

Europeanization Mechanisms and Process Tracing: A Template for Empirical Research*

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Abstract

While the literature on Europeanization has exhibited considerable awareness of the methodological challenge of establishing causal relations between non-binding EU stimuli and domestic change, less work has been done on how this challenge might be met. This article contributes to the literature's attempts to meet this challenge by: 1) reformulating four explanations of Europeanization based on four distinct causal mechanisms (instrumental learning, social learning, naming and shaming and peer pressure); 2) specifying their observable implications for three intervening steps between EU stimuli and change in national policy (the definition of the policy problem, the alternative courses of action considered and the manner in which they were assessed); 3) defending process tracing against critiques of its usefulness for research on Europeanization; and 4) providing practical guidelines on how process tracing can be used to test these four explanations empirically, using examples from employment policy, where non-binding EU stimuli feature most prominently.

Keywords: Europeanization; mechanisms; process tracing; causality; employment policy

Introduction

It has become commonplace to state that establishing causality in the literature on Europeanization is a challenge, especially for researchers who attempt to establish causal relations between non-binding European Union (EU) stimuli and change in national policy (cf. Featherstone, 2003; Haverland, 2006; Radaelli, 2012). While a sizeable part of the literature has exhibited considerable awareness of this challenge, less work has been done on how it might be met. In the small part of the literature that has attempted to address this issue, it has become equally commonplace to argue that process tracing might be used to establish the causal significance of the EU (Moumoutzis, 2011; Radaelli, 2006; Zartaloudis, 2013). Process tracing is a within-case¹ qualitative method that 'attempts to identify the intervening ... causal mechanism between an independent variable ... and the outcome of the dependent variable' (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 206). Its attempt to identify causal mechanisms is typically considered process tracing's distinguishing feature (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p. 1).

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¹ As has been pointed out (Bennett and Elman, 2006, p. 462), many small-*n* studies have been presented as comparisons, while in fact they use process tracing to make within-case causal inferences.

While the use of this method in the literature on Europeanization has been widespread, it has not been particularly advanced. It has been consistent with what has been termed ‘detailed narratives’ that make limited use of theory (George and Bennett, 2005, pp. 210–11). Simply put, researchers frequently merely mention process tracing and then present a historical narrative of relevant EU- and domestic-level developments. Regardless of the amount of detail that they include, these narratives often do not succeed in establishing the causal significance of the EU.

This is regrettable, given the progress that the literature on within-case qualitative methods has made since the mid-1990s (see Bennett and Elman, 2006 and Mahoney, 2007; for process tracing in particular see Bennett and Checkel, 2015). This shortcoming is not inherent in process tracing, as this method is consistent with more advanced analyses that make extensive use of hypotheses and variables. Thus, the challenge for researchers is to transform these narratives into ‘analytical explanations’ (George and Bennett, 2005, pp. 211–12). The intervening steps between cause and effect, on which process tracing focuses, should be ‘theoretically predicted’ (Checkel, 2006, p. 636). Additionally, an ‘uninterrupted’ causal path between cause and effect is required and ‘it is not sufficient that a hypothesis be consistent with a statistically significant number of intervening steps’ (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 207).² The causal path might be interrupted if relevant theories make no predictions about a certain intervening step or an indeterminacy problem might arise if they make similar predictions (George and Bennett, 2005). As has been pointed out (Rohlfing, 2012, pp. 173–74), process tracing per se cannot eliminate the potential for such indeterminacy. Consequently, it is necessary to hypothesize observable implications for the intervening steps between cause and effect that are as distinctive as possible.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the literature’s attempts to meet the challenge of establishing the causal significance of the EU, especially in policy areas where EU stimuli are not binding.³ It does so by reformulating four explanations of Europeanization based on four distinct causal mechanisms: 1) instrumental learning; 2) social learning; 3) naming and shaming; and 4) peer pressure. Such mechanism-based explanations ‘detail the cogs and wheels of the causal process through which the outcome to be explained was brought about’ (Hedström and Ylikoski, 2010, p. 50). The analysis here also specifies the observable implications of the aforementioned mechanism-based explanations for three intervening steps between cause and effect: 1) the definition of the policy problem; 2) the alternative courses of action considered; and 3) the manner in which the

² For example, while evidence that non-binding EU stimuli have caused changes in the definition of policy problems has been reported, there is not as much evidence that these changes have been followed by changes in the alternative courses of action that national policy makers considered or changes in the way in which these alternatives were assessed before the decision to change policy was made. Consequently, the evidence that has been reported has been insufficient to establish an uninterrupted causal path between cause and effect (cf. Zeitlin, 2005). For these intervening steps, see below.

