

Oligarchization, Formalization, Adaptation? Linking Sociological Theory and EU Enlargement Research

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Abstract

This article makes the case for theoretically anchoring research on international organizations in more general social scientific debates. We illustrate our claim by applying sociological group theories to the analysis of the consequences of Eastern enlargement for European Union governance. In particular, the three sociological theories of oligarchization, formalization and adaptation guide our review of the growing literature on this topic. While we present only preliminary evidence for each of these theories – the first findings on the effects of enlargement are ambivalent – our analysis clearly underlines the advantages of broadening the theoretical scope of such research. Most importantly, embedding one’s empirical research in a more general social scientific context reduces the risk of producing too idiosyncratic and merely descriptive results. In addition, the generalizability of one’s findings can be enhanced.

Keywords

Eastern enlargement, group size, formalization, oligarchization, adaptation, European Union, international organizations

Introduction¹

International organizations in many respects display features of politics more general. For example, the study of decision-making is as common and relevant in International Relations as it is in Comparative Politics. In recent years, scholars have started to explore linkages and similarities between the sub-disciplines of political science (Milner, 1998; Werner, Davis, & Bueno de Mesquita, 2003). However, there is an ongoing need for drawing but also for implementing further and more precise implications from these insights. Whereas there seems to be a clear tendency towards a methodological unification amongst the different political science sub-disciplines – in fact, there are greater differences inside than across the branches – theoretical unification still often lags behind. Here different paradigms seem more difficult to overcome and our projects all too often remain anchored in the different research traditions.

Against this background of disciplinary pillarization, we in this article plead for drawing on more general social scientific group theories when studying international organizations. In particular, we focus on analyzing the consequences of Eastern enlargement for decision-making in the European Union. Studying the effects of enlargement is a rather new research agenda for European Studies. We claim that the use of more general social scientific theories especially at an early stage of a research agenda allows for a more systematic and less idiosyncratic development of the literature. General theories can guide researchers to fertile starting points of analysis. Also because of the maturity of the literature on such theories there is a reduced risk of missing out important parts of the analytical puzzle. For example, when referring to established theories we can be sure that there is a well-structured debate about different mechanisms that can bring about specific outcomes. The more general debate thus contributes to a better understanding of the narrower empirical context and can direct researchers to more promising venues of future research.

There are various reasons why we think that the case of Eastern enlargement is well suited for making our more general claim. Firstly, literature on the consequences of enlargement is only emerging. Therefore it might be a good illustration of the fact that younger research agendas often lack theoretical rigour. Early research is often concerned with describing empirical puzzles. A research agenda in its infancy therefore is still open to manipulation. Secondly, we find that enlargement is a topic that concerns most international organizations at some point. Therefore this literature is a case that invites for a broader generalization. Thirdly, enlargement

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simply is amongst the most important steps in recent European integration and the findings on its effects should be interesting for readers interested in European politics, more generally.

The article is organized as follows. After a brief introduction to EU Eastern enlargement we argue that enlargement can be treated as a case of a more general phenomenon, namely the increase of group-size. Based on this, we expose three important sociological group theories that to us seem well suited to analyse the effects of Eastern enlargement: oligarchization, formalization and adaptation. Oligarchization focuses on actors and power, formalization highlights processes and the importance of institutions for decision-making, adaptation asks about group norms and learning of the new group members. With these more general theories in mind we then review the existing literature on the subject. We find supporting as well as disconfirming evidence for all of our different theories. What, however, is more relevant for our argument here is that we can show that the theories can quite fruitfully be employed to the analysis of the consequences of Eastern enlargement. All of our theories capture some of the existing pieces of research rather well. By adding some political sociology to a question that so far has mainly been addressed primarily from a political economy perspective we find that we not only improve our understanding of what empirically is “going on” but we find that the research becomes less idiosyncratic and more relevant for a larger audience.

