Book Review: European Citizenship and Social Integration in the European Union by Jürgen Gerhards and Holger Lengfeld

In **European Citizenship and Social Integration in the European Union**, **Jürgen Gerhards** *and* **Holger Lengfeld** *pose the question of whether it is plausible to refer to 'European society' through an examination of social integration in Germany, Spain and Poland as well as in Turkey. While questioning the specific choice of countries included in the study as well as the limitations of using survey data drawn from 2009,* **Pier Domenico Tortola** *positions this book as a valuable benchmark for future developments and research in the field.*

European Citizenship and Social Integration in the European Union. **Jürgen Gerhards and Holger Lengfeld. Routledge. 2015.**

Searching for European Society

The social side of European integration has gained prominence recently as a result of the euro crisis. For one thing, the crisis has affected European societies deeply, both materially and ideationally, by reviving Euroscepticism. For another, Europe's predicament highlights the need for further social integration—and a proper European *demos*—as a prerequisite for the transformations that, many argue, the Union needs to fix its institutional imbalances and avert future crises.

It is therefore not surprising to see a recent rise of interest in European integration on the part of sociology, a trend of which the volume examined here is a prominent example. In it, German scholars Jürgen Gerhards and Holger Lengfeld tackle perhaps the single most fundamental question in the sociology of European integration: is there a European society?

While the authors' goal is empirical, operationalising an idea as fuzzy as European society entails several conceptual questions, which are confronted in the beginning of the book. Society, the authors contend, should be defined in terms of collective identity. While in nation-states identity was based on language, religion and ethnicity, in the EU it can only be interpreted in civic terms. Building on the work of Thomas Marshall, Gerhards and Lengfeld posit such civic identity as founded on the triad of civil/economic, political and social rights afforded by EU citizenship. Concretely, Europe is socially integrated if: a) a majority of citizens accepts the equal distribution of the three rights throughout the Union; b) opposing minorities do not constitute socio-economic or cultural groups that could be easily mobilised; and c) EU citizens respect the three rights in their day-to-day behaviour.

As a test of integration, Gerhards and Lengfeld then present the results of a 2009 survey conducted in three EU member states—Germany, Spain and Poland—plus Turkey. To each country's 1,000 respondents the authors asked questions on their acceptance of citizenship rights irrespective of nationality (the three right types were exemplified by the right of foreigners to, respectively, work in any EU country, vote and be voted for in local elections and receive welfare services in their host country), quasi-behavioural questions on the application of EU rights and finally background/opinion questions for correlational purposes.

To summarise the results, citizens in the three EU countries display a generally high degree of support across the three rights, both in principle and in their daily interactions. (The only exceptions concern a lower than expected level of support for foreigners' social rights among Germans, and some scepticism across all three countries on the granting of passive electoral rights to foreigners). Turkey, conversely, scores low on all dimensions of integration, thus displaying low cohesion with the remaining three countries. On the political mobilisation side, finally, while the authors find some correlation between such variables as the respondents' education and political preferences and their position vis-à-vis EU rights, the effect of such variables is not as big as to pose a political problem for the Union.

Based on the foregoing, the authors draw optimistic conclusions on social integration in the EU (though not in its neighbourhood), and the prospects for further political integration. To be truly successful, however, the latter should follow three criteria aimed at reinforcing its legitimacy in the eyes of EU citizens: first, cross-border labour mobility should be matched by rules to prevent wage dumping; second, (passive) political rights should be coupled with norms against clientelism; and finally, the extension of social rights to foreigners should be structured so as to prevent welfare tourism and other abuses.

Gerhards and Lengfeld have produced an interesting volume, which presents an engaging conceptual discussion of European citizenship and rights, and provides valuable evidence on the topic. Their questions are a welcome addition to the more traditional and generic survey strategies aimed at detecting European identity, and so is their attempt to draw connections between the social and policy spheres of European integration.

The authors' choice to use data on people's support of the three right types as an indicator of social integration is a debatable yet legitimate research strategy. Discussing the authors' choice in this respect would open a conceptual Pandora's box which goes beyond the scope of this review. Here we should rather comment on the volume on its own terms, so to speak, presenting in the remainder of this review four critical remarks on the methods and substance of the book.

