

of development policy, institutional changes are threatening the status of development policy within the EU. The June 2002 Seville European Council, as part of a wide-ranging rationalization of the Council of Ministers' machinery, dissolved the Development Council. Moreover, the debates within the Convention on the Future of Europe raised serious concerns, above all among the NGO community, about a possible subordination of development to foreign policy. However, a positive sign is that in its recommendations to the 2003–2004 IGC, the Convention kept development policy as an independent policy. Doubtless the discussion will continue in the years to come. In this discussion, the new member states will have a key role in influencing whether the EU pursues a policy driven by self-interests or a policy where poverty eradication is the overarching goal.

Chapter 18

Theoretical Considerations

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Introduction

One of the great conundrums facing EU scholars searching for coherent theoretical explanations of all or at least part of the enlargement process relates to the fact that the most obvious point of departure – the 'classical' integration theories, such as neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism – were not primarily designed to analyse the enlargement process. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002: 501) comment, for instance, how 'it is striking that EU enlargement has been a largely neglected issue in the theory of regional integration'.

Of course, this is not the fault of those advocating such theories as explanations of European integration. It should not be forgotten that these were developed in the 1960s before even the first enlargement had taken place. As Schmitter (1996: 13), has commented, neither neofunctionalism 'nor any other theory of integration can explain why the Community began with six – rather than seven or nine – subsequently expanded to twelve, and may even reach twenty-five or thirty before exhausting itself somewhere on the Asian steppes'.

The deficiencies with 'classical' theories in explaining the process of European integration – let alone the sub-process of EU enlargement – are well-documented. At best, classical theories can only explain parts or some of the dynamics of the EC/EU, as integration theory in Europe has tended to live a sort of 'shadow existence' as a supplier of ad hoc explanations. It can be argued quite convincingly that no one 'grand theory' has, so far, described adequately the complex intricacies of the EU 'in one go' (see Peterson, 1995).

The EU has, at least officially since the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty (and informally for many years before this), entered into an era of 'differentiated integration' with the new vocabulary of 'flexibility' appearing in discourses on the future of the EU. This development is part of a process whereby the 'elephant' of the EU has evolved over the years into a highly complex animal. The more sophisticated policy options now open to EU decision-makers, as well as the ambitious enlargement agenda since the early 1990s, have been accompanied by a general movement amongst EU

scholars away from the search for any single 'meta-theory' that can claim to effectively explain all aspects of the integration process and nature of the Union. In practice, the contemporary preference has been to advocate the usage of 'middle-range' theoretical approaches that focus on *some* of the dynamics associated with the Union.

These twin developments in European integration theorizing – on the one hand towards a more diverse discourse incorporating notions of 'flexibility', and on the other a more selective and modest concentration of effort amongst EU scholars – has advantages and disadvantages for those contemplating EU enlargement. Of course, the central challenge in seeking coherent explanations of EU expansion is related to the fact that the impact of enlargement is comprehensive and not confined to one or a series of EU policy fields. In effect, enlargement, past and future, is closer to being a *phenomenon*. Moreover, its impact is also not confined to the existing member states. Thus, any theorizing pertaining to the EU enlargement process must also pay attention to the interaction between the Union and the respective candidate countries. In short, there must be an explicit recognition that the effects of European integration do not respect the external boundaries of the existing Union. Theoretical considerations apply not only to the Union, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, to the applicant and/or candidate countries. When searching for conceptual and theoretical pointers as regards enlargement, there is thus a need to widen the traditional horizons of European integration theory.

Broadly and ideally, enlargement theory should be focused on three main elements:

- *Conceptualizing the EU accession process* – the enlargement perspectives, conditions and procedures of the Union, and the problems of negotiation and entry for candidate countries.
- *Addressing the transition processes emanating from EU enlargement on existing and new member states as well as for candidate countries* – the complex interrelationship between the EU and the nation-state level. Indeed, we need to recognize within this the distinction between the applicants' enlargement politics and member states' enlargement politics (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002: 502).
- *Analyzing the 'impact' of past and future enlargements on the European Union* – the wider perspective of the pressures and nature of reform of the Union to accommodate past and future accessions. As part of this third aspect of 'EU enlargement politics', we may need to differentiate between macro/polity dimensions and substantive policy impacts (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002: 502) and also the implications for the Union in terms of the relationship between 'deepening' and 'widening' and the growing diversity of the Union (Zielonka and Mair, 2002).