Eastern Enlargement

In May 2004 ten new member states joined the European Union. With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania the EU has in 2007 grown to a club of 27 member states comprising almost 500 million inhabitants. On the one hand, this certainly underlines that European integration is a success story. On the other hand, enlargement changes the traditional EU politics by including new actors with different political, economic, cultural and historical backgrounds. There is a question of whether enlargement endangers the functioning of the EU institutions given that they were originally designed for a community of six. Scholarly research on enlargement has rapidly grown in recent years. After a descriptive starting period (Browning & Joenniemi, 2003; De Witte, 2002; Ersboll, 1994; Glenn, 2003; Grabbe, 2002; Heidenreich, 2004; Nugent, 2004; Phinnemore, 2002), enlargement research quickly turned theoretical. Whereas one strand of the literature has focused on explaining the reasons for enlargement (Baldwin, 1995; Breuss, 2001; Brown, Deardoff, Djankov, & Stern, 1997; Friis, 1997; Friis & Murphy, 1999; Jeffrey Lewis, 2003; Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2002; Schimmelfennig, 2002, 2003; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002; Sedelmeier, 1998, 2000, 2002; H. Wallace, 2000), a different strand has addressed its consequences. In this review essay we focus on this second strand. This literature

can be divided into theoretical and empirical contributions. On the theoretical side, most contributions are anchored in a rationalist framework (Aspinwall & Schneider, 2000). In fact, classic integration theories such as neofunctionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism do not directly address the effects of enlargement and do not capture the dynamics of day to day politics in the EU, in general, (Hix, 1994; Thomson & Hösl, 2006, 9-11). In terms of the rational institutionalist literature, on the other hand, we distinguish two approaches of analyzing the effects of enlargement on EU decision-making: a veto-player related approach (Dobbins, Drüner, & Schneider, 2004; König & Bräuninger, 2004; Tsebelis & Yatanagas, 2002) and an a priori voting power approach (Baldwin, Berglöf, Giavazzi, & Widgrén, 2000; Baldwin & Widgrén, 2003, 2004b, 2005; Bilbao, Fernández, Jiménez, & López, 2002; Felsenthal & Machover, 2004; Johnston, 1995). The a-priori voting power literature is based on the calculation of all possible coalitions and the fraction of coalitions within the Council that reach a qualified majority. While the veto-player approach combines preferences and institutions to predict outcomes, the a-priori voting power approach focuses on institutions. The simplifying assumptions and the validity of both approaches have widely been debated (Albert, 2003; Felsenthal, Leech, List, & Machover, 2003; Garrett & Tsebelis, 1999, 2001; Hörl, Warntjen, & Wonka, 2005; Lane & Berg, 1999). For example the neglect of actors' preferences in the a-priori voting power approach has often been criticized ((Pajala & Widgrén, 2004; Steunenberg, Schmidtchen, & Koboldt, 1999). Although the focus of these two approaches is different, their predictions point into the same direction: enlargement is generally said to have a strong impact on the EU's decision-making capacity ((Kerremans, 1998)). In Tsebelis' (2002) terms it should clearly increase policy stability. Tsebelis and Yatanagas (2002:304), for instance, conclude that "it will be almost impossible to alter the legislative status quo" and Baldwin and Widgrén (2004a:6) agree that "the Nice Treaty rules cripple the EU's ability to act since they make it very difficult to find winning majorities" in an enlarged Union. A notable exception from the generally pessimistic outlook on enlargement is provided by Steunenberg (2002:112). He uses computer simulations to predict that "under qualified majority voting, enlargement will not affect the Union's ability to take new decisions".

