CULTURE AND EU'S SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

The EU now is indulged in a multitude of challenges and crises. Member States such as France, Germany and Italy are suffering from their internal problems, e.g., immigration, failure in general election, financial problems and so forth. The sustainability of the EU is at stake. It is believed by many scholars that the European integration is a multi-dimensional process, involving economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. A "culturally deficit project of integration" is fragile. This paper probes into the role of culture played in the process of European integration and the importance of culture in the context of the current crises faced by the EU. To keep the EU sustainable, culture should not be ignored because culture is the 'glue' that joints the Member States together and the 'lubricant' that keeps the European integration moving forward smoothly.

Keywords
culture; sustainability; crisis; EU; European integration

There is a famous saying in ancient Chinese: "Yi Li Jiao Zhe, Li Qiong Ze San". It means that those who make friends with each other for economic benefits will be dissolved when there're no benefits anymore. In the short run, in order to achieve common interests, different countries can quickly form a bloc. If there is unfairness or conflict in the distribution of benefits, such groups or organizations will immediately show their vulnerability. Their future will turn out to be uncertain and unpredictable, and they may even face the risk of disintegration. The European Union, an 'organization' comprising 28 Member States at present, is the outcome of the European integration process, which started in the economic field and gradually 'over-

flowed' into the other fields. Now, the EU is indulged in a multiple of challenges from both inside and outside, and its future is full of great uncertainty. However, the European Union is different from other organizations in which culture plays a larger role in connecting the European countries to one another. If we treat the EU as an organism, then its economy is like the flesh of the whole body, politics is like the brain, and culture is like the 'bones and muscles' connecting all parts of the body, playing the role of a 'lubricant' maintaining the continuous operation of the organism. In this way it reveals the resilience of the EU. This paper explores the relationship between culture and integration, by drawing on the concept of sustainability from other disciplines, and also tackles the problem of sustainable development of the EU from a system point of view.

The relationship between culture and integration

Regarding the relationship between culture and integration, there are different and even competing views. Some of the political leaders and scholars argue that there is a very strong and positive connection between the two. It is widely believed that Jean Monnet, the founding father of the European Integration, said the following words toward the end of his life: "If I had the opportunity of starting again the integration process from scratch, perhaps it would be more efficient if it was started by cultural integration. The unification of Europe and the integration of culture together." (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 46) Though it is an assumption, it reflects the critical position of culture in promoting the European integration at the bottom of Jean Monnet's heart. Harvard University professor Huntington holds positive views on the role played by culture in the process of integration as well. "International organizations based on states with cultural commonality, such as the European Union, are far more successful than those that attempt to transcend cultures." (Huntington, 2003, p. 28) With or without culture, it matters to the success or failure of international organizations. Huntington has even more on this issue. "Military alliances and economic associations require cooperation among their members, cooperation depends on trust, and trust most easily springs from common values and culture." (Huntington, 2003, p. 131) Here, we see that shared culture and values can generate trust, a necessary condition for cooperation, which forms the basis for any regional blocs. Huntington further expounds the effectiveness of a single civilizational organization and a multicivilizational one. "While age and purpose also play

a role, the overall effectiveness of regional organizations generally varies inversely with the civilizational diversity of their membership" (Huntington, 2003, p.131). He draws a conclusion that single civilization organizations do more things and are more successful than multicivilizational organizations. This is true of both political and security organizations, on the one hand, and economic organizations, on the other. The concrete example is ASEAN, a multicivilizational organization in Asia, which only in 1992 began to move toward a free trade area (Huntington, 2003, p. 131), slower development made as it is compared with the EU.

Unlike the positive stances, there are scholars, however, who believe that culture is usually not associated with integration (Samson, 2006). The literature published on the European integration before 2000 proved this assertion to some extent. Scholars like Castells (1998) and Delanty (2000a) divided the European integration process into three main historical phases, which are interpreted by Castells (1998, p.332) as "three outbursts of political initiatives and institution-building". They are the 1950s, the 1980s and the 1990s. Though lasting about half a century long, the first feature in common shared by the three stages is that "the goal was primarily political, and the means to reach this goal were, mainly, economic measures" (Castells, 1998, p.332). The second common feature is that culture is left aside.

The first phase of 1950s, as Delanty (2000a, p.109) called it, is a period of "rescuing the nation-state". The launch of the European integration process made the European countries avoid a collapse, meanwhile it strengthened their existence as nation-states (Milward, 1992) as a matter of fact. The initial goal of the European integration was to pool the European countries together so as to prevent war and armed conflicts. This was a peacekeeping and an economic phase where nation-states were mainly concerned with pragmatic cooperation (Samson, 2006). Culture did not come into the sight of the founding fathers of the EC.

