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Differentiated integration in the European Union: towards a comparative regionalism perspective

Alex Warleigh-Lack

ABSTRACT In this contribution I examine three regions outside Europe, all of which have used forms of differentiated integration as a means to solve otherwise intractable problems and/or export their policy preferences, ideals and bargains to key external actors. I argue that if we examine the European Union (EU) as one case of regional integration/regionalism among many, rather than a unique entity, we can develop a more nuanced view of differentiated integration in the EU which accepts it as an enduring, and possibly permanent, feature of the EU.

KEY WORDS APEC; ASEAN; comparative regionalism; differentiated integration; European Union; NAFTA

INTRODUCTION: DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION IN EUROPE

One of the many interesting features of European integration has been the expectation that it would, and should, produce a uniform outcome. The entity that we have in recent decades called the European Union (EU), however, is increasingly differentiated in terms of the membership of the policy regimes it creates. Moreover, the EU is itself part of a matrix of institutions that collectively provide the governance of the European continent; European integration is still, and may always be, a ‘spaghetti bowl’ of institutions and regimes with overlapping memberships and different rationales. For instance, European security is still primarily addressed via the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), with human rights principally the bailiwick of the Council of Europe. Sub-regional organizations such as the Nordic Council continue to coexist with the macro-regional EU. And the EU itself constructs wider governance regimes by exporting its influence and norms to states that have not joined it formally but seek close relations with it: an example is the European Economic Area (EEA; see Gstöhl [2015]). Despite this, differentiated forms of European integration tend to be viewed sceptically by many scholars and policy-makers (Warleigh 2002).

My argument in this contribution is in two parts. First, I argue that opposition to differentiation as a legitimate aspect of European integration can be

traced back to neofunctionalist thought, which construes differentiation as *integration gone wrong*. Second, I argue that if we turn to comparative regionalism studies, which ironically was another aspect of the neofunctionalist project (e.g., Nye 1968), it is possible to see differentiation as a neutral and to-be-anticipated feature of regional integration. I seek to do this by examining three successful regions outside Europe, namely the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the North America Free Trade Agreement zone (NAFTA), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation organization (APEC). Each of these regions have used forms of differentiated integration (DI) as a means to solve otherwise intractable problems and/or export their policy preferences, ideals and bargains to key external actors. This perspective enables a more nuanced view of differentiated integration in the EU, open to its strengths as well as its weaknesses, and which accepts it as an enduring, and possibly permanent, feature.

I proceed as follows. In the second section I examine the neofunctionalist, and neofunctionalist-inspired, literature on differentiated integration, in order to show how the latter coloured the approach of many scholars of the EU. In the third section, I briefly survey the recent literature on comparative regional integration, and in particular the opportunities such studies can offer EU scholars. In the fourth section, I undertake a survey of differentiated integration in three global regions beyond Europe. I conclude by returning to the discussion of neofunctionalism and DI.

Before this, however, I set out two caveats. First, it is not possible to review the entire literature on differentiated integration in the EU in the confines of one contribution; my focus here is restricted to showing that one helpful part of the neofunctionalist project – namely, comparative regionalism – can help overcome a different, problematic aspect of neofunctionalist thinking, which I dub the ‘tragic view’ of differentiation.¹ While several scholars within EU studies have argued that differentiated integration can be beneficial (for instance, see Adler-Nissen [2011, 2014]; Leuffen *et al.* [2013]; Tuytschaever [1999]), the added value of the present piece is that it adds a comparative regionalist understanding to such perspectives. Second, it should be acknowledged that comparative study of the EU with a different range of comparators, namely federal states, continues to be useful; the present piece is intended as a complement to, and not a substitute for, such work.²

NEOFUNCTIONALISM AND THE ‘TRAGIC VIEW’ OF DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION

Neofunctionalism’s influence on European and regional integration theory, European integration studies and comparative regionalism studies is extensive. As a body of work, this theory provided the means to move away from state-centrism in the study of international politics, inviting the scholar to investigate ‘units of analysis ... dismissed as irrelevant by the dominant realist school’ (Chrysoschoou 2009: 32). This influence has been both positive – e.g., creating

the very concept of 'regional integration' – and negative (for instance, the anti-neofunctionalist backlash in new regionalism).³ Neofunctionalism's influence has also extended through time, beyond its heyday in the 1950s and early 1960s to more recent scholarship produced in the era of governance approaches in EU studies, in which the existence of a Euro polity is taken as read and the spotlight is trained on its outputs, impact and workings (Rosamond 2005a).