Using these three elements as a 'template', consideration will now be given to what the present array of theories offer in the context of the enlargement research agenda.

Existing Horizons: The 'Grand Theories' of Neofunctionalism and Liberal Intergovernmentalism

Neofunctionalism

It may have become somewhat 'routine to point to [the] obsolescence of classical . . . integration theory' (Matlary, 1993: 64), yet neofunctionalism with its emphasis on being a 'process theory' may offer some insights as regards EU enlargement. In particular, neo functionalism's suggestion that economic and political integration is furthered through the concept of 'spillover' could be of relevance to our enlargement discussions. Indeed, aspects of 'political spillover', whereby 'political actors in distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing nation states' (Haas, 1958: 16), may describe not just EU deepening. They may also be pertinent as regards the motives of those outside the Union seeking to get in. In short, if neofunctionalism incorporates a more discernible 'external perspective' of elite interaction (see Miles, Redmond and Schwok, 1995: 181), it can be important as a sub-text explaining why states join the Union.

An interesting exploration of the usefulness of spillover in this context has been undertaken by Peterson and Bomberg (1998), who have argued that the 1995 enlargement can be explained in terms of three different kinds of spillover. First, as 'functional spillover' – through the initial creation of the European Economic Area (EEA). Second, by 'institutional spillover' – such as with the way in which the EEA became politically untenable due to the limited nature of the EFTA countries' influence on Single European Market-related decision-making, and hence provoked the membership applications. Third, through 'political spillover' – as the elites in the new EU member states became acclimatized to operating in the new EU political environment (Peterson and Bomberg, 1998: 44).

A greater emphasis on 'external', rather than 'internal', spillover taking place beyond the Union's boundaries can thus help explain full membership applications and eventual accession (Miles, 1995: 20–3). What can also be helpful is to distinguish between 'voluntary' and 'enforced' external spillover (see Miles, 1995: 21) – although the terms are not mutually exclusive and the categories are, in any event, always subjective to a point. With some simplification, voluntary external spillover relates to where the initiation of closer EU ties lies largely with

the non-member states and is based upon their recognition of the need for a closer relationship with the Union in some form. Enforced external spillover envisages that third countries are required by the Union to explicitly reform domestic processes in line with EU principles, usually as a precondition of membership. Hence EU principles and policies are being enforced by the Union and are, rather forcefully, spilling over into non-member states. A good example of this is Malta in the 1990s: enforced external spillover was direct since the 1993 Commission opinion required the Maltese economy to restructure (in some sectors necessitating radical reform) before the Union would consent to opening accession negotiations.

Political spillover may also occur from the 'outside in' as new members and their respective political elites bring with them their own preferences for moulding the character of the EU (see Miles, 1995). This may not necessarily all be in the direction of further deepening, as areas of integration may be limited, resisted or even reversed by the presence of new political elites who do not share the premise that further integration is advantageous in itself (see Miles and Redmond, 1996). This 'outside in' effect may begin even before accessions have been completed since the political elites of applicant states interact with EU elites from the time applications are presented, and furthermore they often are given observer status within EU institutions and forums.

Nevertheless, although there are valuable deductive aspects that can be drawn from neofunctionalism, its contribution to theoretical considerations of EU enlargement is restricted to largely background factors. More specifically, neofunctionalism can shed some light on the first (EU accession process) and second (the enlargement politics of the applicants and member states) elements of our research agenda through a more sophisticated interpretation of spillover.

Yet, we are never far away from neofunctionalism's origins in seeking to explain integration between a relatively homogenous EC of six, rather than a diverse Union of 25 plus. Neofunctionalism also has difficulty in accommodating the economic impacts of the accessions of relatively poor members that have widened disparities, undermined the coherence and effectiveness of EU policies, and complicated the search for supranational elite consensus by promoting multi-speed (and even multi-tier) European integration. Enlargements have tended to emphasize the Union's diversity – something neofunctionalism is largely uncomfortable with in its traditional form.

Liberal intergovernmentalism

At the core of liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) (Moravcsik, 1993, 1995, 1998) lie three underlying elements: the assumption of rational state behaviour; a liberal theory of national preference formation (the demand

side of European integration); and an intergovernmental analysis of interstate negotiation (the supply side of European integration). These elements largely seek to explain how the costs and benefits of economic interdependence primarily determine national preferences, which governments aggregate and negotiate with during intergovernmental interstate bargaining at flagship 'super-systemic' IGCs. European integration is thus best explained as a series of rational choices by national executives. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Moravcsik's analysis in relation to enlargement?

