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Europe Through the Looking-Glass: Comparative and Multi-Level Perspectives

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ABSTRACT
The two main divisions in the social sciences, cross-national comparison and international relations theory, must reconsider their methodologies and paradigms when studying transnationalization and, in particular, European integration. This article reviews the major differences in methods, research orientation and heuristic models between the comparative and international perspectives. Four main differences between the two perspectives are discussed: Galton's problem, the level of analysis, interdependence and (dis)aggregation. Reviewing the different paradigms in European studies, the author argues for a combined, if not synthetic, comparative and multi-level approach. For studying Europe's diversity and unity, a multi-level and multi-centric model seems most promising. Such an approach should take into account both state and non-state actors, as well as the interaction between international and national levels in the Europeanization process.

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1. Introduction
Approaching the third millennium, many observers proclaim the end of the nation-state. The European nation-states are indeed engaged in a process of political and economic integration, a unique experiment given the centuries of war as political expression of interstate conflict. These processes of transnationalization in general and European integration in particular have not only political, economic and social repercussions, but also challenge the foundations of the social sciences: the sovereign state and autonomous society. Some critical observers call for a renewal of the social sciences to confront the increased interdependencies between and dissolution of the nation-states.1 Since their beginning, the social sciences have clung to the nation-states and their societies, for fear of losing their firm theoretical, methodological and empirical foundations. Charles Tilly criticized this centuries-old pernicious postulate, according to which 'the world as a whole divides into distinct societies, each having its more or less autonomous culture, government, economy, and solidarity' (Tilly 1984:11). This criticism holds not only for comparative politics and sociology, but also for international relations (IR), including European integration studies.

Viewing European studies 'Through the Looking-Glass', to borrow the title of Lewis Carroll's fairy tale, I shall portray the comparative and international perspectives roughly as mirror-images (Caporaso 1989; see also Hix 1994: Risse-Kappen 1996). While comparativists envision societies as unconnected 'islands', their IR colleagues traditionally conceive 'war and peace' as a game of chess between sovereign states. Although these groups subscribe to contrary aims and analyse the empirical world from inverse angles, their perspectives nevertheless mirror each other. Seen through the looking-glass, the national state remains the pivotal concept of the two converse perspectives. Cross-national comparison takes the nation-state as its unit of analysis, but IR theory also adheres
to an interstate perspective, which presupposes the state as actor.

When studying political, economic or social development in Europe, social scientists still choose between the two competing domains: European comparative studies and EU integration analysis. On the one hand, comparativists study the commonalities and differences between European nation-states. Comparison serves to test macro-theories and provide insight into the Europeanization process. EU policy studies, on the other hand, deal with political regulation within a multi-level polity – the European Union. These IR studies analyse the political decision-making process at the different levels of government, in particular the national actors and supranational institutions and their interaction.

Although there are advantages to specialization and separation, the division of labour into domestic and international politics becomes increasingly questionable. This divide hampers our understanding of Europeanization, a complex process that follows from the interaction between diverse national interests and European co-operative efforts (Olsen 1995). My central thesis is that by themselves, these perspectives can provide only incomplete, albeit complementary pictures. Europeanists must open a dialogue, if not attempt a synthesis of the two perspectives for a more fruitful and realistic study of European unity and diversity. The current debate on the transnational challenge to European social sciences invites further reflection on the use of comparative methods and IR theory (de Swaan 1995; Haller 1990; Hamm 1992). It is also an opportunity for comparativists to formulate and advance their own contribution to the analysis of global interdependencies and European integration. A political scientist proclaimed that 'the time is right for 'comparativists' to take up their pens and challenge the dominance of the international approaches' (Hix 1994). As a comparativist, I would like to follow and contribute to the methodological debate in European studies in order to stimulate more sociological analysis of the Europeanization process.

I shall proceed by emphasizing the contrasts between the two approaches, especially their paradigmatic, methodological and theoretical differences. Due to space limitations, the looking-glass through which we shall see the two perspectives reflects only the most significant contrasts. For the sake of argument, I shall largely disregard the more differentiated and balanced recent attempts of some researchers in both domains to bridge the gap. The schematic comparison highlights the special perspective needed for an analysis of the process of Europeanization. This article is primarily a programmatic plea for bridging the two perspectives and for advancing the discussion of such a combined approach in European social sciences.

The synopsis will be revealed in four mirror images. First, I shall compare the contrasting aims of the two domains: on the one hand, explanation of cross-national differences or commonalities, and on the other, analysis of inter-state relations. Second, it will be shown that the two perspectives do not use incompatible methods, although in practice they usually apply one or the other more frequently. Third, I shall look at the dominant paradigms, especially those models that conceptualize state and societal, but also domestic and international factors. Finally, I shall outline how these different paradigms place more emphasis on either unity or diversity in Europe, and how we may gain from synergies bridging both comparison and multi-level analysis, though this needs further elaboration in the future. Thus, I hope to develop and expand on the rather sketchy observations on the comparative and international perspectives so far prevalent in European studies.