But is this all that we can say about enlargement? In order to answer this question let's take a step back and ask what enlargement is a case of? We find that enlargement first of all represents a change in group size. However, can the EU be treated as a group? In fact, the European Union has been conceptualized in different ways. Some authors conceive of it as a confederation – for example, for Wallace (W. Wallace, 1994) it is "less than a federation, more than a regime" – others as a super-state, some take it as an order "sui generis" (Jachtenfuchs, 1996:18), for others it is system of multilevel governance (Marks, Hooghe, & Blank, 1996). Again

others claim that it analytically should best be considered a club (Padoan, 1997; Schimmelfennig, 2003:21) or rather a community (Schimmelfennig, 2003). In this article we simply treat the EU as a group of states. For Schäfers (1999:20) a group consists of a limited number of members that combine in continuous communication and interaction processes in order to achieve common goals. These members tend to develop a feeling of togetherness, identity and common norms. The necessity of dividing tasks leads to the emergence of different roles. We find that the EU matches these criteria rather well. Note, however, that treating the EU as a group of states here does not ultimately define the “nature of the beast” but rather captures it analytically.

Group-Size and Group Behavior

In sociology the group is a concept that should be situated somewhere in between the micro and the macro analytical levels. Whereas most sociological group theories see individuals as the basic elements of groups (Mullen, 1987:2) we here conceive of states as collective actors that engage in group building. There is, by all means, an abundant literature on groups and group behaviour. Central questions of sociological group research (Girgensohn-Marchand, 1999) include questions on how leaderships roles evolve, how to explain conformity and dominant power and communication structures and which factors influence a group’s efficiency in terms of public good production.

Parts of the wider literature have also focused on the variable ‘group size’. Various sociologists and economists have analyzed the influence of group size on the functioning of a group (March & Olson, 1989; Oliver & Marwell, 1988; Olson, 1968; Simmel, 1908). Empirically, the influence of group size on the dynamics of group interactions has mainly been tested via experiments (Albanese & van Fleet, 1985; Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Davis, 1950; Hare, 1952; Oliver & Marwell, 1988; Terrien & Mills, 1955; Thomas & Fink, 1963; Williams, 1951). Already Thomas and Fink (1963) provide an overview over 31 studies testing the impact of group size. They come to the conclusion that “group size has significant effects on aspects of individual and group performance, on the nature of interaction and distribution of participation of group members, on group organization, on conformity and consensus, and on member satisfaction” (1963:393).

On the theoretical front, the common understanding of, for instance, Simmel (1908) and Olson (1968)(1965) is that larger groups lead to more complex group dynamics, making it more difficult to provide collective goods optimally. Hackman and Vidmar (1970:43) find that large groups are more often than small groups associated with considerable disagreement and a large degree of competitiveness. Hare (Hare, 1952:267) concludes that as “the size of a discussion

group is increased from five to twelve members the degree of consensus resulting from the discussion decreases when the time for discussion is limited". Simmel (1908:63-159), however, stresses that the effects of an increase in group size might be alleviated by organizational changes. As the group increases formal structures tend to replace the personal and immediate cohesion that is observed in smaller groups. There is thus a formalization going on as a group gets bigger. Whereas in small groups coordination can still be organized informally, a growing number of group members make informal coordination more difficult (Weber, 1921). In such a situation formal institutions can provide a welcome framework of decision-making.

Whereas for Simmel a growth in group size leads to formalization, another early classic of sociology, Robert Michels has stressed that informal decision-making structures often counterbalance eventual changes in group size. In his study of party life Michels (1962:351) introduces his "iron law of oligarchy". He finds that minorities in groups tend to gain particular power. For Michels (1962:20) "the few always dominate". His explanation is functional – political groups simply need leadership (Michels, 1962:370). Following personal ambitions leaders counterbalance the "immovability of the masses" by providing expertise at the micro-level (Michels, 1962:370; Rohrschneider, 2002:209). Many scholars have analyzed Michels "iron law of oligarchy" (Breines, 1980; Cassinelli; Rohrschneider, 1994). Assessing the "iron law of oligarchy" from a theoretical perspective, Mayhew and Levinger (1976) show that it does not only hold for groups containing a very large number of members but that it can be applied to groups with less than five members, depending on the length of interaction. Additionally, Mayhew and Levinger (1976) link polarization of power structures to group size, showing that both are positively related.