The initial strength of liberal intergovernmentalism derives from the notion of 'liberal national preference formation', that suggests the importance of state–society relations, economic interests, and the role of 'societal groups' in shaping national preferences. This is of some use when considering national preferences towards EU accession. If groups, for example, 'articulate preferences and governments aggregate them' (Moravcsik, 1993: 483), this provides plausible governmental motivations to support (or oppose) EU membership and why states suffer from varying levels of domestic problems when contemplating accession to the Union. Indeed, the primacy of economic interdependence arguments – an integral part of LI – regularly also drive non-member states to join the Union 'where policy co-ordination increases their control over domestic policy outcomes, permitting them to achieve goals that would not otherwise be possible' (Moravcsik, 1993: 485). LI may therefore have something to say in relation to the first (accession process) and second (the enlargement politics of the applicants and member states) elements of our research agenda.

Moravcsik also identifies that the distributional consequences of EU policies are uneven among and within nations and that those nations and domestic groups that are disadvantaged by policy co-ordination are likely to oppose EU membership. It is only when governments can collectively overcome such opposition that membership is possible. This is especially relevant to applicants using public referendums to legitimize EU accession. Equally, such notions help to explain the arduous nature of EU accession negotiations, since the participating governments are both empowered and constrained by important societal groups, partly because they calculate their interests in terms of expected gains and losses from specific policies. Accession agreements are thus reliant upon the converging of the interests of dominant domestic groups within and between differing countries.

The focus of LI on 'interstate strategic interaction' also has resonance, especially in conceptualizing the accession process (the first element of our research agenda). The strengths of LI are that it helps to elucidate the role of governments during key strategic negotiations in large policy forums dominated by the member state governments, such as IGCs. This seems especially pertinent to EU enlargement, which is littered with such

flagship deliberations. The deliberations can occur during key negotiations between existing member states on either EU reforms or treaty changes as preparation for the impact of forthcoming enlargements. Examples include the 2000 Nice Treaty negotiations and the talks between EU-15 governments at the October 2002 Brussels summit on the financial packages to be offered to the new member states.

Flagship deliberations can also occur during head-to-head discussion between the Union (usually via the Council Presidency) and the governments of the respective candidate countries on the actual accession terms. In this context, enlargement questions can reflect Moravcsik's 'co-operative game in which the level of cooperation reflects patterns in the preferences of national governments' (Moravcsik, 1993: 499). LI could possibly explain the reason why the views of large existing member states are also critical in shaping the Union's overall attitude towards specific applicants. Given the complexity of the enlargement negotiations there are, of course, plenty of opportunities for linkages between issues and for 'package deals'.

Nevertheless, LI can only have limited value for our purposes. The main weakness of LI perhaps lies in the almost exclusive positioning of executives as the determiners of EU policy, while cutting them off from rich debates over the character of 'domestic politics', state theory and public policy-making (Wincott, 1995: 599). These are, after all, central features of domestic debates on EU enlargement. LI is also less than comfortable with the important role of the Commission as the Union's chief negotiator in accession negotiations and its influence in shaping the Union's general policy on enlargement – as with the *Agenda 2000* programme. Similarly, the EP's role in the accession ratification process is largely ignored. Finally, LI cannot explain properly why existing member states can be in favour of further enlargement even if their economic interests may be damaged in the short term – as is the case with the opening of the Union to the CEECs, all of which are less economically developed countries that will place great strains on the Union's financial resources. Therefore, as Moravcsik (1995: 611) admits, LI cannot account for all aspects of European integration and the EU enlargement process in particular.

So, neither LI nor neofunctionalism can comment comfortably or fully on all elements of our enlargement research agenda.

Newer Horizons: Multi-Level Governance and New Institutionalism

Dissatisfaction with the limitations of 'grand theorizing' have resulted, especially since the early 1990s, in the application of 'middle-range' theories that 'do not have totalizing ambitions' (Rosamond, 2003: 112). At

the forefront of these theoretical investigations are the concepts of 'multi-level governance' and 'new institutionalism'.

Multi-Level Governance

The concept of 'multi-level governance' (MLG) provides a framework for explaining EU decision-making that recognizes 'the existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels of governments and the interaction of political actors across those levels' (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 341).