2. Breaking the conceptual chains

Ever since their origins, the social sciences have been entangled with the rise and fate of nation-states and capitalist market-economies. By dividing social sciences into national and international aspects, they became 'prisoners of the state' (Tilly 1992). As Zolberg states, 'The social sciences are founded on the conventional notion that the world may be treated as a set of largely self-contained societal entities, coinciding by and large with international boundaries' (1987:46). Both comparative and international perspectives perceive the 'nation-state' as the context of national politics or as an international actor. Yet only a few examples actually fit the definition (Tilly 1992), that is, a nation-state based on a homogeneous society and international sovereignty.

For decades, political scientists accepted the neat distinction of 'high' and 'low' politics or the division of foreign affairs and domestic
politics. As long as comparativists concentrated on the explanation of domestic politics and IR experts on war and peace research, there was not much each side could learn from the other. Despite their common origins, 'because they have focused on diametrically opposed areas of the discipline – the politics 'among' against the politics 'within' nations – the academic discourse of IR scholars and comparativists has grown apart as the fields have matured' (Hix 1994:23). In addition to the advantages of self-confidence and economy of specialization, the segmentation made its practitioners believe that domestic and international politics are better studied separately, despite the recognition that 'the boundaries between domestic and international politics have crumbled' (Caporaso 1989:8). This gulf has long impeded a revision of the assumptions inherent in this split: the autonomous societies in which domestic politics are subject to endogenous factors and the sovereign nation-states that have undiluted power in interstate relations. This is all the more surprising given the complex interaction between state and society and the increased transnational, political and economic interdependencies which are particularly evident in the Europeanization process.

Not only political science, but also economics, law and history practice such a division into domestic and international domains. However, '[i]t is noteworthy... that sociology is conceptually so bound up with the notion that human activity is carried on exclusively within societies that no 'international' field has evolved within that discipline at all' (Zolberg 1987:47). Indeed, that sociology has by and large ignored transnationalization is surprising given its claim to study all kinds of social process whatever their level of aggregation, including the international level (Landecker 1938). As Shaw put it, 'A central paradox of sociology is that, while most analysis assumes national societies, the major theories are centred on concepts which either implicitly or explicitly transcend national frameworks' (1994:14). A few sociologists have moved beyond society-centred analysis and applied general theories to transnationalization, most prominently those studying world systems (à la Wallerstein), 'dependencia' problems of developing countries, cross-border migration of people or capital and (postmodern) theories of global culture. However, these transnational sociological analyses are conducted largely on a world-wide or global societal level, while few sociologists have thus far focused on the Europeanization process and combined both IR and comparative perspectives. Outside IR, comparative politics and mainstream sociology find it difficult to deal with the transnationalization of state and society, partly because they are afraid to break with the method of comparison.

3. Galton’s problem

Why should transnationalization pose a challenge to the comparative method? Critics argue that transnationalization undermines the methodological assumptions of this method. In this view, cross-national comparison, especially when applied as a quasi-experimental method, assumes independent and closed units of analysis and contexts in which dependent and independent variables operate. Although there are several different cross-national comparative strategies and goals (Allardt 1990; Kohn 1989; Ragin 1987; Tilly 1984; Sztompka 1988), in principle, they all attempt to explain cross-national singularity, universality or diversity. For all three comparative foci, the dependent variable is a phenomenon within a nation-state. The same holds, by and large, for the independent variables presumed to account for country-specific uniqueness, commonality or variation (Scheuch 1990).

Consequently, if transnational processes do exist, they would traverse all units of analysis and violate the closed system assumption of the comparative method. Thus, when comparing modern societies, we face Galton’s problem from anthropology: cultural similarities between different tribes on two islands may be due not to endogenous factors, but to the diffusion of a cultural trait from one tribe to the other (1987:47). Indeed, that sociology has by and large ignored transnationalization is surprising given its claim to study all kinds of social process whatever their level of aggregation, including the international level (Landecker 1938). As Shaw put it, 'A central paradox of sociology is that, while most analysis assumes national societies, the major theories are centred on concepts which either implicitly or explicitly transcend national frameworks' (1994:14). A few sociologists have moved beyond society-centred analysis and applied general theories to transnationalization, most prominently those studying world systems (à la Wallerstein), 'dependencia' problems of developing countries, cross-border migration of people or capital and (postmodern) theories of global culture. However, these transnational sociological analyses are conducted largely on a world-wide or global societal level, while few sociologists have thus far focused on the Europeanization process and combined both IR and comparative perspectives. Outside IR, comparative politics and mainstream sociology find it difficult to deal with the transnationalization of state and society, partly because they are afraid to break with the method of comparison.
larity between them. However, this strategy is of no avail when we seek to examine closely connected European societies. For these national societies, we must assume that internal and external factors coincide. Cross-national comparison is possible on the condition that researchers explicitly rule out or deliberately control for external factors. We must control for a society's degree of 'openness' to and 'linkage' with the external world, which in fact is an internal property of an open system, and thus can be compared along with other endogenous factors.