The concept of adaptation has also been addressed by various scholars in a variety of contexts (Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998; Knill & Lenschow, 1998; McKinley, 1993). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) indicate that by institutional isomorphism group members generally adopt to what has later been called "a logic of appropriateness" (March & Olson, 1989). Sociological institutionalism and organization theory underline the importance of adaptation for group sustainability and behavior. According to mimicry theory, when unsure in a new environment social actors will copy the older group members' behavior. Adaptation depends first of all on actor constellations. Goethals (1987:225), for example, highlights that "self-attention theory suggests that individuals are more likely to match to standards [...] as they feel proportionally outnumbered by others who define appropriate standards of behavior."

The insights of sociological studies on the relationship between group size and decision-making dynamics are numerous. So far the sociological theories of oligarchization, formalization,

adaptation have not, however, been systematically applied to the case of EU enlargement. After sketching out how these theories could be applied to the study of the consequences of EU enlargement we will evaluate this application by reviewing the emerging literature on this research question. We thus use the sociological theories of oligarchization, adaptation, and formalization as an analytical framework for exploring the early findings on the effects of enlargement.

Oligarchization, Formalization and Adaptation in the context of EU Enlargement

On which grounds can the theories of formalization, oligarchization, and formalization be applied to the case of EU enlargement? The theories originally address the behaviour of individuals whereas enlargement is usually conceived off as an increase in the number of member states. This tension can firstly be solved by referring to individual agents such as members of the European parliament or Council working group members. In addition, there is a debate about whether such theories can also be applied to collective actors. For instance, for Mayhew and Levinger (Mayhew & Levinger, 1976:1036) the two criteria of group-size and complexity determine whether a minority gains control over decision-making processes. Remember that oligarchization theory had formulated the expectation that in larger groups there is a growing tendency towards an establishment of informal decision-making structures that benefit few decision-takers. In particular, some countries should informally take decisions that are then followed by the other actors. While Mayhew and Levinger (1976) show that for face-to-face interactions the ‘iron law’ holds for small groups with less than ten members and not only for large groups of 1000 to 10000 members as originally postulated by Michels, they are more skeptical whether their results should be transferred to what they call the macrostructure, i.e. the “structure generated in the relations among the elements of social systems where the elements themselves are not individuals” (Mayhew & Levinger, 1976:1037). On the other hand, Duncan (1964), Service (1962), Eisenstadt (1963), Lasswell (1958) and Blau (1972) do not focus on individual actors but rather stress the conditions under which we should expect oligarchization to occur (Rohrschneider, 1994). In the EU, countries in form of their representatives interact as collective actors, for instance, in the European Council. Following the oligarchization scenario it could be argued that the entry of many new member states incited the former EU member states to defend their positions vis-à-vis the newcomers. For example, during the Intergovernmental Conferences of Amsterdam and Nice the bigger member states pleaded in favor of increasing their voting power as compared to the middle- and smaller-sized member states (Baldwin & Widgrén, 2004b). Finally, Germany, for example, is the only country that was able to maintain its number of parliamentarians in the EP. The oligarchization scenario accordingly claims that the

more members are joining an organization, the more former organization members should try to increase their power at the expense of the new member states.

As to formalization, this theory has already been applied to small groups by Simmel (1908). Thus, the size of the EU is not a problem in the first place. On the other hand, we do not find a clear indication by Simmel of whether his theory should be applied to groups that consist of collective actors. References about the interactions of Swiss cantons as well as Greek and Italian cities (Simmel, 1908:69) indicate that Simmel's theory possibly included collective actors, too, but Simmel is not explicit on that point. Since, however, his formalization scenario is motivated by a will towards increasing efficiency we find that this should all the more apply to collective actors. As to the EU, formalization would predict a growing disposition towards the use of formal rules of decision-making. In the EU various informal rules had traditionally guided decision-making (Heisenberg, 2005; Jeffery Lewis, 1998; Jeffrey Lewis, 2003). For example, the Luxembourg compromise was such an informal agreement. Similarly the high amount of consensual decision-making in the Council despite the formal existence of QMV highlights the importance of informal norms (Hayes-Renshaw, Van Aken, & Wallace, 2006; Mattila, 2004; Mattila & Lane, 2001). Already Haas (1958:523) underlined that the "decision-making code [...]" shows that the categories of legal competence of the Treaty do not determine all votes." Therefore formalization would expect a more controversial voting behavior. Consensus is fine as long as it does not lead to large-scale persisting gridlocks!