Although rather vague and seemingly more promising as a metaphor than a theory (see for example, Aspinwall and Schneider, 1997), MLG amounts to the claim that the EU has become a polity where authority is dispersed (Rosamond, 2000: 110). It does not reject the view that state executives and state arenas are important, nor that these remain the most significant for the European integration puzzle, but does stress that they are not the exclusive link between domestic politics and intergovernmental bargaining in the EU. In short, the MLG concept highlights an 'actor' rather than a 'state-centric' approach 'in which authority and policy-making influence are shared across multiple levels of government – sub-national, national and supranational' (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 342). The emerging Euro-polity is reliant upon the outcome of tension between supranational and intergovernmental pressures, evolving into a multi-level polity where control is slipping away from national governments to supranational institutions, and in particular, agenda-setting has become 'a shared and contested competence' (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 359).

What does MLG offer our discussion of EU enlargement? At face value, MLG highlights the importance of contact and cooperation between sub-national actors, such as interest groups, in pushing forward the process of European integration and as part of the general ethos of increased interdependence between states (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 371). For third countries that are considering applying for EU membership and/or are moving further towards full membership, then the links of their respective sub-national actors with those in existing member states are often instrumental in pressing the pro-membership cause and shaping EU accession debates. So, for example, the Europe Agreements that formed the precursor for full membership of CEECs encouraged closer cooperation between such actors and allowed those from non-member states to participate indirectly in the EU policy process. These sub-national bodies can therefore be useful 'actors' in themselves, affecting accession debates and becoming important institutional settings that are, in effect, preconditions for a country's success in joining the Union. There is thus potential for MLG to offer explanations relevant to the first and second elements of the enlargement research agenda.

MLG represents an attempt 'to depict complexity as the principal feature of the EU's policy-making system' (Rosamond, 2000: 111) and, as such, strikes an accord with notions of 'flexibility' and diversity in a post-2004 EU-25. From the perspective of EU enlargement, 'differentiated integration' explains 'horizontal' widths of EU competencies, whilst 'multi-level governance' largely addresses 'vertical' divisions of competencies 'up and down' within the Union's decision-making structure.

Yet, the value of MLG is curtailed since it seems at times to be little more than a description of the EU decision-making system and a rather static model that lacks a means to predict change. This is a worrying commodity since the 1995 enlargement probably represented the last usage of the 'classical method' of EU enlargement (Preston, 1995 and 1997). Certainly, the 10 + 2 round signifies a qualitative change since – as the Nice Treaty testifies – the expansion to EU-25 invokes changes in the rights not just of the new member states but also of the existing EU-15. It would seem that MLG represents largely an account of the status quo.

New institutionalism

Another theoretical avenue lies with new institutionalism, especially since in recent years it has emerged from a quiet back-water of political science into a mainstream approach for those studying European integration. That is not to say that institutional analysis is something new, for organization theory and theories of collective action and corporatism are commonplace. In general, new institutionalism, like MLG, should be regarded as something of 'an umbrella term' (see Armstrong and Bulmer, 1998). It incorporates literature focusing on institutional actors, examinations of the complexities of bargaining between actors from different levels, and evaluations of the role of norms and socialization on the process of European integration (see for example, Bulmer, 1994; Shepsle, 1989; Norgaard, 1996). There has been almost no convergence towards a common understanding of European institutions within the existing new institutionalism literature. It may be correct to call it a 'movement' rather than a clearly delineated theory (see Rosamond, 2000: 113–22), incorporating sociological, historical and rationalist perspectives (see Hall and Taylor, 1996).

However, all new institutionalists argue that 'institutions matter' and that they affect outcomes between 'units' – whether these be individuals, firms, states, or other forms of social organizations such as the EU. In short, institutions contain the bias individual agents have built into their society over time, which in turn leads to important distribution consequences. They structure political outcomes, rather than simply mirroring social activity and rational competition among desegregated units. (March and Olsen, 1984, 1989; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992).

The distinctiveness of new institutionalism lies in its wider interpretation

of what constitutes institutions, with a shift away from formal constitutional–legal approaches to broader aspects of government. In particular, historical, rather than rational choice, institutionalism is more popularly (but not exclusively) applied to the EU context (see Armstrong and Bulmer 1998; Pierson, 1996). In general terms, new institutionalism includes broader aspects of government – allowing it to incorporate concepts of 'policy community' and 'policy networks' (see Peterson, 1995: 69–93). Further to this, new institutionalists recognize that EU decision-making is steeped in norms and codes of conduct, which make it 'difficult to isolate formal institutional rules from the normative context' (Armstrong and Bulmer, 1998: 51).