The second phase started in the 1980s. It was a time when "political steering now moved to centre stage" (Delanty, 2000a, p.109). The legal and administrative integration was increased during this stage. In other words, the question of interdependence based on legal and administrative integration took over the question of cooperation from the previous stage of integration. (Samson, 2006) What should be highlighted is that in the EU documents during this phase culture and identity appeared as key dimensions of European integration (Shore, 2000). Questions of culture such as shared history, common language, and religion became prominent.

The early 1990s turned a new page of the European integration. The EU was established when the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993. The European integration process expanded from the spheres of economics and politics into social integration, though in its early stages.

After 2000, especially since 2008, the economic crises hit Europe. The overall development of European integration has stagnated. What's more, a series of challenges and crises have popped up. The economic and political impetus for integration has been reduced. The European Union has come to a crossroad: whether it will still be kept together or broken apart. The future of Europe has become uncertain, making the sustainability of the EU at stake.

Sustainability: concepts, features and approaches

European integration is a multi-dimensional process, involving economical, political and cultural dimensions, among which a balance should be kept. Therefore, a system view is needed. The concept of sustainability can provide us with some illuminating ideas.

Originally, the term of 'sustainability' derives from forestry, fisheries, and groundwater. The concept of sustainability explores the relationship among economic development, environmental quality, and social equity. Generally speaking, it bridges the gap between development and environment. (Rogers, Kazi & John, 2008)

The concept of sustainability has been evolving since 1972. In that year, the international community first discussed the connection between quality of life and environmental quality at the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. Almost 15 years later, in 1987, the term "sustainable development" was defined as "development that can meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Rogers, Kazi, & John, 2008, p.42) This definition places great emphasis on balancing the economic and social needs of the people with the regenerative capacity of the natural environment. Therefore, sustainable development is a dynamic process of change. The following factors, such as the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change, should be made consistent with future as well as present needs. (Rogers, Kazi & John, 2008)

Sustainable development involves three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. They are used to measure the success of a particular de-

velopment program or project. In order to obtain sustainable outcomes, we should give each component equal attention. This balance becomes obvious when each component is examined individually. (Rogers, Kazi & John, 2008)

1) The economic approach: Maximize income while maintaining constant or increasing stock of capital. The core idea of sustainability is that current decisions should not impair the prospects for maintaining or improving future living standards. (Repetto, 1986) The implied meaning is that our economic systems should be managed so that we can live off the dividends of our resources. (Rogers, Kazi, & John, 2008)

2) The ecological approach: Maintain the resilience and robustness of biological and physical systems. The term "sustainable development" suggests that the lessons of ecology can, and should be applied to economic processes. (Redclift, 1987) It encompasses the ideas in the World Conservation Strategy, providing an environmental rationale through which the claims of development to improve the quality of life can be challenged and tested. (Rogers, Kazi, & John, 2008)

3) The socio-cultural approach: Maintain the stability of social and cultural systems. Sustainable economic development is directly concerned with increasing the standard of living of the poor, which can be measured in terms of increased food, real income, education, health care, water supply, sanitation, and only indirectly concerned with economic growth at the aggregate. (Barbier, 1987; Rogers, Kazi, & John, 2008)

In general, 'sustainability' refers to a process or state that can be sustained for a long time. The sustainability of human society consists of three interrelated and inseparable parts: ecological, economic and social sustainability. For researchers in the field of European integration, what we can learn from sustainable development is that a heuristic view should be developed. Economic, political and culture, each has its own role to play in the integration process. They're like the legs that support the table. When any of them is removed, it will lead to the imbalance and even collapse of the system. Compared with economic and political factors, cultural factor came to be a later realized factor. However, its role should be strengthened as the others'.

Meanings and functions of culture

Culture is one of the few words which are the most difficult to define in any languages, though it has been studied for centuries. So far no consensus has been reached concerning the definition in the academic world. That is

why to some degree the mainstream integration theory has not paid much attention to culture.

To the EU, the concept of culture has been used in the official documents since 1980s, as an important dimension to the process of European integration. Barzanti (1992) argues that the cultural dimension is becoming an increasingly crucial means of giving effect to policies seeking to fasten a Union of the European peoples founded on the consciousness of sharing a common heritage of ideas and values. But one problem with Barzanti's idea is that common history and cultural traditions are often going to be exclusive and incompatible in a definition of culture because parts of identity and history evolve in complex terms with neighbours. (Samson, 2006)

After 2000, in the works of scholars of European integration (Rosamond, 2000; Hix and Goetz, 2000; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Jachtenfuchs, 2001), they began to realize that culture and European integration had something little in common. However, much of their analysis of the cultural dimension of integration concentrated on the EU's cultural policies and on the dynamics and mechanisms of cultural policy-making (Meinhof and Triandafyllidou, 2006; McGuigan, 2004; Flood and Kevin, 2005), as a result of the fact that the term 'culture' is mainly understood as institutions, such as museums, libraries, and theatres. This is a narrower sense of culture.