One of the phenomena that most confounded neofunctionalist scholars in the 1970s, when they revised and all but retracted their theory, was the likelihood of differentiated integration (see particularly Haas [1975]). One of neofunctionalism's core early objectives had been to use, but thereby to adapt, functionalist insights into international integration (Chrysoschoou 2009). Functionalists such as David Mitrany (1944, 1975) were sceptical about regional integration, fearing that it could reproduce the dangers of nationalism at a greater scale; instead, they argued for a complex system of issue-specific international regimes, where power could safely be taken away from the nation state and shared internationally. Neofunctionalists disagreed with their forebears not only about the nature and purpose of social scientific theory, but on the value of regional integration as a path to the formation of a new polity and quasi-state at the regional level (for discussion, see Rosamond [2000]). In neofunctionalism, indeed, spillover was intended as the means to avoid long-term differences between policy areas, and supranational actors, together with those in civil society, would actively seek to ensure greater uniformity of integration to ensure that its benefits could be extended maximally (Chrysoschoou 2009: 30).

In fact, the assumption that the Monnet Method of integration would produce a uniform outcome was always open to question. After all, the integration process relied entirely on the notion that areas of political life could be treated differently from each other; this is what was thought to allow the process to start in coal and steel production and then spread through other areas to eventual federation (Monnet 1978). However, after the Empty Chair crisis of 1965, neofunctionalists came to the view that member state leaders would only use the EU as a tool for problem-solving when incentives were sufficient; this would probably be on a case-by-case basis, with particular policy areas developing varying degrees of integration (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970: 285). Only a major crisis, be it internal or external, could jolt the member state élites out of such a view (*ibid.*: 298–304). There would be little, if anything, to distinguish regional integration from the more general management of international interdependence (Haas 1975: 76–85): a differentiated integration process would be one in which entropy had set in.

This 'tragic' view of differentiated integration shaped much subsequent thought, to some extent implicitly. In much, if not most, official EU discourse this orthodoxy regarding differentiated integration as a detraction from the Monnet Method and the related term, the 'Community Method', continues; indeed, the two 'methods' remain vested with emotional power and strong levels of self-understandings of EU officials (Rosamond 2005b: 473).⁴ Many academics remain similarly sceptical, seeing differentiation as a highway to

disintegration (for a discussion, see Andersen and Sitter [2006]). Although certain scholars have pointed to the potential usefulness of differentiated integration in the EU (for instance, Kölliker [2006]), it has usually been considered sub-optimal, only to be deployed in a crisis and because the ideal of uniformity is impossible (e.g., Armand and Drancourt 1970; Taylor 1983; Tindemans 1976).

Furthermore, differentiation must in such thinking be placed within clear confines. First, it must be kept to the multi-speed model, which allows member states to differ on the time it takes to reach a collective goal, but which permits no variation of the goal itself (Duff 1997; Ehlermann 1995). Second, it must be ruled out in policy areas where its usage could undermine EU influence over third countries (Grant 2000). Third, it must be used minimally and instrumentally as a policy tool, never gaining normative acceptance as a *principle* of integration, since to do that would enshrine differences between member states and complicate the functioning of an already complex political system, making it even less intelligible to the citizen (Ehlermann 1998). Thus, the provisions for enhanced co-operation, set out in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty and amended in successive rounds of Treaty change, were not actually used until 2010, and core questions such as the relationship between states which participate in enhanced co-operation on a given issue and those that do not remain to be resolved (European Movement UK 2013).⁵ In sum, then, the prevailing attitude towards differentiated integration has emphasized its problems rather than its potential, with differentiation understood as entropy. In what follows, I argue that by taking a comparative regionalism perspective, this view can be challenged.

THE EU IN CONTEXT: THE *REGION-NESS* SPECTRUM AND COMPARING DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION ACROSS REGIONS

In recent years, a great deal of work has been undertaken to bridge the gap between EU studies and new regionalism work in order to reactivate the comparative regional integration project (see *inter alia* Acharya [2012]; Acharya and Johnson [2007]; Sbragia [2008]; Söderbaum [2009]; Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond [2010]), and in particular to set out the benefits to be had for EU scholars from a sustained engagement with scholars of regionalism in other parts of the globe (Robinson and Warleigh-Lack 2011; Warleigh-Lack and Van Langenhove 2010). One of the issues suggested as part of such investigation is the usage of differentiated integration in different regions (Warleigh-Lack and Van Langenhove 2010).