One of the merits of Gerhards and Lengfeld's research is to take the question of identity seriously, by subjecting it to the test of 'practicing what one preaches' in day-to-day interactions with foreigners. Exactly because of that, however, one cannot but wonder whether the authors are not asking too much of the survey tool, whose ability to record *actual* behavioural patterns is partial at best. Granted, the paucity of data on intra-EU social discrimination probably left the authors with few viable options other than their hypothetical survey questions. Even so, the absence of references to external data when this does exist is notable, more so when such data could have enriched the rather static picture provided by the volume—as, for instance, in the case of the latest report on employment discrimination by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2011).

Equally odd is the author's inclusion of Turkey in the study, given that their integration indicators are derived directly from the Union's legal architecture. Leaving aside the normative undertones of the oft-repeated statement that Turkish citizens *exclude themselves* from the European project, one should question how meaningful that statement is if the prerequisite to take up the EU's civic identity is to be part of the project in the first place. Given its conceptual setup, the study would have probably gained by replacing Turkey with a fourth EU member. The United Kingdom clearly comes to mind as a possible substitute, whose inclusion would have given us salient attitudinal information on all three dimensions of citizenship rights.

Looking at the UK would also have forced the authors to tackle the question of Euroscepticism more thoroughly. While the authors' attention to the mobilisation potential of 'unsocialized' minorities is commendable, by linking political activation to background socio-economic and cultural cleavages they put forward a derivative interpretation of Euroscepticism, which underestimates the latter's ability to structure political conflict autonomously. This is inconsistent with the EU's historical dynamics and more importantly

with current European politics, a central feature of which is the rise of nationalist and populist movements.

The above points to a broader problem with the volume, namely that it does not fully examine the effects of the crisis on Europe's social integration and its (potential) political repercussions. This results from using survey data from 2009, a time at which the crisis had yet to produce its greatest effects on the continent's economies and societies. The lack of fresher data should invite some caution in judging the volume's optimistic conclusions, which rest on what is at best incomplete information.

Would more up-to-date empirics have brought Gerhards and Lengfeld to a different assessment of the EU's prospects? Not necessarily: the analysis of the societal effects of the euro crisis promises to be more complex than one might assume at first. While some 'disaggregative' effects of the crisis are evident, some observers have begun to ask whether the turmoil of recent years might not also generate integrative effects among European peoples (Vobruba 2012; Eder 2014). While often just sketched, such arguments do indicate an interesting research agenda for the sociology of European integration. By not saying much on these issues, Gerhards and Lengfeld's volume truly feels, in this sense, like a missed opportunity. Looked at from a different angle, however, the book's arguments and data will represent a precious benchmark for further developments in this research agenda in future years.

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Searching for European society

by Pier Domenico Tortola (11/12/2015)

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There is little doubt that the social aspects of European integration have gained prominence recently as a result of the euro crisis. The economic turmoil that has pervaded Europe for the past few years, and many of the policy responses to the crisis, have affected European societies deeply, both materially, by impacting on the well-being and life chances of those sectors worst hit by the crisis, and ideationally, by reviving Eurosceptic sentiments and, more generally, mutual mistrust among the continent's peoples.

Europe's predicament makes societal issues salient also in another, closely connected way, namely by highlighting the need of further social integration as a prerequisite for the transformations that, in the eyes of many, the European Union needs in order to to fix its institutional imbalances and avert future crises. A true political union with effective systems of solidarity and democratic governance, the argument goes, can only materialize on the basis of a proper social foundation, a European demos able to legitimize such a polity, thus ensuring its viability.

It is therefore not surprising to see a recent rise of interest in European integration on the part of sociology, a discipline that has historically trailed behind political science and economics in the analysis of EU matters. The volume examined here is an example of this trend. In it, German scholars Jürgen Gerhards and Holger Lengfeld tackle perhaps the single most fundamental question in what can be named the sociology of European integration, that is, is there such a thing as a European society?

