

THE NEW EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF TEACHING. THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN STUDIES.

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Abstract

Teaching European studies, from the universities' standpoint, is to modify their syllabuses to include EU law in their law courses, EU common policies and project management in their economics and the process of European construction in their history courses, as well as to dedicate more time to research on EU affairs. European Education projects represent the best way to promote European integration at the EU and non-EU level, having a large impact among the most important audiences: professors, students and researchers every year. A press release provided by the European Commission in September 2014 mentions that an European Union studies background can contribute to improving European governance and policy-making, leading to a simple conclusion that any modification to the Education and Training Policy could influence the approach towards European studies. According to the latest EU recommendations, teaching European studies under the safe form mentioned above, is no longer enough. The emphasis is on common values and European dimension of teaching at all levels. The proposal is to learn about Europe's common heritage and diversity, and getting a good understanding of the origins and functioning of the EU, in order to create and maintain a cohesive European society. The EU goes back to the origins of European studies and reminds the difference between European studies and European Union studies.

The research methodology approach is qualitative, based on text analysis of present official EU documents, academic articles, and professional experience.

Keywords

common values, European Studies, European Union Studies, European Education Area

Defining European Studies and European Union Studies: always a common ground

In the academic world, the European studies represent a simple alteration in the academic curricula, allowing European Union to become a comprehensive actor of today's academic horizon. It includes all the required key competences for lifelong learning (literacy competence; languages competence; mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering and; digital competence; personal, social and learning competence; civic competence; entrepreneurship competence; cultural awareness and expression competence) (European Commission 2018:1-2).

We may consider it a constant in European higher education. "Before its accession to the European Community, there is an increase of European Studies, an increasing regarding the number of classes, specialties and interest in this area, probably because of the wish of being informed about what is happening at the institutional, political and European economic level. A gradual decline of the interest can be noticed a few years after accession, the subject being no longer current. This is another testimony to the fact that European Studies is and will always be a changing process, according to changes of any kind that occur at a higher level in the European Community or the European Union" (Buda 2015:3-4). An issue regarding the above statement is that the author does not make the difference between European studies and European Union studies, but we consider it to be valid and appropriate to our introductory research.

We have two fields of teaching and research dedicated to Europe. At the level of the EU academic world, European Studies lost its place to European Union Studies. In my professional experience, I have gone through different phases of importance awarded to this subfield, including a reduction in the importance awarded to other European studies teaching fields, such as culture and sociology. As noticed in the research work for this article, a number of academics share the same concern. According to Chris Rumford, the editor of *The SAGE Handbook of European Studies* (2009), "the European studies does not possess the status, visibility and profile that it deserves and this does limit the contribution that it can make to the study of contemporary Europe. That it is still in formation is fairly clear, given the low profile and lack of recognition that it enjoys. [...] what is needed [...] is [...] more an openness toward studying European transformations and a continual questioning of how best to study Europe" (Rumford 2009:1).

Francis McGowan recognises the connection between the two fields of research: EU studies and European studies, but their agendas might be considered overlapping or distinctive. The researcher mentions that there are European studies programmes which would pay limited attention to the EU and its works while much EU studies teaching and research would make little reference to broader questions of Europe's historical and cultural development (McGowan 2009:546).

He shares the views of other researchers that the EU Studies is largely based on political science methods, approaches and it has been affected by 'disciplinarity', which may add a marginalization of the sort of interdisciplinarity or multi-disciplinarity which characterizes European studies (as well as some studies of the EU) (McGowan 2009:546).

According to Craig Calhoun, European Studies is "perhaps the most basic model behind all area studies programs and yet at the same time an odd fit with the others. It is the model because the idea of Europe as a multiplicity of nations and states united by 'civilization', history, geography, religion, and politics informed the very idea that regions should be units of academic and indeed public interest" (Calhoun 2003:5).

The next step

The European Studies field has been evolving and strengthening its place within the social sciences. While the study of the European Union and the European integration process represents a common focus of teaching European studies, the diversity of curricula in this field presents both advantages and limitations.

On the one hand, it provides a variety of disciplinary and teaching approaches, which are particularly valuable for tackling the complex nature of the EU, European integration process, or the multi-level governance. At the same time it raises certain challenges. Often European Studies lacks pedagogical approaches that would define the profile of its graduates and provide them with some core knowledge and skills (Timus, Cebotari & Hosein 2016:654).

According to the *Erasmus+* Guide, the European Union Studies should include a number of core subject areas, such as EU and Comparative Regionalism Studies; EU Communication and Information Studies; EU Economic Studies; EU Historical Studies; EU Intercultural Dialogue Studies; EU Interdisciplinary Studies; EU International Relations and Diplomacy

Studies; EU Legal Studies; EU Political and Administrative Studies (European Commission 2017a:196).

However, different subject areas attract attention beyond the simple EU Studies. We are reaching a stage where the EU is no longer the main actor of this field and authors describe the mistake of introducing common curricula of EU Studies and renouncing to European Studies. As one of the believers in the statements that EU Studies and European Studies are just sharing a common actor, I would go further and sustain that the European Union Studies comprise a particular emphasis on the European integration process in both its internal and external aspects. “...when we study the EU, what we are studying is the extent to which integration has occurred, or the likelihood that it will occur in the future” (Rumford & Murray 2003:85).