The two most famous methods of comparison are John Stuart Mill's 'method of agreement' and 'method of difference' (Mill [1848] 1905). These methods are commonly used in cross-national comparison, but are also applicable when controlling for external factors. According to the latter, we compare similar societies that differ in terms of dependent and explanatory independent variables. However, similar societies are often more interdependent or related and are thus subject to similar external influences. According to the method of difference, we can only compare their divergence, not the convergence between such interconnected societies. The method of agreement seeks to find similarities between dependent and independent variables in two otherwise dissimilar societies. In this case, we must investigate whether parallel exogenous factors are pushing these diverse societies to become more similar and thus to converge before we can observe universal but endogenous processes.

Cross-national comparison can only provide us with a sense of how national societies are influenced by exogenous factors; it is not the means to explore transnationalization processes as such. Since exogenous factors are analytically situated outside the social system under investigation, they must be taken for granted in cross-national comparison – only the degree of openness is a country-specific property. Thus far, there are very few studies that compare societal processes in a broader context, examining national development within the international system (Kohn 1989:24). In contrast to cross-national comparison, 'transnational' analyses study nations or parts of them not as isolated units, but as systems of interrelation. Such an understanding of transnationalization informs cross-national comparison, which links transnationalization with specific national impacts.

If supranational decisions are increasingly affecting national states, markets and societies in Europe and elsewhere, studies of international co-operation, world market interdependence or global cultures may provide better insight into today's social reality. Moreover, if cross-border social processes are also on the increase, then we should learn more from studying the interaction between units of a transnational system than from a simple cross-national comparison of the impact at the 'receiving' national ends. For instance, instead of studying the degree of penetration of foreign investment in national economies, a study of foreign investment decisions and the resulting transnational networks of subsidiaries could provide better insight into the globalization processes of capital and production than nation-based studies would.

4. Divided domains, different methods?

Now we come to the question of whether an increase in cross-border exchange and the transfer of decision-making beyond national borders requires a switch in methodology. We often assume that IR or EU studies differ methodologically from cross-national comparison. However, the comparative method is not necessarily unsuited to analysis of international relations. Ever since Durkheim, comparison has been sociology's constitutive method at all levels of social organization and interpersonal relations (Durkheim [1895] 1982). Although we often assume cross-national comparison to be the domain of the social sciences, the comparative method is applicable to subnational and supranational political institutions and social units as well.

Many see the European Union as a system sui generis, claiming that due to the N = 1 problem, there is no other case for comparison. However, comparison of supranational institutions and transnational processes need not always be limited to the same international level. For instance, it is possible to compare one international institution or transnational process with other social aggregates or processes at the national level (Alger 1963). We can create analogies and models not only on different community levels, ranging from local to international co-operation, but also within different political systems, e.g. by examining the similarities between the joint decision-making trap of German federalism and the...
political decision-making process within the European Union (Scharpf 1988).

The expediency of such an approach in European studies lies less in revealing empirical parallelism and more in introducing new insight from cross-national studies into European integration analysis. Thus, ‘thinking about the Community comparatively will prove to be more fruitful analytically than simply describing the Community as ‘unique’ and in consequence analysing it exclusively on its own terms’ (Sbragia 1992:12–13). Certainly there are such comparative studies, which mainly reveal the singularity and contingency of the European integration process. Moreover, the number of cases when comparing supranational regimes – even counting historical cases – is rather small. However, numerous international organizations and transnational actors, such as non-governmental interest groupings and multinational corporations, constitute a rich store of comparable cases (Keohane & Nye 1972).

5. Horizontal versus vertical analysis

Their methods are not the sole defining features of the comparative and international perspectives; they also have different emphases in practice. Comparativists mainly study variations or similarities between phenomena on the same level of analysis, whether national, supranational or subnational. IR approaches, or rather multi-level analyses, study interactions across several levels. Whereas the first, comparative approach investigates horizontal causal chains operating on the same level, the second, multi-level approach inquires into the vertical interaction in hierarchical decision-making structures and multi-layered social systems.

The two converse approaches – horizontal comparison and vertical multi-level analysis – reflect different choices in the level of analysis and the unit of observation (Yurdusev 1993). They differ in their methodological conceptualization of the dependent and independent variables. In the case of horizontal analysis, units of analysis and observations, dependent and independent variables operate on the same level, either intranational or international. Vertical or multi-level analysis explains a phenomenon (or dependent variable) on a national or international level with reference to the interaction between lower and higher levels (independent variables).