In order to do such work, however, it is necessary to have a typology of regions and either to compare regions of the same kind (so that the type of region under the microscope cannot prejudice the results) or to compare how different regions address the same policy or structural issue (so that conclusions regarding 'best practice', or whether the phenomenon being studied is

meaningfully generalizable across regions of various kinds, can be drawn). There are hundreds of regional integration processes currently in existence across the globe, many of which are capable of evolution both towards and away from their present level of concentration of authority at the regional level, with consequent difficulty in identifying broad categories of region. In addition, regions can be constructed for a variety of reasons (chiefly security, regime-bolstering and economic development). However, the 'region-ness' spectrum of Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) has become acknowledged as the conventional typology in comparative regionalism studies, and I use it in what follows.⁶

Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) posit the existence of five main levels of region, understood as a non-hierarchical, not necessarily sequential and fluid set of phases of creating a region out of previously separate states and other actors.⁷ These phases range from *regional space* (a geographically contiguous area) to *region-state* (a multi-level organization based on voluntary co-operation by member states, which has evolved into a novel form of statehood). Between these two extremes are the categories of *regional complex* – a region being woven through cross-border human interaction and transactions, *regional society* (a regional complex that has been made subject to formal transnational rules, and in whose governance both state and non-state actors participate), and *regional community*, a regional society which has developed a collective identity and is recognized as a collective actor by third countries.

Invoking this typology, and classifying the EU as a '*region-state*', I have chosen three regions at different points on this continuum, so that together with the EU they can stand as representatives of each variant of region-ness discerned by Hettne and Söderbaum (2000); I omit only the 'regional space' category, as this kind of region involves an insufficient degree of co-operation.

ASEAN has been selected because it is often seen as the EU's rival as a paradigm for regional integration, and like the EU it has survived the various 'waves' of regionalism since its creation in 1967. ASEAN's norms and structures are rather different from those of the EU, being founded on the idea of non-intervention in the politics of partner states rather than supranational institutions and 'ever closer union', but like the Union it has enlarged, embraced post-communist states, undertaken a recent and ongoing process of transformation into a rules-based organization, and been a vehicle for normative power in its region. Thus, *ASEAN is a regional community*.

NAFTA has been chosen because, like the EU, it is a formally institutionalized regional organization with a degree of supremacy in its legal order. Established in 1994, it is part of the more recent global wave of region-building. It is a contract-based organization and, in its small membership of only three participating states (the United States [US], Canada and Mexico), is a good test case of the idea that small is better, because more uniform, in regional integration. *NAFTA, then, is a regional society*.

APEC is a loose construct of large geographical proportions, ranging from North America to what we in the West call the 'Far East'. It is a creation of the early 1990s, and has known both periods of optimism and fallow seasons

in its core project of economic development through liberalization, but continues to function as a means to foster economic collaboration between participating states. *APEC can thus be viewed as a regional complex.*

Before proceeding to the comparison, however, it is necessary to present the typology of differentiated integration to be used. Stubb (1996) offered a tripartite typology and broader overview of the various terms used to encapsulate this phenomenon, of which different types and nomenclatures exist (see Leruth and Lord [2015]). In a recent agenda-setting piece, Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) offer an updated understanding of differentiation in the EU that focuses on six key dimensions (namely whether such differentiation is temporary or permanent, territorial or solely functional, based on intergovernmental decisions by national governments or multi-level governance, within or outside the EU Treaties, based on decision-making at EU level or regime level, and whether non-member states can participate). A helpful recent definition of the phenomenon is supplied by Leuffen *et al.* (2013: 10), who hold that a system of differentiated integration is one which has ‘an organizational and member state core but ... a level of centralization and territorial extension that vary by function’. In addition to this definition, I find the typology set out in Table 1 useful, as it helps attract attention to the main forms taken by differentiated integration projects and is capable of application to regions beyond Europe/the EU.