Whereas oligarchization focuses on the behavior of the elder group members, adaptation turns towards the new member states. According sociological institutionalism and organization theory newcomers in a group are expected to adapt to existing norms. They should adjust to a dominant "logic of appropriateness" (March & Olson, 1989). Conformity is brought about through different mechanisms. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) differentiate between coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism and normative isomorphism. These are different forms of a general institutional isomorphism. Mimetic isomorphism is closely linked to uncertainty. Uncertainty characterizes EU enlargement. In particular, the new member states had to join an existing community and did not know how to behave in the EU's decision-making structures. Mimicry theory claims that when unsure in a new environment social actors tend to copy the elder group members' behavior.

Hence, adaptation theory would predict the new member states to adapt to established rules of conduct and behaviour. We would imagine a voting behaviour that aligns with the old member states. Thus despite the presence of structural differences as, for example, displayed in divergent GDPs we would expect the new member states to agree to the old member state

preferences. The new member states should thereby demonstrate their conformity with the existing system. On the other hand, we could expect the new member states to after an initial period turn to rebellion or reluctance. This, for example, would be a response to oligarchization scenarios. If new member states find that the elder member states abuse their position and knowledge, new member states might decide to disregard existing patterns of behaviour. Of course, their behaviour should also depend on several other factors such as domestic politics. The more euroskeptic their populations are, the more "reluctant" the governments should behave. This might result in more abstentions or no votes in Council of Ministers or in "loud and proud" behaviour (Szczepanik, 2006). If, however, adaptation takes place we should generally expect few changes to occur. We find that applying theories of adaptation to collective actors is not a problem since the original theories already explicitly address the behaviour of organizations.

After having introduced these different theories on group size and group behavior we will now review the emerging literature on the effect of enlargement in order to test the predictions and also the general applicability of these theories.

Analyzing Enlargement as an Increase in Group Size. A Review of the early Literature

The three theories of oligarchisation, formalization, and adaptation point out different group dynamics that are triggered by an increase of group size. In the following, we will review the emerging literature on the effects of Eastern enlargement on decision-making in the EU in order to test the applicability of such group theories to international organizations, more generally. The literature on the effects of enlargement is only emerging and most research has not got beyond the stage of working or conference papers. This does not come as a surprise since only three years have past since the first round of Eastern enlargement in 2004. However, the literature is growing rapidly and the consequences of enlargement are amongst the most discussed issues in recent European integration. We find that it is worthwhile to review this young literature because it makes an interesting case for evaluating our claim about introducing more general social scientific theories to the study of international organizations. At the current stage – as is often the case in young research agendas – there is a certain overweight of empirical analysis at the cost of theory. Also there is a rather narrow focus on specific parts of the enlargement puzzle – for example, most papers only focus on specific institutions – at the expense of more general assessments. This article thus might contribute to adding a new theoretical dimension to this growing body of research.

After having developed the theoretical framework in the previous section we now turn to the literature on the effects of enlargement for EU governance. In the following paragraphs we review this literature with a special focus on the group dynamics identified by the sociological group theories. Most of the studies to date focus on the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, the EU's two most important decision-making bodies. As always, data on European Commission decision-making is rather scarce and, for the time being, we have to rely on descriptive evidence (Peterson & Birdsall, 2008). Currently, no research has yet been undertaken in the form of Hooghe (2002) that would allow us to more clearly trace post-enlargement changes in the decision-making mechanisms of this bureaucracy.