European society as civic identity

While Gerhards and Lengfeld's goal is primarily empirical—they present theirs as a measuring enterprise that builds on Habermas's theoretical work on the EU's democratization and legitimation—operationalizing an idea as complex and fuzzy as European society necessarily implies a number of conceptual questions, which the authors confront in the first part of the book (primarily chapter two). Society, they contend, should be defined primarily in terms of collective identity. In traditional nation-states, the latter was typically based on language, religion and ethnicity. In the EU, where differences on these dimensions are as important as the similarities, identity can only be interpreted in civic terms. Building on the work of Thomas H. Marshall, Gerhards and Lengfeld posit such civic identity as founded on the triad of civil/economic, political and social rights afforded by EU citizenship. Concretely, Europe is socially integrated if: first, a majority of citizens (both Europe-wide and nationally) accepts the equal distribution of the three rights throughout the Union; second, opposing minorities do not coincide with clear socio-economic or cultural groups, thus are not easily politically mobilized; third, EU citizens acts in respect of the three rights in their day-to-day behaviour.

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As a test of European social integration, in the following three chapters Gerhards and Lengfeld present the results of a survey conducted in 2009 in three EU member states—Germany, Spain and Poland—plus Turkey, a candidate country. To the roughly 1,000 respondents of each country the authors asked batteries of questions concerning their acceptance of citizenship rights irrespective of nationality (the three right types were exemplified in the survey by the right of foreigners to, respectively, work in any EU country, vote and be voted in local election, and receive welfare services in their host country), quasi-behavioural questions on the practical application of EU rights, and finally a number of background and opinion questions for correlational purposes.

To sum up the results (for details we refer readers to the wealth of tables contained in the volume), citizens in the three EU countries display a generally (and almost uniformly) high degree of support across the three types of rights, both in principle and in their daily interactions. The only notable exceptions to this rule concern a lower than expected level of support for foreigners' social rights among German citizens—a trait that the authors ascribe to the country's generous welfare state—and some scepticism across all three countries on the granting of passive electoral rights to foreigners (detected quasi-behaviourally by asking a question on the hypothetical building of a mosque by a foreign mayor). Turkey, conversely, scores low on practically all dimensions of integration surveyed, thus displaying overall a scarce degree of societal cohesion with the remaining three countries. On the side of political mobilization, finally, while the authors find some (unsurprising) correlation between such variables as the respondents' education, political preferences and transnational experiences and their position vis-à-vis EU citizenship rights, the measured effect of such variables is not as big as to pose a political problem for the Union.

Based on the foregoing, the authors draw some optimistic conclusions on the level of social integration in the EU (though not in its immediate neighbourhood), as well as the prospects for further political integration in Europe. To be truly successful, however, the latter should follow a number of criteria aimed at reinforcing its legitimacy in the eyes of EU citizens. Building on their survey results, the authors suggest three such criteria: first, EU-wide labour mobility should be matched by rules for the prevention of wage dumping across borders; second, (passive) political rights should be coupled with norms against the implementation of clientelistic policies; finally, the extension of social rights to foreigners should be structured so as to prevent welfare tourism and other kinds of abuse.

Analysing society: some methodological observations

Gerhards and Lengfeld have produced an interesting piece of research, which presents an engaging conceptual discussion of European citizenship and rights, and more importantly provides valuable empirical evidence on the topic. Their right-, country- and scenario-specific questions are a welcome addition to the more traditional and generic survey strategies aimed at detecting European identity (in the first place the Eurobarometer's), and so is their attempt to draw connections between the social and policy spheres of European integration—such as the (implicitly) suggested virtuous circles between a EU-wide minimum wage rule and popular approval of the right of EU citizens to work anywhere in the Union.

The author's choice to use data on people's support of the three right types as an indicator of social integration is a debatable yet certainly legitimate research strategy. Discussing the authors' choice in this respect would open a conceptual Pandora's box which goes well beyond the scope of this essay (readers can get an idea of the topic's definitional gamut just by looking at Delanty's recent take on European society as a set of networks). Here we should rather comment on the volume on its own terms, so to speak, presenting in the remainder of this article four critical remarks on the methods and substance of Gerhards and Lengfeld's book.