³ We refer to these EU stimuli as ‘non-binding’ in the sense that they are not justiciable. We prefer to refrain from using the term ‘soft’ EU law because of the problems related to the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ law that the literature has identified (see Trubek and Trubek, 2005). Additionally, the terms that we use here have clearer implications for the causal mechanisms through which Europeanization might produce policy change. As the Commission cannot bring charges of non-compliance with non-justiciable EU stimuli before the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the ECJ cannot enforce compliance with such stimuli by imposing sanctions. Finally, it should be noted that the analysis presented here also applies to policy areas where binding EU stimuli are available, yet unlikely to be adopted due to divergent national preferences (see Radaelli, 2008, p. 239).

latter were assessed. The analysis of these observable implications renders these explanations amenable to an advanced application of process tracing.

The first part of the article presents the aforementioned mechanism-based explanations. These explanations depart from conventional analyses of the causal mechanisms on which they are based. While the literature often conflates various mechanisms into one, this article argues that it is problematic to equate ‘naming and shaming’ with ‘peer pressure’ and ‘social learning’ with ‘socialization’. The systematic distinction between different causal mechanisms allows us to formulate explanations of Europeanization that are theoretically more coherent and easier to test empirically.

The second part of the article defends process tracing against critiques of its usefulness for research on Europeanization. It is argued that those who have advocated random selection on the independent variable as the most effective way of establishing causality have disregarded the fact that cases of Europeanization are cases of equifinality, to which the use of process tracing is better suited. It is also argued that the generalizability of findings depends on case selection rather than the use of process tracing.

The third part of this article demonstrates how process tracing might be applied empirically using examples from employment policy, where the use of non-binding EU stimuli has been extensive (see Heidenreich and Bischoff, 2008; Van Rie and Marx, 2012; Zartaloudis, 2013). While this part of the article does not present findings of an empirical case study, it does provide detailed practical guidelines on the use of process tracing.

I Four Explanations of Europeanization and their Observable Implications

Several mechanisms of Europeanization in policy areas with non-binding EU stimuli have been identified in the literature (cf. Trubek and Trubek, 2005). Nevertheless, none has been specified with a degree of precision that would render them empirically testable through process tracing. As has been recently pointed out (Bennett and Checkel, 2015, p. 30), before employing process tracing it is necessary to specify as precisely as possible what one should observe within a case in order to empirically substantiate each hypothesized explanation. This section serves this purpose by presenting four explanations of Europeanization based on four distinct causal mechanisms (instrumental learning, social learning, naming and shaming and peer pressure) and specifying their observable implications.⁴ Mechanisms are conceptualized here as ‘entities’ and the ‘activities’ in which they engage and which produce particular types of change (Hedström, 2005, p. 25; Machamer *et al.*, 2000, p. 3). As has often been the case (Hedström, 2005, p. 2), the ‘entities’ and ‘activities’ on which the analysis focuses are actors and their actions. In each of the four explanations presented here, the analysis of different actions exhibits a ‘productive continuity’ (Machamer *et al.*, 2000, p. 3) between the same cause (non-binding EU stimuli) and the same effect (change in national policy).⁵

As has been pointed out (Hall, 2008, p. 27), it is particularly important to derive ‘predictions that are consistent with one theory but inconsistent with its principal rivals’. In

⁴ It should be noted that further operationalization of the explanations presented here is likely to be necessary once a specific case has been selected.

