usage then describes a habitual act, which has become much less conscious than at its first use. Contrary to analyses focusing on institutions only, our central hypothesis is that political usage is necessary for any impact of the European integration process on national political systems. More generally speaking, a measure cannot have an impact if no actor seizes it and transmits it to the national level.

Several conceptual merits of the approach seem to be worth underlining. By insisting on the discretional action of individuals, it permits to understand Europeanisation as a dynamic process, which is much less linear and automatic than in the dominant conception. Furthermore, the approach provides a means of studying how the adaptation of public policy is carried out by individuals.

Concerning the application of this concept, we would like to point out that both constraining and non-constraining processes can benefit from a study of political usage. While it seems relatively evident that usage applies to the study of *soft law* procedures, it also comes into play in the context of hard measures. Soft law measures, like the method of open coordination, provide actors with a general, yet sufficiently vague framework, which they can interpret to increase their political discretion. To cite an example, the *Service des droits des femmes et de l'égalité français*, a French ministerial service, has in this way been able to benefit both from the fact that a fourth pillar of gender equality was inserted in the European Employment Strategy and from the overall objective of gender mainstreaming within the EU. These two measures allowed the service department to participate in the elaboration of the National Action Plans for Employment in France, which meant that it had taken a formerly inaccessible position in national policy making. Yet, even constraining procedures, such as directives or court rulings, can benefit from a usage analysis. Even if it is to a lesser degree, the mediation of political actors is not absent and the impact of a constraining measure not automatic. The often differential procedure of parliamentary transposition (Treib 2003) or judiciary strategies of specific interest groups (Caporaso and Jupille 2001) are examples of the mediation necessary for the transposition of hard elements of European integration.

Without usage, there is no impact. Still, it is important to note that usage does not necessarily imply impact. Usage does not imply automatic results – their failures are always possible and need to be considered. The concept of usage is a constitutive mechanism: it is part of a process, not necessarily its cause. To be more precise, usage is a necessary condition for impact, but not always a sufficient one.

3. A Typology of Usage

Since our primary objective is working on actors, an immediate intuition would be to organise a typology according to categories of actors. At a first glance, public officials or politicians, for example, seem to utilise different elements of the EU than non-governmental organisations. However, a typology structured according to actors seems to run the risk of confusing the motivation of specific behaviour with their results. This is why we have chosen to classify usage according to their functionality.

3.1. Three types of usage

Strategic usage

As the term « strategic » implies, this usage describes the transformation of resources in political practices with the intention of pursuing a specific goal. The goal is clearly defined and consciously pursued, be it in order to influence a particular policy decision, increase one's capacity of action, one's access to the political process or the number of political tools available.

Strategic usage seems to be the most common of all usages. With the extension of competencies of the EU, it is open to a large and increasing number of actors. It can therefore apply to actors found at the supranational level, the national level or the transnational level, in the form of both governmental and non-governmental actors.

An example which is quite typical of this type of usage would be a national interest group transforming itself into an EU-relevant interest group in order to benefit from the funding scheme provided by the European Commission. This transformation furthermore permits the interest group to participate in EU-specific policy discussions, which opens the possibility of playing a "two-level game" with the government of its home country.

Cognitive usage

Cognitive usage is most common in the contexts of policy interpretation and persuasion. Any social fact requires interpretation before it can be used in a political debate. Cognitive usage covers, first of all, the understanding and interpretation of a political subject. Secondly, it applies to the diffusion of specific ideas which provide a framework for understanding and deliberating over a certain subject. Eventually, cognitive usage provides the vectors for persuasion within a policy discussion.(8)

Cognitive usage applies to supranational actors, national and transnational actors once they enter into a deliberative context. Through policy discussions, evaluations, and the importation or rejection of new policy concepts, actors advance the issue at stake, be they policy or hierarchy decisions, policy interpretations, or definitions of sectors, professions or others. Typical examples for ideas diffused in the EU context are, for instance, the principal of subsidiary, social cohesion or the knowledge economy.

Legitimising usage

This last type is a very specific type of usage that includes a mix of both strategy and cognitive framing. Since it is quite central to the political process, we would nonetheless like to single it out as a separate type of usage.