As mentioned above, one of the merits of Gerhards and Lengfeld's research is to take the question of European identity seriously, by subjecting it, among other things, to the behavioural test of "practicing what one preaches" in day-to-day interactions with foreigners. Exactly because of that, however, one cannot but wonder whether the authors are not asking too much of the survey tool, whose ability to record actual behavioural patterns is partial at best. Granted, the paucity of hard data on intra-EU social discrimination probably left the authors with few viable options other than their hypothetical survey questions. Even so, the absence of references to external data when this does exist is notable—more so when such data could have enriched the picture provided by the authors. Take, for instance, the 2011 report on employment discrimination by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, which tells us, among other information, that while immigrants are more likely to be unemployed in Poland than in Spain, their chances of being overqualified are much higher in the latter country. Including details of this sort in the analysis would have added some interesting "movement" to the rather static image emerging from the survey.

One of the merits of Gerhards and Lengfeld's research is to take the question of European identity seriously, by subjecting it, among other things, to the behavioural test of "practicing what one preaches" in day-to-day interactions with foreigners.

Equally odd methodologically is the author's choice to include Turkey in a survey and book on social integration in the EU, especially when the indicators of such integration are derived so directly from the Union's legal architecture. Leaving aside the normative undertones of the authors' oft-repeated statement that Turkish citizens exclude themselves from the European project, one should question to what extent such statement is correct, or even meaningful, if the prerequisite to be able to take up the EU's civic identity is to be part of the project in the first place. Given its conceptual setup, the study would have probably gained by replacing Turkey with a fourth EU member state—perhaps also dropping the "modernity" case selection criterion, which is sketched here and there in the volume but never really followed up systematically. The United Kingdom clearly comes to mind as a possible substitute, whose inclusion in the study would have given us very salient attitudinal information on all three dimensions of citizenship rights.

Looking at a country like the UK would have also forced the authors to tackle the question of Euroscepticism as a political force more thoroughly. The authors' attention for and analysis of the mobilization potential of "unsocialized" minorities are commendable given Europe's current political circumstances. However, by linking political activation to background socio-economic and cultural cleavages, the authors risk putting forward an overly derivative interpretation of Euroscepticism, which underestimates the latter's ability to structure political conflict on its own. This is inconsistent not only with the EU's historical political dynamics, in which the integration-sovereignty axis has usually played a role next to the more traditional political divides, but more importantly with current European politics, a central features of which is the rise of nationalist and populist movements.

Crisis and European society

The above, however, points to a broader problem with the volume, namely that it does not fully examine the effects of the euro crisis on Europe's social integration and its (potential) political repercussions. This is an inevitable consequence of using survey data from 2009, a time at which the crisis had yet to produce its greatest effects on the continent's economies, let alone societies. The lack of more recent data should at least invite some caution in judging the volume's optimistic conclusions, which rest on what is at best incomplete information (the additional surveys results cited in the last chapter do add some helpful data but are far from enough to fill the gap).

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Would more up-to-date empirics have brought Gerhards and Lengfeld to a different assessment of the EU's prospects? Not necessarily. In a manner similar to the ongoing political science debate on the crisis and integration, which is still wide open as to whether the former has caused more or less of the latter, the analysis of the societal effects of the euro crisis promises to be more complex than one might assume at a first glance. While some "disaggregative" effects of the crisis on (some sectors of the) European society are evident, some observers have begun to ask whether the turmoil and socio-political conflict of recent years might not also generate integrative effects among the peoples of Europe. They have done so both normatively and more importantly positively by, for example, hypothesising conflict in Europe as a force of socialization, on the basis of classical conflict theory, or examining the legitimizing effects of political friction on the European public sphere.

While often not more than sketched, such arguments do indicate an interesting and potentially very rewarding research agenda (both theoretical and empirical) for the sociology of European integration. By not saying much on these issues, the volume by Gerhards and Lengfeld truly feels, in this sense, like a missed opportunity. Looked at it from a different angle, however, the arguments and data provided in the book will no doubt represent a precious source and benchmark for further developments in this research agenda in the years to come.