Now what can we say about the group dynamics after enlargement? As to oligarchization, the findings so far remain rather poor. Although there is a huge discourse on power and its distribution – just think of Poland's fight (“Nice or death”) to maintain the voting rules of the Nice Treaty – we hardly find any confirmation of oligarchic tendencies after enlargement. The literature to date is rather diverse in its findings and although various scholars identify differences between the status of old and new members these can only, if at all, provide a vague indication for possible oligarchic structures. Naurin (2006) and Naurin and Lindahl (2007), for instance, show for the Council of Ministers that civil servants from the new member states are less solicited as cooperation partners in the working groups than their colleagues from the old member states. In his phone surveys Naurin questioned Council working group representatives at two moments in time, 2003 and 2006, which other civil servants they favoured as cooperation partners. He found strong geographical communication patterns based either on similar cultures or interests. As a matter of fact, Eastern European member states are never mentioned as being amongst the most frequent cooperation partners in the Council working groups (Naurin, 2006:25).

Similarly, Kaeding (2007) and Szczepanik (2006) find several inequalities in the distribution of rapporteurships in the European Parliament. Each legislative act in the European Parliament has an assigned rapporteur who is primarily responsible for reporting and accompanying a legislative act in the EP until it is adopted. Parliamentary party groups receive these rapporteurships due to an internal auction-like system and distribute these tasks amongst their party group members. Kaeding (2007) compares the distribution of rapporteurships in one of the most important committees – the environment committee – with the composition of MEPs in the EP and finds out that MEPs from the new member states are severely underrepresented in receiving these sometimes quite prestigious legislative tasks. Likewise, Szczepanik (2006) looks at all EP reports in the period between July 2004 and January 2006 and

observes that MEPs from Middle and Eastern European states had just received 32 of 468 reports. Whether these results can be traced back to structural inequalities or merely result from a settling in phase of the new members remains an open question. At the same time Szczepanik (2006) finds that the distribution of parliamentary posts between MEPs from the old and new member states was carried out evenly according to nationality and party group in the enlarged parliament. This is in line with Whitaker (2007) who reports that the distribution of committee assignments in the European Parliament is relatively fair and not unfavourable for MEPs from the new member states. The allocation of parliamentarians to EP committees allows some room for manoeuvre for party group leaders: they can decide whether they rather have preference outliers, experts or party soldiers in committees which these prefer most. Although it might at first look as if MEPs from the new member states are in committees of lower legislative importance, Whitaker (2007) can show that professional experience and not nationality is still the key variable to explain committee membership.

So far the results obtained by the literature are far from being coherent. While strong geographical communication patterns exist and the assignment of rapporteurships remains biased towards MEPs from the old member states, the allocation of parliamentarians to EP committees was conducted in an unbiased manner. What do these results tell us about oligarchic tendencies? The findings of Whitaker (2007) and to some degree those of Szczepanik (2006) do not point towards the existence of oligarchic structures. The results obtained by Kaeding (2007) could hint at oligarchization. If only MEPs from a minority of member states obtain important rapporteurships than one could speak of the few dominating the many. Bale and Taggart (2006) assess the background of first-time MEPs in the Sixth EP. Amongst other things, they find that the first-timers coming from new member states seem to have a lot of previous experience in international organizations, elected offices, and national parliaments. Lack of experience on the side of the new MEPs might therefore not explain the bias in rapporteur assignments. However, Kaeding (2007) distinguishes between national and European level experience and finds that European experience seems to be more relevant to obtain reports. Therefore, a lack of European based experience might explain the early findings that Eastern European MEPs have yet not received a fair share of these tasks. According to Michels (1994), oligarchization results from three factors: elitization, passivity of the non-elites, and elite conspiracy. While Kaeding's results would support the development of an elite, i.e. the division into MEPs obtaining rapporteurships and those who do not, Kaeding's early results do not yet allow assessing whether the other MEPs accept the role of such an elite (passivity of non-elites) and whether or not the elite actively

fosters its elitist position. The three factors that lead to oligarchic tendencies are under-researched and could be the focus of future literature.