Etymologically, the term 'culture' derives from the Latin word *cultura.* This conception restricts culture to dissemination of fine art, opera, poetry, theatre and so on. Edward Taylor, the British anthropologist, defined culture in his book *Primitive Culture* as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. It is likely that Taylor thought of culture in terms of social evolution. As a particular way of life among people or community, culture is so defined as relating to groups that opens the door to the study of cultural integration because, since societies are by definition groups, the culture metaphor can also be applied to societies. (Samson, 2006)

In the field of research on culture, there are hundreds of definitions of culture given by scholars from different disciplines (Kroeber & Clyde, 1952). When regarded as a normative model (Samson, 2006), culture has something to do with universal values of democracy, freedoms and universal human culture. This is what makes it difficult to distinguish European culture from other cultures. This definition of culture is somehow related to the notion of 'civilization'. Delanty (2000a) criticizes a definition of culture based on value consensus, arguing that culture is rather conflictual and, cul-

ture leads to fragmentation. Delanty puts forward an alternative model of culture that he calls cultural pluralization as opposed to cultural cohesion.

Culture can also be seen as a medium of communication (Samson, 2006; Eder, 2001; Brague, 2002; Delanty, 2003; Bauman, 2004), as something uncertain, non-fixed, and that keeps questioning. Culture is what people communicate through language and symbols.

'Culture as social construction' (Samson, 2006) is derived from Clifford Geertz's definition of culture: "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973, p.5). Geertz sees culture in a societal context where values, ideologies and the way people behave differ from individual to individual. Society is defined as any community of people with common interests, values and aims. This symbolic-interpretative approach starts from the assumption that cultures are socially constructed realities. (Samson, 2006)

Culture and EU's sustainability

To a significant extent culture has no clearly defined role in the study of European integration. (Samson, 2006) However, scholars have begun to debate whether culture should be included or not when we discuss the process of European integration. In European Union studies, Castells (1996) and Melucci (1996) came to realize the need of association of European integration with culture. It is also regarded as a way to respect the diversity of European cultures. Delanty (2000a, p.114) argued that European integration lacks a cultural dimension comparable to that of nation states. Castoriadis (1987) believes that the cultural dimension is as important as the economic one for understanding and transforming society. This dimension expands to questions of identity (Samson, 2006). Bekemans (1990) argues that economic reasons to develop the European integration are too narrow aims to put forward the process. Smelser and Alexander (1999) suggest that culture is more integrative than some might think. Others (Samson, 2006) insist that there is a crisis of identity and culture in Europe. One reason is that there're no clear definitions of concepts such as Europe and European identity, and another reason is that disproportionate attention is given to cultural aspects of European integration.

More discussions on cultural aspects of integration have become visible in the field of cultural politics. De Witte was among the first to call for no separation between economic and cultural spheres of European integration. De Witte (1990, p. 205) argues that "one must recognize that a separation of the economic and cultural spheres is becoming increasingly artificial".

Cris Shore (2000) includes different aspects of cultural politics of European integration in his book. Though the author is rather sceptical about the process of European integration, Shore offers a debate on cultural aspects of the integration process. Utilizing an anthropological approach based on ethnographic research among EU officials and politicians in Brussels, Shore explores the cultural aspects of EU integration – for instance, the creation of the European nation-state, symbols of Europe, citizenship, single currency, the organizational culture of the Commission, and the key actors in promoting the vision of a common European consciousness and culture.

The EU's sustainability needs a system view, that is, the economic, political and cultural dimensions should be given equal attention. Culture has different meanings and plays different functions. The most typical feature of European culture is its diversity and, meanwhile, it has got its unity as well. Historically, cultural factors were the spiritual foundation of European integration. In the process of European integration, the European Commission has developed various policies to promote the construction of European Identity, so that the 'unifying force' (Huntington, 2003) of culture could be realized. The efforts made by the EU include the multilingualism policy, culture policy, 'European Dimension' embedded in the education policies. Huntington (2003) proposes that 'countries with cultural affinities cooperate economically and politically', so that hopefully the European integration could go further.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the role of culture played in the European integration process. To keep the European integration as a sustainable development, a system view is necessary. First, as a multi-dimensional process, the economic, political and cultural dimensions should be kept in balance when the European integration is pushed forward. No dimension should be neglected. Second, compared with other factors, the cultural factor, the issue of European identity, is more difficult to construct than others. It needs further promotion from the EU's side. In the long run, culture is complementary to

political and economic factors and plays a guiding, consolidating and developing role in European integration.

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