The three main types of differentiated integration shown here vary according to two key variables: time and political choice. In *multi-speed differentiation*, there is no fundamental departure from a uniform process of integration, because all that varies is the time taken by particular states of a region to reach the shared collective goal. Such extra time is limited, and states which benefit from it commit to implement the policies or agreements in question as soon as they are able. An example in EU integration is the status of ‘pre-

Table 1 A typology of differentiated integration

Model of differentiation	Main cause of differentiation	Vision of integration
Multi-speed	Short-term inability to implement policy	Policy regimes with temporarily varying membership; laggards commit to catch up over time
Concentric circles (variable geometry)	Long-term inability to implement policy	Various tiers of member states organised around a ‘hard core’
À la carte	Choice not to participate, regardless of implementation capacity	Policy regimes with different memberships coexist, with no ‘hard core’

Source: Adapted from Warleigh (2002: 10).

in' to the single currency. In *concentric circles differentiation*, however, variation between participant states becomes clearer and more enduring. In this variant, states make frank choices about their long-term capacities to integrate the region's measures in their entirety, and as a result the region's undertakings are packaged into bundles of varying sizes and states sign up to one of the packages – much like subscribing to a satellite television service or internet provider. Consequently, the region becomes divided up into *de facto* leagues, from those states at the top, which implement the whole set of regional measures, to those at the bottom, which implement the smallest bundle possible. An example is the plan for a 'hard core' of states in the EU, involving France, Germany and Benelux states (Lamers 1997). The final variant, *à la carte* differentiation, is the most controversial. It envisions a region in which states decide on the suitability of integration issue by issue, making explicit political choices about the measures they wish to adopt – and those they do not. Consequently, the region becomes differentiated on an enduring, possibly permanent basis, and with no clearly identified core of members or policies. The clearest example of this in the EU is perhaps the United Kingdom's role: London undoubtedly has the capacity to implement several EU measures from which it steadfastly opts-out (e.g., Economic and Monetary Union, many areas of social policy, the Schengen rules on personal freedom of movement, the Charter of Fundamental Rights).⁸

DIFFERENTIATION 'ELSEWHERE': NAFTA, ASEAN AND APEC

I now proceed to operationalize the selected typology of differentiated integration comparatively. Table 2 illustrates whether each of the 'other' regions studied here has deployed multi-speed, concentric circles and *à la carte* modes of differentiation.

ASEAN

Differentiated integration has long been a feature of ASEAN, with particular policy areas and issues being addressed by specific logics and agreements. Often in the form of soft law, these agreements have been crucial for the expansion of ASEAN's competence beyond its early focus. For example, just as in the EU's case, ASEAN had at its beginning no powers in environmental issues, and yet, since 1977, so many resolutions, plans of action and programmes have been

Table 2 Differentiation in global regions

Region	Multi-speed	Concentric circles	À la carte
ASEAN	Yes	Yes	Yes
NAFTA	Yes	Yes	Yes
APEC	Yes	No	Yes

initiated that it is possible to 'define the administrative, institutional and normative contours of regional environmental governance' (Elliott 2004: 189).

In addition to this issue-specific creation of governance regimes, multi-speed models can be discerned in ASEAN's workings. For example, as pointed out by Kingah et al. (2012), the internal tariff reduction processes and the ASEAN Free Trade Area are being constructed on a differentiated basis, with the first six member states expected to complete the agreements before the more recent joiners (the 'CLMV states', i.e., Cambodia, Laos, Burma/Myanmar and Vietnam). Multi-speed dynamics are also part of ASEAN's external policy: the free trade agreement with China will be implemented in at least three phases, with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand signing in 2009, Brunei in 2010 and the CLMV states in 2015. Indeed, such agreements also have elements of opt-out dynamics: Singapore has reached an agreement with China that covers only goods and services, not investment (Cai 2011). This is mirrored by the intra-ASEAN process of services liberalization: the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) works on the basis of a series of bilateral and multi-lateral sector-specific agreements involving both multi-speed and *à la carte* modes of differentiation simultaneously (Loder et al. 2011).⁹

Concentric circles models are also evident in ASEAN, and are likewise present in the region's internal policies as well as its external relations. This is by means of the elaboration of the 'ASEAN Minus' and 'ASEAN Plus' formulae. The construction of the ASEAN Economic Community – a key aspect of the region's development plans – is explicitly grounded in the multi-speed idea (Nesadurai 2008), but also accepts that states may opt-out of particular regimes (e.g., Malaysia and automobile kits), and that 'a certain amount of flexibility is pre-agreed' (Ewing-Chow 2008: 227). The 'ASEAN Plus' project allows the region to bolster its function as the heart of regional co-operation in East Asia, cementing its role as a collective actor while undertaking joint initiatives with other states, e.g., the Chiang Mai initiative on currency swaps and bond market liquidity, established as a response to the Asian financial crisis of 1997 (Blizovsky 2012; Wunderlich 2012). Indeed, it may also be that ASEAN has a *de facto* external policy leadership group, using United Nations (UN) agencies and administrations of Cambodia and East Timor (Henry 2007).