Let's now turn to formalization. Of course, we should not expect to find precisely this term in the literature, but rather should look for features that are in line with Simmel's predictions, namely that formalization should occur whenever it fosters efficiency. For example, Best (2007) and Settembri (2007) speak of a bureaucratization. Although, the studies at hand display mixed evidence, it seems as if decision-making has become more complicated after the 2004 enlargement. In his in-depth analysis of the Fishery and Agriculture Council Hertz (2006) finds on the basis of an extended version of the "Decision-Making in the EU" (Thomson, Stokman, Achen, & König, 2006) dataset that the culture of consensus is declining after the enlargement. This finding is confirmed by Settembri (2007) who shows that after Eastern enlargement the number of Community acts decreased, that the average duration of Community legislation increased and that the legislation itself became longer when measuring the pure number of words.

As a reaction to the more cumbersome decision-making process, some authors detect an increase in simplification attempts in order to speed up decision-making. Thus, members from both the EP and the Council try to broker agreements already after the first reading of the co-decision procedure in order to speed up this lengthy legislative procedure (Hagemann & De Clerck-Sachsse, 2007b). Both old and new EU governments seemingly desire not to slow down the decision-making process to a too large degree realising that an EU-27 might easily come to a standstill. One example for such behaviour is an increased use of voicing dissent in the Council of Ministers with formal statements rather than via voting (Hagemann & De Clerck-Sachsse, 2007a). This method allows signalling a disagreement to voters back home but does not endanger coming to a legislative conclusion in the Council decision-making process. Similarly, an analysis of the voting behaviour of EP committees illustrates that MEPs are still interested in working smoothly so they show the same cohesive, nearly unanimous voting behaviour as in the EU-15 (Settembri, 2006). Hence, the attempts to speed up decision-making by cutting certain procedures are rational reactions to a general slowing down of the working processes in the Union. This, however, cannot necessarily be interpreted as formalization since the formal rules are partly abbreviated. In fact, greater efficiency is obtained by turning to informal processes rather than by relying on formalized rules. Although we thus cannot fully corroborate the formalization hypotheses it is important to underline that the hypotheses have drawn our attention to important parts of the enlargement mechanisms.

If we finally look for evidence for the adaptation scenario, we find supporting evidence but no proof in the Council and the European Parliament. Voting behaviour in the Council remains largely similar to the voting behaviour before 2004 (Hagemann & De Clerck-Sachsse, 2007b). When analysing the voting records of the EU governments in the Council of Ministers, it is still the Northern and bigger member states that tend to disagree and the traditional North-South voting pattern seems to persist even after enlargement (Mattila, 2006, 2007). There is no indication that there is a distinct Eastern European bloc voting against or with the majority. In addition, there is no evidence that the new member states dissent more often than other countries or that they form coalitions that systematically oppose the old member states (Hagemann & De Clerck-Sachsse, 2007b). Thomson (2007) corroborates this finding with micro data on positions of EU member states on legislative proposals. This rather smooth transition is also displayed in the workings of the Coreper (Comité des Représentants Permanents) and within the Council (Lempp, 2006). As to the EP, here too enlargement did not lead to a completely different voting behaviour (Hix & Noury, 2006). Hix and Noury (2006) in their analysis of roll-call data, only detect the change that there is now a clearer centre-right majority bloc which votes against the left than before. There is no new group or voting pattern emerging due to enlargement (Voeten, 2006). The findings to date therefore generally indicate continuity. The results outlining continuity after enlargement pose the question whether adaptation itself occurred extremely quickly or whether most of the adaptive processes took place before 2004 – in anticipation of enlargement. Although no conclusive comments can be made about the presence of adaptive processes after enlargement, the sociological theory of adaptation, when applied to the case of EU enlargement, has posed some interesting questions that can guide future research on the topic.