The distinction between horizontal and vertical analysis goes beyond the debate on the ‘level of analysis’ problem ongoing independently in both domains. This problem in IR is more epistemological than methodological, a debate between rival schools of thought (holists versus reductionists), ever since the early work of Waltz and Singer first juxtaposed international ‘system’ and national ‘units’ of action.12 Holists tend to use horizontal analysis to explain international relations with reference to system properties, while reductionists propound a vertical analysis that understands international relations as the strategic interaction between national actors, sovereign states or even individual statesmen (sic!).

For comparativists, the IR debate seems rather confusing and shows a ‘generally weak understanding of the philosophy of social sciences’ (Buzan 1995:205) that does more to mark its distinctiveness than enhance its methodological soundness as a discipline. In contrast, system theorists in sociology are conceptually bound to the national society or nation-state on the macro-level. Critics of system theory challenge the usefulness of macrosociological explanations, and advocate a microscopic rational choice approach, which seeks to reduce macro-level phenomena to micro-level behaviour (see Alexander et al. 1987). As a consequence of these quarrels, much confusion within and between both subfields abounds. Indeed, the ‘level of analysis’ debate confuses ontological and epistemological issues: what is the unit of analysis (national or international) and what is the source of explanation (action-oriented or structural) (Buzan 1995)? IR system theory confounds these two issues.

6. Top-down or bottom-up?

In the end, the level of analysis problem may come down to personal taste, an arbitrary heuristic choice. Once we acknowledge that there is interaction between higher and lower levels, both ‘microscopic’ and ‘macroscopic’ explanations are possible and fruitful. Yet the point of departure also determines the perspective, whether we climb up or down the ladder of analysis (Singer 1961). While EU integration analysts usually take a ‘top-down’ view to explain national behaviour, comparativists
tend to use the reverse strategy—a ‘bottom-up’ perspective—when explaining international phenomena. Depending on the standpoint, the researcher will put more emphasis on cross-national diversity or international interdependencies, and attempt to aggregate lower-level interest diversity or disaggregate higher-level ‘unitary’ players, in order to arrive at a conclusion on the other level of analysis.13

The ‘top-down’ analysts give priority to international system explanation, and see domestic factors only as ‘transmission belts’—unless they give rise to anomalies from ideal-typical model assumptions (Moravcsik 1993:6–7). They perceive the international system as the result of the interplay of nation-states, thereby assuming states to be unitary actors. Starting from the top, they look at the system and its participating governments as a whole. Game-theoretical models thus explain multi-lateral agreements as bargaining outcomes of the interplay of national interests of the signatory parties. However, ‘the tendency for international explanations to use an increasing number of ad hoc variables is one of the hallmarks of a ‘degenerating’ research program ripe for revisions’ (Moravcsik 1993:6). Only when encountering inexplicable ‘deals’ between national governments will they modify their top-down perspective. They then fill in the ‘black box’ of assumed national interests by analysing the specific domestic politics and conflicts of interest (Singer 1961: see also Moravcsik 1991, 1994).

The ‘bottom-up’ strategy starts with the domestic politics and conflicts of interest. Only as a second step will it turn to the international level. For instance, comparativists have studied the convergence of national welfare states, social structures or family patterns as facilitators of European integration (Kaelble 1990; Therborn 1995). Economic integration within the Single European Market, beginning in the 1950s and gaining momentum in recent years, has led to considerable economic convergence and interdependence, not to speak of the parallel process of globalization into the world economy. However, despite similar pressure to converge from globalization and European economic integration, we still find considerable national diversity even in response to these economic forces across Western capitalist countries (Berger & Dore 1996). A comparative analysis of the national interest structure also helps to explain alliance and coalition building on an international level. This ‘bottom-up’ view looks at the national forces promoting international co-operation, and asks in whose interest such co-operation will be. Seen from this perspective, ‘EC politics is the continuation of domestic policies by other means’ (Moravcsik 1991:47).14

These perspectives lead to different assumptions about the main forces behind European integration—the ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors (Ebbinghaus & Visser 1997). From a ‘top-down’ perspective, European integration is seen mainly as influenced by ‘pull’ factors. For instance, the transfer of authority and resources to the supranational level of political decision-making will induce nationally organized interest groups to readjust and relocate to the higher level (‘Brussels’). The ‘bottom-up’ perspective argues that ‘push’ factors account for increased European co-ordination of organized interests. In this view, transnational co-operation results from increased convergence and interdependence between nation-states, that is, as a consequence of functional overlap and pressures from ‘below’.