Patrick Hassenteufel and Yves Surel (Hassenteufel and Surel 2000: 19) have described this form of usage "the reference to Europe as a way of legitimising national public policies." The function of this type of usage is to increase or renew the public acceptance of a policy decision at the national level (see Jobert and Theret 1994). It is most commonly employed by governmental actors who try to appeal to the public opinion of their country and relies heavily on rhetorical figures such as "European interest" or "European constraints". This "European rhetoric" corresponds to what Eric Fassin (2001) has described as the "*rhétorique de l'Amérique*" used in the early 1980s in France in order to justify the oxymoron "French liberalism". By interrogating what this rhetoric seeks to describe and achieve, one will find that a situation presented as scientific might actually be exclusively political (Hay and Rosamond 2002).

Even though this legitimation seems to be founded on "empty" discourse, we would like to insist that even discourse might have an effect. "Ideas do not float freely" as Thomas Risse reminds us, and rhetoric is never completely neutral, because it conveys associations and images that then circulate and transform national references.

Figure 1

Figure 1 aligns the three types of usage identified with the type of political stake it applies to most. It seems most helpful to crudely distinguish between three moments in a political process:

1. the moment in which issues are problematised, ideas are defined and alternatives are suggested;
2. the very general procedure of decision-making, which entails both the conflict around the decision itself, the mode of decision-making and the struggle of actors to participate in the decision-making process; and
3. the justification of a given political action or decision on the political stage in front of an audience.

The definitions which we have just elaborated upon are of quite abstract nature. In order to make them more concrete, we suggest putting them in a context of further elements that are connected to the different types of usage. We will later use the elements spelled out below to give some further indications about the variety of motifs that triggered a specific act.

3.2. Elements used ⬆

Usage depends upon specific elements or tools that actors can seize. Most generally, these elements can be divided into two categories: immaterial and material elements. In the first category, we have identified discursive references, ideas and the use of the European public sphere; in the second, European institutions, policy instruments and funding.

Immaterial elements:

Discursive references, as pointed out above, are rhetoric figures aiming at invoking a positive or negative association.

Ideas are more complex than discursive references. In policy analysis, ideas are used as a label to assemble all forms of thought constructs: perceptions, believes, values and norms as well as more complex frameworks such as paradigms. It might be useful to divide ideas into three subcategories: cognitive interpretations, causal ideas and normative believes.(9) Cognitive interpretations allow an actor to grasp an event, to transform it into a reality that is understandable, analysable and utilisable. Causal ideas are believes about cause-and-effect relationships and therefore contain prescriptions for action. Normative believes are value judgements: what is assumed to be good or bad for the political objective in question. Causal and normative believes are most often inserted in a complex form, a cognitive framework.

The *public sphere* or the European public space is a concept elaborated initially by Jürgen Habermas (1990 (1962)) and later taken up again by scholars working on participatory and deliberative politics. The public sphere refers to the discursive space independent from governmental institutions which allows for the exchange of ideas on collective problems or action. In the European context, the public sphere is most relevant for non-governmental organisations, which can increase their political salience by linking themselves to like-minded organisations from other Member States. One can also imagine protest movements or political discussions of socio-economical elites from across Europe, who seize the new public space in order to draw attention to an issue they present as collective and European.

Material elements:

More concrete elements or tools provided by the EU are, above all, the European *institutions* themselves. Access to these institutions, by means of the Commission's comitology, for example, implies access to the political deliberation, the problematisation of policy issues. By acquiring the status of experts, non-governmental organisations can thus gain political legitimacy or simply obtain important policy information that would have otherwise been outside of their reach. But even public officials might find it useful employ a formerly unused mechanism of institutional cooperation with other Member States.

Policy instruments, as mentioned above, can be either constraining (directives, court judgments) or non-constraining (resolutions, recommendations, communications, the open method of coordination, "benchmarking", "mainstreaming" or others). Non-constraining instruments leave by definition a larger discretion to the political actor, but constraining policy instrument also require interpretation and transposition to the national level.

Financing or funding very directly covers financial allocations for the use of a particular political project distributed through a call for tender from the European Commission. It is important to note that the use should be political not individual, as in the case of Erasmus stipends. A typical example would be the Commission's funding scheme for non-governmental organisations.

Concerning the different types of actors, it useful to distinguish between the different levels of the European system:(10) supranational, national and transnational. One could cite governments, political parties, interest groups, political movements, as well as more vague groups such as political, administrative or socio-economical elites.

Even though exception are possible, the most reoccurring associations between the different elements used and the actors we have elaborated upon and the three types of usage identified earlier seems to be the following:

Table 2

3.3. Logics of action ⬆

Finally, in order to develop a set of declinations of possible usage situations, we would like to consider the different logics motivating action. One of the benefits of the approach of political usage is to draw our attention to these motivations, as most usage is premeditated and needs to be incited by a specific desire. By crossing the elements used with the effects that an actor intents to pursue, it becomes possible to distinguish different logics of action.