All in all, we find confirming as well as disconfirming evidence for the three theories of oligarchization, formalization, and adaptation. Enlargement certainly did not come as a shock to the EU and its effects are rather moderate. This is in contrast with fears that were put forward before enlargement actually took place. We find that the new member states were quickly integrated into the existing system. At the same time, the old EU members do not seem to have engaged in oligarchization attempts in an obvious or easily detectable way. Moreover, all current EU actors seem to be able to cope with change and adapt to an increase in size quite well by reacting to the challenges: a slowing down of decision-making procedures due to an increase in size is for instance answered with an attempt to abbreviate and shorten the processes.

Discussion

This article makes the case for anchoring research on international organizations in more general social scientific theories. We illustrate our claim by referring to the case of EU Eastern enlargement. The enlargement of the EU to an organization that now comprises 27 member states is a major event in recent world politics. For European governance, it is often seen as a caesura. Can an institutional setup designed for six members work in a club of 27? What kinds of changes are triggered by enlargement? In order to take a more theory-guided approach to the study of enlargement effects, we turn to sociological group theories. The theories of oligarchization, formalization and adaptation add a sociological dimension to the rational institutionalist reading of enlargement. We apply these sociological theories as an analytical framework when reviewing the early literature on Eastern enlargement.

We find supporting but also disconfirming evidence for all three theories. It for instance remains unclear whether we can speak of oligarchic structures when new members have difficulties in getting into existing networks as equal partners (Naurin, 2006). Similarly, the discrimination of new member state's MEPs when it comes to the distribution of rapporteurships (Kaeding, 2007) hints at oligarchization. However, when taking into account the weaknesses of the literature to date and the findings of, for instance, Whitaker (2007), namely that MEPs from new member states obtain an equal share of committee assignments, the existing literature clearly remains inconclusive. As to formalization, Hertz (2006) presents first evidence for a decreased importance of the culture of consensus after enlargement. He finds that falling back on the formally anchored qualified majority voting mechanisms indicates formalization. His findings are partly confirmed by Settembri (2006). Hagemann (2007a), on the other hand, underlines that formal rules are also circumvented by rational actors that strive for efficient decision-making. For instance, there is a growing tendency for informally brokering agreements between the different organs. As to adaptation, our findings are to be used with care. We find that the horizontal as well as longitudinal cohesiveness of voting behaviour reported for the Council and the European Parliament by Mattila (2006; , 2007), Hagemann (2007b), Hix (2006) and Voeten (2006) points towards adaptation of the new member states. For the time being, we are, however, still unsure whether these observations are due to mimicry, coercion or normative learning or whether there are other mechanisms at work. For instance, we currently still lack information on possible qualitative changes of EU legislation before and after the enlargement.

While the sociological theories are not completely corroborated by the existing literature our analysis clearly emphasizes that there are good reasons for 'bringing these theories back in'. Our framework provided an excellent starting point for a systematic investigation of enlargement effects. As to the merits of this approach we find that the theories firstly draw our attention to

important pieces of the enlargement puzzle and help to unveil some rather complex group dynamics. They secondly provide explanations for what was observed – and also not observed – after enlargement. Thirdly, the theories draw our attention on the mechanisms of such complex processes of change. For instance, there is an advanced debate around the mechanism of adaptation in organizational theory that can guide the analysis of the specific cases under study. This can also open venues for future research. Fourthly and finally, relating one's work to more general theories also helps embedding one's findings in a more general social scientific context. For instance, formalization theory situates the findings in broader debates about formal decision-making and efficiency. For these reasons we find it useful to turn to more general social scientific theories when studying international organizations. The theories do not need to come from sociology but from any social scientific sub-discipline. Also, the reference to sociological theories should not discard the value of other approaches and, in fact, we find that our theories can fruitfully be combined with a rational institutionalist account of the effects of enlargement. To conclude, given that our analysis has revealed some persisting question marks about the effects of enlargement and the intricacies of the integration process we expect some exciting literature to be published on that issue in the years to come.

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