NAFTA

All three modes of differentiation can be seen in NAFTA, which is characterized by 'multi-speed dynamics, differentiated treatment of particular issue areas and even opt-outs for individual member states from particular liberalization processes' (Warleigh-Lack 2010: 49). Multi-speed dynamics, in fact, were written into the NAFTA process at the outset: a 15-year implementation period was agreed, with different sectors of the economy set to be integrated at their own speeds (Burfisher et al. 2001), and it can even be argued that NAFTA's

origins in the pre-existing Canada–US free trade agreement, which Mexico wanted to join, give the multi-speed dynamic deeper, more organic roots (Courchene 2003). Indeed, the explicit ring-fencing of ‘side agreements’ in environmental matters and labour questions, which were bolted onto the main focus on liberalizing trade late in the negotiation process, means that NAFTA involves different areas of policy on explicitly different institutional bases, with varying degrees of authority and different patterns of governance (Sanchez 2002).

Moreover, the concentric circles model is evident in the informal hierarchy of relations between the three member states: the most closely bound are the US and Canada, followed by the US and Mexico and, a long way behind, Mexico and Canada (Beatty 2002). This is not a formal separation into tiers of membership, but is nonetheless a clear and enduring aspect of North American integration (Morales 2010). Indeed, bilateral agreements to supplement NAFTA provisions on various matters are typical of the region (Wallace 1998), perhaps especially between the US and Mexico (Hufbauer and Schott 1993).

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of NAFTA’s differentiation, however, is the extensive use of opt-outs, i.e., the *à la carte* mode of differentiation: the region has only three member states! However, given the differences in wealth, international status and state capacity between Washington, Ottawa and Mexico City, this is perhaps more intuitive an outcome: NAFTA was, after all, the first regional organization formally to include a developing country as a partner with some of the globe’s richest states. Certain aspects of *à la carte* integration were signed into the Agreement at its origin, and others have arisen as the process of regional integration has proceeded. In the first category can be counted both several aspects of the Canada–US free trade agreement on which NAFTA was based (for instance, see Dean and Dehejia [2006] on Canada’s opt-outs regarding cultural industries) and areas of integration that were freshly minted as part of the NAFTA deal. Both Canada and Mexico formally opted-out of certain NAFTA provisions: for instance, Canada did so on the use of sanctions for environmental degradation, preferring to use its own domestic enforcement procedures (Sanchez 2002), and Mexico did so regarding energy production, export and import (Cameron and Tomlin 2000). Intriguingly, given the fact that all NAFTA states are federations, NAFTA provides for the different sub-national provinces/states of each country to opt-out because of the subsidiarity issue: the side-agreements on environmental protection and labour co-operation, for instance, address matters that are the provinces’ jurisdiction in Canada, not the preserve of the federal government (Kukucha 2003). Thus, NAFTA is institutionally and legally variegated in complex ways which mean it is, in practice, a highly differentiated region; indeed, its evolution to date has arguably made it even more so than it was at the outset. The cross-sectoral processes for dispute resolution in the region have become more sector-specific and even usurped by what have become *de facto* differentiated regimes and rules in certain sectors of the economy; taking

the case of softwood lumber, Adams (2008) shows how Chapter 19 of NAFTA has effectively been replaced by a bilateral US–Canada agreement to the exclusion of Mexico.