The latest EU recommendations suggest that teaching European Studies under the safe form of European Integration Studies is no longer enough. The emphasis should be on common values and European dimension of teaching at all levels. A personal proposal is to learn about Europe's common heritage and diversity, and to get a good understanding of the origins and functioning of the EU, in order to create and maintain a cohesive European society. Lately, the EU promotes a curriculum structured around the idea of an active European citizenship and the role of the EU in a globalised world, enhancing awareness of the Union and facilitating future engagement and people-to-people dialogue worldwide.

Both fields share a number of common grounds like:

- more openness to the worldwide universities, including the phenomenon of globalisation and EU and global governance.
- more attraction and a slight fear in the eyes of future graduates regarding the “employability skills”, as Adriaensen et al. call it (Adriaensen, Bijlsma & Groen 2019:112).

It is therefore in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity. Education and training are also the best way to increase employability and help get people into decent jobs. They offer the best protection against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Education and culture play a pivotal role for people to (i) know better each other across borders, and (ii) experience and be aware of what it means to be “European” (European Commission 2017b:3). The existing EU-level cooperation in the field of education and training, with its focus on exchanging

experiences, mutual learning and providing national policy-makers with evidence on best practices on what works well in education, would be relaunched with a 2025 perspective in the light of the new priorities and the ambition to build up a European Education Area. The European Studies was the first experience for the European Community that led to what it means to be European. An answered question remains. Is the European Union Studies the logical step?

In the field of higher education, *Erasmus+* supports a number of main Actions targeting cooperation with Partner Countries including *Jean Monnet* activities with the aim of stimulating teaching, research and reflection in the field of European Union studies worldwide. These Actions also aim at fostering the dialogue between the academic world and policy-makers, in particular with the aim of enhancing the EU and global governance.

Jean Monnet Activities support a number of Actions for teaching and research as:

- Jean Monnet Modules (teaching and research);
- Jean Monnet Chairs (teaching and research);
- Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence (teaching and research);
- Jean Monnet Support to Associations;
- Jean Monnet Networks (policy debate with the academic world);
- Jean Monnet Projects (policy debate with the academic world)

(European Commission 2017a:196).

The *Erasmus+* Programme has generalised its objectives concerning the EU studies. But it has kept the same keywords and main activities related to this field area like: excellence, innovation, diversification, quality in teaching and research; engagement of young academics; professional training; dialogue between academics and policy-makers (European Commission 2017a:196).

The European Studies must retrieve their role in the academic world. Given the specificities of the European Studies area and its multidisciplinary character and taking into account the broad audience spectrum the course is addressing (from students to professionals working with European Union related issues), a mix of delivery methods as well as teaching modes and learning styles appears to be the most suitable approach (Christova & Mihai 2011:22). A new dimension in European teaching is the use of blended learning approaches embraced by many Higher Education institutions. The blended learning approach implies the use of innovative teaching methods (online and face-to-face) in order to reach wider audiences. According to Christova and Mihai, blending different teaching methods will eliminate the

shortcomings of each one of them and enhance the pedagogical results of the courses (Christova & Mihai 2011:22).

The whole process would provide access to knowledge and expertise in general European issues, opening the doors both for European Studies and European Union Studies. The use of this method brings the benefit of flexibility, especially for European Studies which is renowned for its multidisciplinary.

Conclusions

This article represents an introductory framework to research dedicated to present status of European Studies. One noticed result, before any relevant actions, is that after some logical thinking, and professional experience, the preliminary conclusions prove similar to most of the quoted authors. Keeping this area of teaching and research matters for the worldwide academic institutions “not only for the particular knowledge of Europe it can produce and transmit, but for the bearing of that knowledge on pressing questions for the world as a whole, for other regions in the world, and for innumerable human projects” (Calhoun 2003:20). I share the opinion of Chris Rumford that European Studies needs to become more multidisciplinary in order to ensure that it studies Europe in the most effective way and studying Europe should be as important as studying the EU integration (Rumford 2009:3).

We must keep in mind that we are not discussing about areas that are “at war”. From my personal point of view, there is a simple issue of placement. The definite link between the two teaching and research domains remains the European Education Area. The EU is prepared for a European Education Area to strengthen the Union's competences in education and culture, the sense of European identity and awareness of cultural heritage.

Education and culture are primarily policies in the hands of the Member States and of their regional and local authorities. The European level plays an important complementary role, in particular, when it comes to cross-border activities (the most prominent examples of EU action being the *Erasmus+* and the *Media* Programme). It is in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the potential of education and culture in full. A collective effort would enable Europe as a whole to deal better with the challenges it is facing. A vision for 2025 would be a Europe in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by different types of borders.

Paraphrasing the European Commission's Communication (COM(2017) 673 final), reaching a new level of European Studies must be a common endeavour. It will mean working together towards this common goal, in full respect of the subsidiary, like the European Union Studies. New dimensions for European Studies involve cooperation with the EEA via making learning mobility a reality for all; removing obstacles to the recognition of qualifications, both at the level of schools and higher education; modernising the development of curricula; boosting language learning; creating world-class European universities that can work seamlessly together across borders; improving education, training and lifelong learning; driving innovation in education in the digital era; giving more support to teachers; and preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of a European identity and culture (European Commission 2017b:11).

This shared agenda would be implemented on the basis of the existing distribution of tasks and competences, using tried-and-tested ways of working together.

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