The vagueness surrounding the definitions of 'institutions' seems to be the greatest strength but also the underlying weakness of new institutionalism. This is conceded by its advocates. Some argue that it 'is neither a theory nor a coherent critique' (March and Olsen, 1984: 747) and it is certainly not a 'grand theory' of integration as it makes no predictions of the path ahead. So how can new institutionalism help the analysis of EU enlargement?

It is useful – especially in its historical variant – in several ways. First, in helping to explain the structure of the debates on EU accession in both member states and applicant countries. This has resonance for the second element of our enlargement research agenda in particular. According to historical new institutionalism, 'long-term institutional consequences are often the by-products of actions taken for short-term political reasons' (Pierson, 1996: 136). Actors are not fully aware of the complete implications of participating in institutional venues. This is especially appropriate when discussing the motives of countries and is endemic within national accession debates. Information on EU accession is not perfect and the reasons for joining or not joining the Union are often premised on highly speculative assumptions and limited 'time-horizons'. Domestic and even supranational institutional actors often base their policies on EU enlargement on incomplete information and, more broadly, on what the EU may become rather than what it consists of at the time.

Second, political institutions are central to domestic EU accession debates since they structure political life. The views of key institutions, such as labour and employers organizations, feature strongly in accession debates. Furthermore, institutions disseminate information and mobilize their membership either for or against full membership status. It is often the balance between 'pro' and 'anti' EU membership forces within key institutions that influence whether accession is pursued and secured, particularly within corporatist societies.

Third, a central assumption of new institutionalism is that institutions tend to 'lock-in' to place and create 'path dependencies'. Participation in supranational arrangements and further Europeanization locks-in

member states and their respective political elites. In the enlargement context, leading institutional actors continue to favour EU membership even when there may be fundamental changes in the very reasons why they joined. Hence, the role of institutions helps explain why, even where anti-EU membership feelings remain high in some quarters after EU accession, governments and leading interest groups are usually able to convince sceptical electorates to remain 'inside the Union'. Moreover, they become 'locked-in' to further integration pathways. Over time, new member states gradually become more 'supranational inclined' as there is a 'rising price of exit' (Pierson, 1996: 144).

There would also seem to be valuable lessons to be drawn from new institutionalism as regards the supranational context, and in particular the Union's reform process spurred on by past and future enlargements. From the enlargement perspective, EU institutions are 'supranational actors' with their own institutional preferences. The European Commission and the EP, for instance, have increasingly made inputs into the enlargement process since the 1970s. The Commission is responsible for defining accession criteria and pre-accession strategies, delivering 'Opinions' on the applications and 'Progress Reports' on the preparations of candidate countries towards accession. It is also the case that the Parliament has been regularly consulted on accessions by the Commission and the Council Presidency, and since the 1986 SEA has had to ratify accession treaties.

The EU institutions also input strongly into agendas of institutional and policy reform that have been largely prompted by the fact that enlargements do affect the *acquis communautaire* and *finalité politique* of the Union (part of the final element of our enlargement research agenda). A good relationship between, say, the Commission and the governments of the new member states is essential if the Union's budgetary, agricultural and structural funds (and their reforms) are to be implemented effectively. Indeed, this is an ongoing process. In short, enlargement affects differing institutional configurations and thus the 'governance capacity' of the Union, which new institutionalism seeks to explore (see Bulmer, 1998: 372).

Nevertheless, new institutionalism is only indirectly useful to concepts of EU enlargement. Although the stress on shifting national preferences as 'an unintended consequence' is interesting, the quest by third countries for full membership status is based more on the recognition of 'the deliberate triumphs of European integration' (Moravcsik, 1998: 491). There are often discernible economic and financial motives driving countries towards EU accession, not least in the case of the CEECs as a means of inducing further economic modernization. New member states accept directly the transfer of sovereignty to supranational institutions as part of the 'price' of full membership – and not, as historical institutionalists may argue, an 'unintended or unforeseen

consequence'. Hence, it is difficult to argue that European integration has been happening (almost) in spite of the EU member states (Puchala, 1999: 329).