Conversely, we may also analyse the ‘barriers’ to European integration. The ‘top-down’ perspective stresses the institutional obstacles at the supranational level, while the ‘bottom-up’ view sees cross-national diversity as the major ‘barrier’ to European unity. For instance, with respect to the possibility of an integrated European social policy, some observers argue that EU law and its need for unanimity rule out the transfer of substantial EU regulatory competencies, while others stress the enormous differences in social standards, regulatory styles and nationally entrenched institutions (Leibfried & Pierson 1995). Thus, political decisions on European economic integration ‘from above’, by deregulating national economies and removing barriers to the free movement of capital, goods, services and labour, have undermined ‘from below’ our domestic economies and led to regime competition between national welfare states (Marks et al. 1996).

We should also note that the two perspectives entail a particular selection bias. The ‘top-down’ view takes as its points of departure the supranational institution and the main ‘players’. However, there may be actors not formally involved, not sitting at the round table in Brussels, but playing an important role behind the scenes. Moreover, as the unsettled history of European integration
shows, development and expansion of the EU is the result of a compromise between the ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups and the centre-building process. For instance, Norway, as a non-member of the European Union, is still indirectly affected by many EU decisions and, as a small neighbour, must adapt to the wishes of the large European Economic Area. This also holds for Switzerland, which is neither an EU member, nor part of the EEA. A comparative perspective à la Rokkan (1975) may help to better our understanding of the geopolitical and geo-economic clustering and the de facto interdependence between European nation-states. Such a perspective may do more for us than a European integration analysis limited to the de jure EU institutions.

But there is also the danger of a retrospective ‘bottom-up’ analysis: we should be careful only to select cases with the same outcome (e.g. EU membership). We also need to take into account those cases that differed in development. Therefore, to understand the process of Europeanization, we should not limit our analysis to the current EU member states, or, even worse, to the largest ones, but must also include the non-members and members-in-waiting (Olsen 1995). Such an ‘encompassing comparison’ (Tilly 1984) would not be a quasi-experimental attempt to reveal universal processes, but would provide a systematic study of the historically bound diversity and unity amongst increasingly interconnected nation-states on the European ‘conceptual’ map (Rokkan 1975). The comparative method contributes to European integration studies by interpreting intra-European convergence and the differences between Europe and other global players, such as the USA or Japan (Kaelble 1990; Therborn 1995). Comparative studies might also reveal regional disparities, social imbalances and international divisions of labour across Europe caused by the European integration process and globalization.

7. Domestic or international factors?

As Gourevitch (1978) has illustrated, some distinguished comparativists have sought to identify the international sources of domestic politics instead of the reverse image common in IR, which looks for domestic explanations of foreign politics. Specific national patterns were explained with reference to the place of a nation-state within the international system or world economy: ‘Instead of being a cause of international politics, domestic structure may be a consequence of it’ (Gourevitch 1978:882). In contrast to the ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ perspectives, the images with respect to cause and effect are reversed here: the comparativist acknowledges that international factors may cause domestic ones, and the internationalist that domestic politics may influence international politics.

Whether IR students examine the influence of domestic on international relations, or comparativists see international factors accounting for cross-national differences, both get caught up in the problem of interdependence. The two levels are ‘so interrelated that they should be analysed simultaneously, as wholes’ (Gourevitch 1978:911). Whichever approach we choose, we first need to ascertain that the reverse influence is not more dominant. To deal with interdependence, we need a Janus-faced approach that takes into account the interaction between national and international systems, a conception of the interaction as a feedback spiral in which domestic changes and international interdependencies become mutually contingent. Historical studies may provide a means to analyse the path-dependent nature of the European integration process (Pierson 1996); past decisions might have unintended long-term consequences. Once implemented, decisions such as opening up the economy or joining the Single European Market are difficult to reverse.

Thus, to understand European integration, we must be able to climb up and down the ladder, from the domestic to the international level and back again (Singer 1961). Standing on only one step of the ladder will not provide us with an appreciation of the dynamics of integration and potential interdependencies. Analysts of intergovernmental agreements have pointed out that we need to understand the diplomatic decision-making process as a two-level game of co-ordination within and between nation-states (Putnam 1988; Moravcsik 1993). Such a multi-level approach entails both comparative analysis of the ‘logic of diversity’ and, at a higher level, analysis of the ‘logic of integration’ (Hoffmann 1968). This may already hint at the important insight that multi-level integration analysis presupposes and builds upon cross-national analysis, since we cannot grasp the supranational unity and its consequences without understanding cross-national diversity.
Table 1. Paradigms in international relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Actors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unidimensional system level</td>
<td>Inter-state relations (‘billiard ball’ model)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-level interaction</td>
<td>Multi-level game (double-edged diplomacy)</td>
</tr>
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8. Towards a multi-centric and multi-level model