However, a special caveat is necessary concerning the intended effects. Any action will have consequences that the actor tries to evaluate and intents to cause. Yet intended effects should not be confused with actual effects. Since a great variety of factors intervene before the final consequence plays out, we can only consider here the consequences the actor has actually aimed for. Only his intention is a part of the motifs of his action. In the political domain, we distinguish between short term effects, long term effects and an absence of effects. Absence of effects means that there are no consequences for the direct political issue that the individual tries to act upon. A variety of factors can explain the gap between a determined action and the unattained goal. One could imagine, for instance, that the action was only a pretence: while it looked like the actor was trying to influence a political decision, he might just have wanted to increase his reputation or social positioning or defend his standing.

Table 3

The logics that motivate and orient action vary as a function of the result that actor intended as well as the element the actor employed. Three specific groups of situations seem to exist, which can be regrouped under the following labels: influence logic, positioning logic and justification logic.(11)

Influence logic: The goal is to act on the content or orientation of a political issue, more generally speaking, to weigh on a political stake. As the name indicates, wanting to gain political influence is the specific goal aimed at through strategic or cognitive means.

Positioning logic: Here, the goal is to position oneself more advantageously in the political process. In the context of political groups wishing to reinforce their access to the political game, or more precisely in the political network that develops around a political issue, this logic is very common. When applying to groups, the positioning logic contains the "logic of membership", which we borrow from Streeck and Schmitter (1999). According to this notion the important goal is not to influence the decision-making process, but to please the members of the political group by claiming a presence on the European stage. The group might undertake a lot of actions in the European policy context, which eventually yield very few results. Membership logic reminds us that the issue here might have been to gain in reputation or credibility, which is part of the social positioning of the political actor.

Justification logic: This last motif is specific and relates exclusively to cases where the political decision has already been taken and needs to be justified. Justification logic is most often tied to the political objective of gaining support for a political choice that has already been made. In an often very obvious way, actors try to justify their choices through means of European symbolism, which often has more positive associations than national symbols, or to promote a specific position in the European public sphere.

With the goal of either influence or positioning, an actor can proceed both by cognitive or strategic means. To illustrate, the use of a policy instrument such as benchmarking might represent a strategic usage aimed at a short term goal. A public official could for example seize this new method in order to extend the field of competencies of his department who would be in charge of the evaluation. In a long-term perspective, the usage of this instrument will weigh upon the cognitive structure of the organisation or the policy sector and will provide new cognitive and normative references. With the long term in mind, the use of benchmarking is therefore a cognitive usage. Table 3 does not indicate this set of possibilities for reasons of clarity. The variation of different situations in the table illustrates the multiplicity of actions imaginable.

The objective of this section has been to clarify the tools that can be derived from an analytical approach focusing on political usage. We have distinguished three types of usage (strategic, cognitive and legitimising) and have shown how they are inserted in the political process. In order to make this typology more operational, we have identified a series of constitutive elements of each type. Since the elements used are a good indicator of the motifs of action, we have finally provided examples of the objectives of different actors, which has allowed us to isolate three different logics.

4. Conclusion ⬆

Our intention is not to open up a fundamentally different research agenda, but to multiply the angles of analysis of the impact of European integration. By relying on the method approach of sociology, it becomes possible to put the micro level of social interactions into light and to understand its importance for the study of a highly complex political system. The goal is not to make a conceptual innovation, but to provide a new analytical instrument that has been forged from existing sociological concepts.

An interrogation about usage poses the question of interactions between national or transnational actors with European ones. The repetition of these exchanges produces reciprocal transformations, of which Europeanisation is one. By relating different studies through the concentration on similar forms of interaction, our objective is to arrive at a more global vision of the transformations at work. It seems to us that individual actions have so far been ignored in the study of large European transformations. Despite the difficulties that arise when one tries to deal with them systematically, we would like to insist on bringing them back in.

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Endnotes ⬆

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(1) As a dictionary entry in the French *Petit Robert* (Edition 2000), "*européanization*" dates back to 1906 and describes the result of "*européaniser*", a word recorded since the time of Napoleon in 1807, meaning "to give a European character to something."

