

Olga Gheorghiev - *Justifications and critique in the European Union: a study of legitimacy in practice*

The thesis suggests the utilization of French pragmatic sociology or the 'sociology of critical capacity' in order to study European integration. The usage of pragmatic sociology in European studies is surprisingly little undertaken in current studies. Hence, the project developed in the thesis is therefore original and highly promising, and I very much welcome this endeavour.

The first part on theory situates pragmatic sociology in existing debates in European studies and International Relations. While Bourdieu is quite heavily used in European integration studies (as acknowledged in the thesis), in particular by French sociologists, Boltanski and Thévenot's pragmatic sociology has not been widely used (apart from a few rare exceptions, such as Balli 2007; Blokker 2016; 2017; Nash 2009; White 2010). The theoretical discussion is systematic and convincing. In relation to part 1, chapter 3, however, some of the attempts to use pragmatic sociology on the European level could have been discussed more intensively (apart from Gadinger, for instance Nash 2009; Trenz and Liebert 2012). In this, I believe the case for a pragmatic sociology of the European project could have been made more forcefully by: 1) stressing the indeterminate and fragile nature of the construction of the EU; 2) acknowledging the intrinsic plurality of the project (in which various higher principles have been competing from the start, while the prominence of specific principles (e.g. peace) has changed over time (as e.g. discussed by Claudia Sternberg); 3) pointing out the superior analytical capacity of studying different levels of publicness, as particularly stressed in the work on engagement of Thévenot.

In general, the thesis provides a good endorsement of the utility of a pragmatic sociology for European integration. It remains somewhat incomplete in that a few dimensions might have been explored more extensively. First, the EU is clearly a polity in the making, and hence a context rife with dispute over the finalité of the political project. Pragmatic sociology is particularly well placed to research principled dispute over the direction of the project. Second, historical change in the European project remains underdiscussed. As authors such as Sternberg and Brunkhorst have discussed, key principles of legitimation have shifted during European integration. Third, the theoretical discussion – focussing in particular on IR – is adequate, but one wonders if not more effort could have been made to 'translate' the original orders of worth (originally conceptualized for the domestic, French level) for the transnational level. Admittedly, one new order of worth regarding sovereignty is proposed, but it remains insufficiently fleshed out. For instance, how does an order based on sovereignty relate to/distinguish itself from the civic and domestic orders?

The empirical part offers an interesting discussion of meta-disputes regarding European integration. The analysis is broad, extensive and largely convincing. Some significant problems remain, however: 1) the actors in the disputes (and the micro-situations) are not represented/discussed in a systematic way, which means that sometimes key actors remain undiscussed, while empirical data comes across as somewhat anecdotal. Very little discussion is focussed on civil society actors (for instance, in the Convention of the early 2000s, such actors were not inconsequential). Also, key questions remain as to why certain statements have been selected and not others. For instance, on p. 85 the claim is made that the civic polity is the main legitimacy claim in the policy of enlargement, but no systematic evidence is provided (Boltanski and Thévenot, and Boltanski and Chiapello did so by means of the systematic study

of management literature, which was even quantified so as to indicate shifts in legitimation); 2) related to the first point, it is not clear why possibilities for the systematic study of key texts have not been used (in the case of the enlargement, the annual Commission reports provide a key source). Overall, then, the empirical part appears too much based on the author's interpretations, without a consistent presentation of evidence in the form of legitimacy statements (as many other studies in pragmatic sociology tend to do; a clearly represented table with documents analyzed might also have been useful). In the discussion of the Lisbon Treaty, the constitutional dimension might have been stressed more (as a dispute with an intrinsic meta or constituent dimension). Also, some core contributions to the debate – with clear relevance for the discussion - have not been taken into account (e.g. Bellamy and Schönlau 2003; Closa 2005; Crum 2013; Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber 2007). In addition, it is not always made clear what the additional contribution is of the pragmatic approach to the meta-disputes discussed: what additional insights are offered, how is the pragmatic analysis providing novel insights?

Overall, and despite some of the issues indicated above, the thesis is a welcome contribution to debates on European integration, rightly stressing the need for an extensive analysis of a plurality of justificatory regimes (not least in the context of the current Conference on the Future of Europe), and the clashes between them. I recommend the thesis can be defended as it stands.

Paul Blokker, Florence, 26 August, 2021