Comparative sociology and international relations have tended to use either horizontal or vertical analysis, and have also favoured different paradigms. International system analysis, with its traditional interest in international security matters, has largely applied ‘state-centric’ models, while comparativists have often stressed ‘multi-centric’ society models (Rose- nau 1990; see also Marks et al. 1996). The first approach takes the nation-state as its primary actor, while the second problematizes state-society relations and the diversity of national interests. Theoretically, both explanatory models can be applied in horizontal comparative or vertical multi-level analysis, though in practice, they are not equally common options. We can distinguish at least four theoretical-methodological paradigms in IR (see Table 1)

1. We find, on the one hand, the international system view, which conceives of world politics as a flat international ‘playing field’, thereby ignoring its multi-layeredness. The ‘billiard ball’ model of international system analysis of war and peace presumes a mechanical interplay of powerful unitary nation-states. With this approach, ‘by definition, we allow little room for divergence in the behaviour of our parts when we focus upon the whole (...) nations may differ widely in what they consider to be their national interests, and we end up having to break down and refine the larger category’ (Singer 1961:23). Although it may be a relatively parsimonious model, it assumes a high degree of uniformity, thus ignoring non-state factors and intra-state divisions.

2. Uneasy with such state-centric short-sightedness, critics attempted to amend this model by dropping the assumption of unitary national actors and allowing for multiplicy. In this ‘spider’s web’ model, international relations occur in a ‘multi-centric world’ in which a relatively anarchic network of state and non-state actors plays on the international stage (Rosenau 1990). According to Keohane and Nye, ‘A good deal of intersocietal intercourse, with significant political importance, takes place without governmental control’ (1972: x). This interaction between non-state and state actors has been labelled by them ‘transnational relations’.

3. In addition, multi-level approaches are also becoming more and more important. We find the same two tendencies here, mirroring the split at the ‘flat’ system level between state-centric and multi-centric models. One approach amends the ‘billiard ball’ model of international power relations, problematizing the unitary national actor assumption. National government agents in this model engage in ‘double-edged’ diplomacy (Putnam 1989; Moravcsik 1993). They negotiate not only at the international level, but also at the domestic level, using their intermediary position to play the levels against each other. This approach illuminates the bargains struck between and within EU member states, especially where competencies and resources are transferred from the sovereign nation-states to the supranational level (e.g. see Moravcsik 1991; Garrett 1992; Lange 1993).

4. The societal approach adds a further element – a multiple actor network which extends from state to society. This approach understands international politics as a complex interdependence within a multi-layered polyarchy. This perspective has moved farthest away from classic, state-centric system theory. Rosenau (1990) argues strongly that we face increasingly global turbulence as a result of proliferating ‘subgroupism’, eroded state authority and increased impact of non-state actors. A
multi-centric, multi-level analysis seems particularly suited to aid understanding of European unity and diversity. Recent calls for comparative-historical studies of Europeanization point in this direction (Flora 1993; Hix 1994; Olsen 1995). In addition, political scientists have called for a multi-level governance approach to European integration (Marks et al. 1996). Such a research programme may indeed pay off; it could combine the advantages and insights of both horizontal comparative and vertical multi-level analysis.

9. The logic of European unity and diversity

Both unity and diversity characterize Europe. Europe faces two simultaneous transformations: the Europeanization of nation-states and the nationalization of European integration (Olsen 1995). These two partly parallel and partly asymmetric, sometimes simultaneous and sometimes asynchronous forces often lead to contradicting images of the ‘rescue’ or ‘retreat’ of sovereign nation-states (Milward 1992; Wallace 1995), and of the global convergence of national economies or entrenched diversity of European welfare states (Berger & Dore 1996; Kaelble 1990). Many of these ‘either/or’ debates indicate that our understanding of the nation-state and of Europeanization is still based on fairly static and unvarying conceptions of ongoing and complex processes of political governance, and of how different societies adapt to a changing global environment (Flora 1993; Marks et al. 1996; Olsen 1995).

The ‘logic of diversity’ (Hoffmann 1966) – seen from a comparative point of view – reveals many barriers and some potential pathways to Europeanization accommodation of interests (Ebbinghaus & Visser 1997). On the one hand, cross-national diversity remains entrenched in centuries of nation-state building, social cleavage structures and welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990; Flora 1993; Rokkan 1975). This has three important repercussions for European unity:

1. The common denominator, the precondition for voluntary compromises between nation-states, remains limited;
2. National institutions are already considerably entrenched, although supranational integration may be needed; and
3. The openness and susceptibility to transnationalization and interdependence varies considerably among countries.

These three aspects of diversity account for the gradual, limited and uneven degree of transnational integration within Europe. On the other hand, comparativists have also found indications of convergence and similarity between European societies, which could be major preconditions and forces for European unification (Kaelble 1990; Therborn 1995). While older modernization theories assumed that endogenous development would lead to convergence, recent observers recognize the role of exogenous factors in European convergence, be they transnational interdependencies, global diffusion of ‘best practices’, pressures from international competition or results of political integration and co-ordination.