Following on from this, national preferences and national interests are, for the most part, not as unstable or as unpredictable as new institutionalists would have us believe. Indeed, if the preferences of new member states over the previous enlargements are considered, what is striking is the stability and continuity of national preferences. Taking the post-1995 new members – Austria, Sweden and to a lesser extent, Finland – what is most evident is that all three are, to some extent, still interested in securing EU breakthroughs in those areas left unfulfilled by the accession agreements. In the Swedish case, for example, this includes securing greater transparency in EU decision-making. There are as many 'intended' as 'unintended' 'lock-in' effects arising from EU enlargement.

New institutionalism thus remains, for the most part, too loose to provide an adequate explanation of EU enlargement processes.

Expanding Horizons: Constructivism

It is essential then that further work is done on the construction of an adequate theoretical agenda for examining the EU enlargement process. As Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002: 502) recognize, any such agenda as regards EU enlargement must address existing shortcomings – not least the insularity in which enlargement questions have been treated in terms of theorizing, an under-theorizing of dependent variables, and, most of all, a neglect of important dimensions of enlargement.

The most contemporary attempt at addressing some of these aspects is the 'theoretical turn' of 'constructivism' (which sometimes, but not always, is regarded as an off-shoot of institutionalism). As was shown in Chapter 1, the constructivist hypothesis suggests that the enlargement process will generally be shaped by ideational and cultural factors (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002: 513), especially notions of community or 'cultural match' where the member states and the candidate countries share a collective identity and fundamental beliefs. Thus, third countries join the Union because they share common values and believe it is best to be part of an 'EU club' of liberal democracies and market economies.

At many levels, the constructivist position is convincing. It provides insights into the enlargement politics of applicant states, such as why the CEECs after the 1989 strategic changes in Europe became so keen to join the Union as part of their new 'democratic credentials'. In addition, it helps to explain why identity factors play such a role in enlargements debates in states like Norway and Iceland that have (so far) resisted joining the Union. Constructivism may therefore provide useful insights into

the second element of our research agenda pertaining to the enlargement politics of applicants and/or member states.

However, although it is helpful at the margins, it is less confident in terms of differentiating between groups of candidate countries and indeed, in explaining the nuances of why the expanding Union has differing levels of integration between the member states. As Jachtenfuchs (2002: 656) suggests, influential factors such as the role of state executives, domestic responses to external or structural stimuli, and the relationship between material preferences and ideational influences are hard to explain from a constructivist perspective of enlargement. Furthermore, greater attention needs to be placed on the relationship between ideational factors and the strategic alternatives that both the applicants and the member states face both 'inside' and 'outside' a more flexible Union (Wallace, 2002: 663).

Conclusion: Widening of Our Theoretical Horizons?

Part of the challenge when assessing the usefulness of integration theories in helping to explain EU enlargement is that integration theories and EU enlargement have, to some extent, been moving in opposite directions. There are two aspects to this. First, most of the existing theories have sought to explain what is going on within the Union, rather than the relationships between itself and third countries. There thus is a question of analytical appropriateness. Second, recent trends have seen integration theories become more reserved and less ambitious – at the very time when the EU enlargement agenda has become ever busier. It would seem that just as European integration theorizing is 'down-sizing', the EU's enlargement portfolio has 'ratcheted upwards'. It is thus wise to look outside existing theoretical frameworks in order to provide a resounding theoretical consideration of the EU enlargement process.

Scholarship is far from having developed anything like a comprehensive 'theory' to enable us to understand the all-embracing nature and impact of EU enlargement. If it ever is to do so, scholars must focus not so much as they have done on the 'deepening' of the Union, but must pay more attention to how enlargement fits into the integration picture. Thus, the existing trend towards 'middle-range' theory will, almost by definition, not provide us with any major step forward in understanding how and why the Union has grown in size and what this will mean for the future functioning of the EU. If anything, this chapter represents something of a plea to others. It is time to widen once again our theoretical horizons and make the conceptualizing of further EU enlargement a central focus, rather than a peripheral element on forthcoming research agendas.

One possible avenue may be to explore further notions of a 'flexible' or 'differentiated' EU – although just as with the theories analyzed here, concepts of 'flexibility' (Stubb, 1996, 2002) or of a 'Europe of concentric circles' (Baldwin, 1993) need to be more academically rigorous in handling the specific ramifications of enlargement than at present. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, a 'Hub and Spokes Europe' – with the euro area as the central hub, and within that perhaps a smaller inner-core – may provide a suitable framework to begin assessing the post-2004 EU-25 (Miles 2003).