APEC

APEC is an intriguing case of differentiated integration within a region. Its member states often refer to themselves in this context as ‘member economies’ – indicative of an allergy to developing formal institutions for the region, but also expressive of the fact that business interests and groups are key actors in the process, with privileged access to decision-makers (Camilleri 2003). As a region with few, and extremely weak, formal institutions, there is no obvious division of APEC into different tiers of membership on even an informal basis, and there is no solid core of policy equivalent to the EU *acquis*, NAFTA text or ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Co-operation that could be packaged up into suitable bundles for each concentric circle of members to implement. That said, APEC’s approach to its core agenda – ‘open regionalism’ as a means to liberalize the economy, thereby preparing for immersion into the global economy – is undertaken on a voluntary and often unilateral basis, and in a way which is explicitly non-discriminatory *vis-à-vis* third countries (Ravenhill 2001). As a result, an *à la carte* situation is easy to discern, and is perhaps unsurprising, given the ongoing difficulties in building the region – not least with regard to the role of the US, Australia and Russia, not to mention Peru and Chile, as members of a region which is geographically (and culturally?) centred in Asia (Garnaut 2000).

More surprising, perhaps, is the use of multi-speed integration as a means of generating policy agreements and improving implementation of APEC-level agreements in member states/economies. In this regard, APEC has an ambiguous record. The usage of such a mode of integration in APEC’s early years to foster the opening up of markets in goods and services, Early Voluntary Sectoral Liberalization (EVSL), was a failure: vested interests in certain powerful states, e.g., Japan, mobilized to frustrate it (Beeson 2009), and in the absence of either regional institutions capable of enforcement, or participants’ commitment to the general good, it withered on the vine (Aggarwal and Morrison 2000). On the other hand, APEC has since developed a different, explicit mechanism to take its members on a path of multi-speed integration, namely the Pathfinder Initiative. Agreed in 2001, this sets out the basis on which sub-groups of APEC states can undertake co-operation measures together, so long as they are coherent with the region’s core principles and try to foster the inclusion of greater numbers of APEC states subsequent to the initiative’s launch. Since 2004, the process has required Pathfinders to be launched on an interim basis of a year, after which they can be converted to full Pathfinder status if a quarter of APEC states are willing to take part and at least one of them is prepared to take the lead in drafting a proposal (Su 2007). Thus, although it must be admitted that APEC’s future continues to be in doubt, multi-speed

integration is likely to be a crucial part of whatever future success it is able to generate.¹⁰

In sum, all three of the selected regions demonstrate significant amounts of differentiation, meaning that it is present at all four of the examined points on the Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) region-ness scale. Multi-speed and *à la carte* modes are common to each, with three of the four regions (the EU, ASEAN and NAFTA) evincing clear signs of concentric circles modes too. Unless we are to believe that, as a consequence of this flexibility, all the regional organizations and processes under the microscope have somehow failed to develop properly, the frequency of differentiated integration suggests instead that it is a normal characteristic of regional integration rather than a sign of arrested development. It can actively be sought by societal interest groups (Long 2008), and can coexist with – if not facilitate – growing popular support for the region (Pastor 2011). Moreover, differentiation appears to be capable of adding depth to a regional integration process, and enabling that region to shape its neighbourhood (Wunderlich 2012), even if by the same token it also makes such regions less uniform, and is not a failsafe device for addressing difficult problems when member state preferences diverge (Adler-Nissen 2011). In the final section of this contribution, I proceed to draw some conclusions and suggestions for further research.

CONCLUSIONS: COMPARATIVE REGIONALISM, DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION AND NEOFUNCTIONALISM

In this contribution I have suggested that DI is not to be considered as integration gone wrong, but rather as an inherently neutral feature of regional integration organizations and processes at any point on the region-ness spectrum other than *regional space*. I have drawn on work in comparative regionalism to demonstrate that three leading global macro-regions other than the EU also experience several modes of DI, and argued that this implies DI is more in need of explanation in its absence than in its presence. To be sure, the range of macro-regions capable of study in one contribution precludes nomothetic judgements; comparisons including regions in Africa and Latin America could help explore whether more generalizable conclusions about causality and scope conditions of DI in regional integration can be suggested. Nonetheless, the analysis undertaken here is sufficient to suggest that the tragic view of DI is misplaced, and that comparative regionalism, identified by neofunctionalists as a key part of their project, has useful light to shine on important aspects of present-day EU governance.