However, some critics point out that Western European societies each have their particular modernist trajectories, and that significant intra-European differences remain (Flora 1993; Rokkan 1975). In contrast to the image of global convergence, European nation-states show surprisingly different behaviour from that of the USA and Japan, even within Europe (Berger & Dore 1996; Crouch & Streeck 1997). Moreover, given the diverse patterns of interdependence across European societies, the ‘logic of diversity’ produces different intranational cleavages and transnational alliances.

In addition, the ‘logic of unity’ – seen from a multi-level perspective – interacts with the logic of diversity. Stanley Hoffmann once compared the ‘logic of integration’ with that of a ‘blender which crunches the most diverse products’ and produces a ‘presumably delicious juice’, while the logic of diversity limits the ‘spill-over’ process (Hoffmann 1968:199). Neither convergence of European societies nor mere increase in transactions between them necessarily paves the way to political community – this was a pitfall of earlier modernization and integration theories. The ‘spill-over’ logic of integration, which assumed harmony following the logic of (functional) integration, is an unlikely path to European unity.

There are also other reasons for national governments to co-ordinate political action and pool resources. In situations where governments see that national solutions would fail or be less efficient, they may be willing to give up some sovereignty by regaining at least
some autonomy – albeit collectively bound – that would otherwise be lost. Intergovernmental EU policy style and national implementation of EU law still outweighs supranational regulation and law-making (Moravcsik 1991, 1993, 1994). Europeanization brought about a new supranational governance that is not replacing nation-states, but is a device by which sovereign nation-states maintain cross-national diversity and transnational integration (Marks et al. 1996).

While nationalization of Europe – the ‘rescue’ of the European nation-states – may have been the initial motive and force of European integration, and each new step is still a result of intergovernmental compromise, the long-term, partly unintended consequences may nevertheless advance the Europeanization of nation-states (Pierson 1996); that is, the increased interdependence between European nation-states in terms of decision-making and living conditions. However, the European centre building process remains slow and open, while societal and democratic interest intermediation is still underdeveloped within the EU (Sbragia 1992). The logic of unity thus finds its limits in the logic of diversity among societal interest groupings – the difficulty of achieving ‘borderless’ solidarity under the transnational challenge (Ebbinghaus & Visser 1997).

Certainly, the comparative and international perspectives, when applied separately, lead to specialization; they are sensitive to different contexts and give rise to diverse research questions on Europeanization. Hence in areas where the EC member states remain sovereign, international relations theories of ‘co-operation’ may still produce accurate and parsimonious explanations. However, where decisions are taken which involve cross-cutting party-political and national interests, decision and coalition theories from comparative politics are likely to have a higher explanatory value. (Hix 1994:23)

One approach alone cannot grasp the complexity and interaction of European unity and diversity. A combined approach will provide a better understanding of the dynamics of the logics of diversity and unity. Therefore, comparativists should not leave the study of European integration to IR theorists or EU policy experts, but should take up the challenge (Hix 1994). They can bring in a more societal conception of European unity and diversity. The comparative perspective can also inform about the different repercussions of European politics on still largely nationally defined societies.

10. Conclusion

In this article I have argued that the social sciences must take the challenge of transnationalization seriously, reconsidering its methodological assumptions and theoretical models. One can indeed maintain that the comparative and international perspectives have different research questions and orientations, but I argue that they are complementary. Recent research on Europe indicates that many researchers wish to go beyond the disciplinary boundaries to consider elements from other perspectives. European integration specialists should not be alone in attempting to meet the challenge of transnationalization; comparativists in sociology and political science should also reconsider their approach. Both sides can contribute to a more advanced multilevel and comparative perspective of Europeanization. This article has juxtaposed the alternative options taken by comparative and international perspectives in dealing with four methodological differences: Galton’s problem, level of analysis, interdependence and, finally, (dis)aggregation.

Galton’s problem does not rule out cross-national comparison, as long as intervening, exogenous factors can be controlled for or specified as to their impact. Comparative and international perspectives have converse conceptualizations of the level of analysis. Horizontal comparison looks at variables on the same level of analysis, while vertical multilevel analysis explains phenomena on one level with reference to lower or higher levels. As for the problem of interdependence, the interaction between national and international levels, we usually make a heuristic choice – investigating either the domestic causes of an international phenomenon, or the reverse. Finally, the (dis)aggregation problem implies that our choice of a ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ perspective depends on our point of view. IR experts seek to disaggregate the national interest of its assumed unitary actors, while the comparativists seek convergence or divergence of European societies, which would foster or hamper European integration and interest aggregation.
In terms of their theoretical premises, the two domains (comparative and IR studies) conceptualize different models of state-society relations and multi-level interdependence. I have briefly discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the state- and multi-centric perspectives. The former is a more parsimonious approach, resting on rather unrealistic assumptions of unitary actors and undivided national interests, whereas the latter perspective makes use of insight from comparative studies, acknowledging the diversity of national interest formation and questioning the autonomy of states. I call upon comparativists and IR experts who want to study Europeanization to learn from each other. European studies needs a dialogue between both domains, if not a synthesis of the two complementary approaches. We need a dual approach that transcends the current confusion resulting from the ongoing disharmony of these parallel processes, the Europeanization of nation-states and the nationalization of European politics, that is, the partial ‘rescue’ and ‘retreat’ of the nation-state.