(2) One should note that the authors of the misfit model use the term "Europeanisation" with the following definition: "the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance," (Caporaso, et al. 2001: 3). This definition has been criticized because it confuses Europeanization with European integration (Bulmer and Lequesne 2002). However, the poor definition does not disturb the clarity of the model, where they describe the adaptation process at the national level as "Europeanisation and domestic structural change." In the following text, we will use the term "Europeanisation" in order to describe the adaptation process of within the Member States, even when we cite the misfit model specifically.

(3) This actually became a point of contention in an interesting exchange between the authors and Thomas Risse. See Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999b).

(4) Richard Münch (1994) summarizes Simmel's conclusion in the following way: "… in the distinction to the causal laws studied by the natural sciences, the laws of forms of sociation are always laws of interaction, which have to take into account the relationship of at least two parts to one another and the effects of their interaction on each of them and on different aspects and subparts of them. Because of this complicated web of interactions, there is no uniform effect, only contradictory and conflicting effects."

(5) Attention to the socialisation effect of European integration is not new. Neo-functionalists such as Ernest Haas have underlined the development of European identities or "supranational loyalties" which emerge through the integration process, for example.

(6) The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 10th edition.

(7) By insisting on the centrality of actors in institutional dynamics of European integration, we apply several notions from the actor-centred institutionalism of Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf to the study of Europeanisation.

(8) This last element makes cognitive usage somewhat strategic as well. Since the primary objective is to frame and understand a topic, even if this eventually leads to the pursuit of a specific goal, we nonetheless propose to distinguish between the two. As all typologies, the forms of usage are but ideal types and occur most often in a somewhat mixed way.

(9) Goldstein et Keohane (1993) add a fourth category, world visions. We have decided to omit these in our analysis, because they seem to be merely a sophisticated combination of the other three categories.

(10) We use the term "European system" in a large sense here, covering both the actors engaged in it, the policy arenas and politic policies that constitute as well as the European public sphere.

(11) As the different types of usage, these logics of action are ideal types and can only be separated analytically. In reality, trying to achieve a better positioning in the political process is always attractive because it promises greater influence in the long run. But the ambition of influence is often very vague and quite far in the future, so that it seems useful to distinguish the two.

Table I

Typology of research on the impact of European integration

		Rational Institutionalism	*Sociological Institutionalism*
Level of analysis	*Macro/ Institutional structure*	I. European institutions exert pressures on national institutions and actors	III. European institutions influence the construction of identities and interests of national and transnational actors
	Micro/ Actor	II. Faced with institutional constraints or opportunities, actors react through strategic interaction	IV. Normative and cognitive adaptation of the actor in response to institutional change

Table II

Characteristics of the different types of usage

	Element used	**Type of actors**	**Political Objective**
Strategic usage	Institutions Instruments Financing	Institutional actors	Resource mobilisation
Cognitive usage	Ideas	Political Entrepreneurs Advocacy coalitions Public policy networks	Argumentation Framing of political action
Legitimating usage	Discursive references Public space	Politicians	Justification Deliberation

Table III

Variations of usage in practice

		Results		
		No effect	*Short-term effect*	*Long-term effect*
Strategic	*Institutions*	POSITIONING: Institutional	INFLUENCE: Increased attention	INFLUENCE: Increased legitimacy of an actor or constitution of a new actor
	Instruments	POSITIONING: Non intention of incurring change	INFLUENCE: Change of a policy orientation	INFLUENCE: Paradigm change concerning a policy, political sector or a participatory structure
	Financing	POSITIONING: Prestige	POSITIONING: Increased capacity for action	INFLUENCE: Increased legitimacy of an actor or constitution of a new actor
Cognitive	*Ideas*	POSITIONING / JUSTIFICATION: Alibi, argument	INFLUENCE: Cognitive or normative framing of policy	INFLUENCE: Paradigm change concerning a policy, a political sector or a participatory structure
Legitimation	*Discursive reference*	POSITIONING / JUSTIFICATION: Alibi, argument	JUSTIFICATION: Legitimation of a decision	JUSTIFICATION: Legitimation of a political orientation
	Public sphere	POSITIONING: «Logic of membership»	INFLUENCE: Increased attention	INFLUENCE: Increased legitimacy of an actor or constitution of a new actor

Figure 1

Usage and political stakes

COGNITIVE USAGE :	STRATEGIC USAGE :	LEGITIMISING USAGE :
Interpretation of the political context and the diffusion of ideas as a vector of persuasion	Transformation of political practices into resources for action with the intention of obtaining a specific goal	Utilisation of European elements in order to defend political action or decisions
Problematisation, definition of solutions	Decision-making procedure	Justification