However, for several reasons such a conclusion is not tantamount to the restoration of neofunctionalism. There are in fact several grounds for caution here. First, present-day processes of regionalism and regional integration differ sufficiently from those of the 1950s and 60s in both their forms and in their links to globalization to require new theoretical approaches (Hettne 2003). Second, while neofunctionalism has helpful contributions to make about understanding

regional integration outside the EU and Europe (Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010: 1005–7), these often lead to circular conclusions that only the EU has any significant chance to integrate further, since only in the EU are background conditions sufficient. This ‘integration snobbery’ can blind scholars to see real-world successes in regional integration processes beyond Europe (Murray 2010); it may also fail to capture ways in which the EU itself has evolved in ways which neofunctionalism finds problematic, such as its increasing diversity and reliance on soft policy (Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010: 997–1003). Neofunctionalism can also lead scholars to misconstrue certain key dynamics, e.g., the role of civil society actors; in MERCOSUR, for instance, multinational corporations have fostered closer *informal* regional links in order to maximize profit, but shied away from while failing to support closer formal integration (Phillips and Prieto 2011).

Indeed, the division between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics made in neofunctionalism, along with the nostrum that the latter is easier to integrate than the former, is falsified by the experience of several real-world macro-regions. For instance, the African Union has done far more in security integration than in the economic equivalent, and has a more robust regional security role in its continent than the EU has so far managed. ASEAN’s origins are in calculations about security and regime-bolstering, not economics or trade, and yet it has a record of external influence in its neighbourhood which rivals that of the EU on its own near abroad (Wunderlich 2012). Moreover, the EU remains mired in slow progress in several areas of ‘low politics’, such as the cross-border recognition of professional qualifications or transport policy, and even the recession of 2008 to the present day has only generated sufficient spillover for system-changing deeper integration in conjunction with the use of DI – *viz.* the Fiscal Treaty. Comparative regionalism studies indicate, therefore, that neither in general nor in the specific case of DI does neofunctionalism merit a more than partial rehabilitation.

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NOTES

- 1 For such a discussion, see Leruth and Lord (2015).
- 2 For a dialogue between a comparative politics-nurtured EU scholar and a comparative regionalism scholar, see Söderbaum and Sbragia (2010).
- 3 For further discussion of this backlash and its consequences, see Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond (2010).
- 4 For an academic defence of the Monnet Method and its usefulness in present-day European integration, see Wessels (2001).
- 5 For an alternative interpretation, see Bolleyer et al. (2014). These scholars argue that the reason for limited usage of differentiated integration in the EU is linked to its foundations in a confederal pact with a strong emphasis on the constitutional equality of all member states.
- 6 It is valid to apply different typologies to the EU, depending on the purpose of the intended comparison; the EU remains a difficult entity to classify, and does not fit entirely with conventional academic categories. Early work on the comparative study of the EU (e.g., Hix 1994) argues that while approaches derived from International Relations are needed to explain the creation and evolution of the EU, comparative politics approaches are needed to understand its present-day politics and contestation. Comparative federalism has been used, *inter alia*, to evaluate the role of political ideals in integration (Burgess 1996) and study the EU's institutions, interest group mobilization, and territorial politics (e.g., Sbragia 1993). Confederal models of the EU have also been applied, to situate the EU historically and explore how the EU's Treaties have shaped its dynamics (e.g., Bolleyer and Börzel 2014; Forsyth 1981; Warleigh 1998). The intention of the present contribution is not to deny the usefulness of such work, but rather to complement it by exploring the ways in which the EU is akin to other regional organizations and integration processes.
- 7 An interesting attempt to set the EU in comparative context has been made by multi-level governance (MLG) scholars. The existence of two types of MLG is posited (Marks and Hooghe 2004: 17), with Type I being general purpose, with few levels of governance, non-intersecting memberships and system-wide institutional architecture. Type II has intersecting memberships, task-specific jurisdictions, numerous levels of governance and flexible institutional design. For Marks and Hooghe, the EU represents Type I MLG, but has similarities with Type II, and the usage of differentiated integration is explicitly identified as a key criterion to assess whether the EU moves closer to Type II MLG.
- 8 The centrality of the UK's participation to the Common Security and Defence Policy, however, means that UK membership of the EU also has an element of the concentric circles model.
- 9 As discussed immediately below, the existence of the various ASEAN Minus and Plus formations means that the region has internal elements of *à la carte* integration.
- 10 The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) may have a significant impact on APEC's future. The TPP is still under negotiation at the time of writing, but if realized it would involve 11 APEC states in a free trade area. The TPP is not an APEC initiative as such, but through constituting a 'hard core' of states in the region, it could bring a *de facto* concentric circles element of differentiation to the region unless other states join later.

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