Particularly worth pursuing is the development of a multi-centric and multi-level paradigm, which includes state and non-state actors, but also the interaction between the international and national levels. Such a perspective would investigate the processes of integration and differentiation in Europe in the context of the interplay between cross-national diversity and supranational unification. When studying Europeanization, we should consider more systematically both the logic of diversity and the logic of unity, the barriers and pathways of European integration and the feedback and interdependence of the two processes of differentiation and integration. The different looking-glass views so far applied by the comparative and international perspectives are only mirror images of the same thing: Europe’s unity and diversity. Whatever mirror image we use to get a better view on Europe – horizontal or vertical analysis, intergovernmental or functional, supranational or comparative – the Europeanization process remains more complex than any one-sided model allows. Or, as Alice observes in Through the Looking-Glass, “It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played – all over the world – if this is the world at all, you know” (Carroll 1871).

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Notes

1 For such critical views, see Smelser (1992), Tilly (1992) and Zolberg (1987).
2 Recent examples for a combined perspective using the multilevel governance approach are Marks et al. (1996) and Leibfried & Pierson (1995), who study European integration in such fields as social policy, regional policy and social movements.
3 Let me mention another challenge that cannot be given full consideration here: intrasocietal differentiation, be it regional disparity or societal subsystems. Economic interdependence often affects some regional units more directly than others, but it also has different impacts in different economic sectors. Thus, further comparative study at the subnational level would give further insight into transnationalization processes.
4 For an overview and bibliography of sociological studies on transnationalism, see Bamyeh (1993), and on global society and international security, see Shaw (1994).
5 Some comparativists do not endorse the comparative ‘method’ at all: ‘Luckily, in all this argument there is one important ‘if’. There is really no way out and the paradox is truly damaging only if one assumes that comparative inquiry has just one possible mode and one possible format – it is predestined to follow the logic of quasi-experimentation’ (Sztompka 1988:213). However, there is a possible second solution to Galton’s problem, discussed below, which does not necessitate dropping the comparative method entirely.
6 Przeworski & Teune (1970) criticize macro-level comparison and promulgate intra-system comparison at the micro-level, correlating individual behaviour and macro-context variables.
7 This problem was first acknowledged by the British statistician Galton when discussing an anthropological study in 1889 (Naroll 1965; Scheuch 1990).
8 Perhaps due to the ‘small country’ effect, ‘Scandinavian social scientists have conducted comparative social research in a great many fields’ (Allardt 1990:190), most notably in the political sociology tradition of Stein Rokkan and in comparative welfare state research, promoted by G. Esping-Andersen, G. Therborn, and W. Korpis. In the 1990s, the recent monetary crisis undermining the Scandinavian model of welfare states, the decision to join the EU by Finland and Sweden, and the changes after the fall of the Eastern communist regimes, made the impact of transnationalization even more obvious and urgent to Nordic social scientists.
9 The anthropologist ‘trick’ is to study unconnected or at least far distant societies (Naroll 1965). For similar reasons, some methodologists argue in favour of the ‘most dissimilar country’ design (e.g. Przeworski & Teune 1970).
10 These methods can also be combined, as is the case in cross-national correlation analysis, when testing the degree of variation of dependent and independent variables (the ‘method of concomitant variation’; see Mill [1848] 1905:230).
11 Comparative studies of functionally or territorially defined international regimes are fairly similar to cross-national comparisons. Comparisons of ‘regional integration’, e.g. EU and NAFTA, or across time, e.g. EU before and after Maastricht, may

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serve as tests of integration theory. See Lindberg & Scheinold (1971), and, in particular, Nye (1971).

12 Waltz (1959) distinguishes three images: man, the state and war. In IR studies, the first image focuses on individual behaviour, the second on nation-states, and the third on the international system as impetus for foreign relations phenomena. Singer (1961) reduced these images to two levels of analysis: the actor unit and the system. For recent literature on the 'level of analysis' debate, see Buzan (1995), Onuf (1995) and Yurdusev (1993).

13 For instance, students of European integration focus more on the decision-making processes and lobbying in Brussels, while comparativists look at the cleavage structures and conflicts of interests between nation-states. See Ebbinghaus & Visser (1997) for analysis of European organized labour from both angles.

14 For a historical study see Milward (1992); for recent studies, see Moravcsik (1991, 1994).

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