⁵ For a framework that considers non-binding EU stimuli’s effects other than change in national policy see Zeitlin *et al.* (2014).

this vein, the analysis here increases the level of ‘theoretical uniqueness’ of each explanation’s observable implications (the extent to which they can be derived from only one of these four explanations in principle) and the extent to which they are mutually exclusive.⁶ At least one of the observable implications of each explanation is both theoretically unique and incompatible with the observable implications of the other explanations for the same intervening step between cause and effect. Finally, this section argues that discourse (in the sense of a process that serves to disseminate policy ideas) is more useful for explaining the Europeanization of domestic politics rather than national policies.

Instrumental and Social Learning

Policy learning has been the most popular explanation of policy change as the outcome of Europeanization (Borrás and Radaelli, 2010; Kröger, 2009; Zeitlin, 2005). Policy learning is understood here as ‘relatively enduring changes in thought or behavioural intention that result from experience and/or new information concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives’ (Hecló, 1974, p. 306).⁷ While various types of learning have been discussed in the literature, we argue that the distinction between ‘instrumental’ and ‘social learning’ is more useful for empirical research because it produces observable implications that allow researchers to distinguish between them empirically. As was mentioned above, the extent to which causal arguments make distinctive predictions about intervening steps between cause and effect should be a guiding principle in the process of refining causal mechanisms.

In this vein, during EU-level interactions, national policy-makers acquire new information drawn from the experience of other EU Member States, assess it and, if they calculate that practices originally pursued elsewhere might achieve their policy goals more effectively, voluntarily incorporate them into their policy. This type of learning has been referred to as ‘instrumental’, ‘single-loop’ or ‘adaptive’ learning and it results in a change in policy means (Argyris and Schön, 1978, pp. 20–26; May, 1992, p. 335; Visser, 2005, p. 180). In contrast, ‘social’, ‘double-loop’ or ‘reflexive’ learning results in a change in policy ends, as the information that national policy-makers acquire and assess is not merely related to policy instruments, but also policy objectives.⁸ The causal significance of the EU in this case lies in the fact that it is the channel through which new information

⁶ For the term ‘theoretical uniqueness’ see Rohlffing (2014, p. 614), who has refined Van Evera’s (1997, p. 31) conception of ‘uniqueness’. It should be noted here that a complete discussion of observable implications would also require an assessment of their ‘empirical uniqueness’ (the extent to which the observable implications of one or more than one of these four explanations can be tested in a specific case) and their ‘certainty’ (the probability that they will be confirmed). As Rohlffing (2014, pp. 613–14) has pointed out, this can only be determined in relation to a particular case and therefore it is not possible within the confines of this article.

⁷ See also Sabatier (1987, p. 654). Hall has defined ‘social learning’ as ‘a deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience or new information’ (1993, p. 278). In this sense, ‘learning is indicated when policy changes as the result of such a process’. As Bennett and Howlett (1992, p. 285) have pointed out, this assumption is fairly common amongst explanations of policy change based on learning. Surely, however, it is conceivable that *certain* policy makers might learn and intend or even attempt to pursue policy change, yet they might fail to convince or impose the lessons they have learnt on their colleagues. Furthermore, if these policy makers have complete information at the early stages of the policy-making process, they are likely to anticipate this outcome and therefore they may not attempt to pursue policy change. Consequently, Hall’s definition is too restrictive as it excludes cases of learning, where the latter is not followed by (attempts to pursue) policy change.

⁸ The outcomes of instrumental learning are consistent with what Hall (1993) refers to as first- and second-order change, while the outcomes of social learning are consistent with third-order change.

becomes available to national policy-makers, which in turn modifies national policy-makers' conception of the policy problem (social learning) or the range of alternatives available to them (instrumental learning).

Instrumental learning is a common element of rationalist explanations of policy change (Dobbin *et al.*, 2007, p. 463; James and Lodge, 2003, p. 181; Risse *et al.*, 2001, p. 12). According to the latter, (national) policy-makers use 'at some later point' the information that they have acquired during (EU-level) interactions 'to alter strategies, but not preferences, which are given' (Checkel, 2001, p. 561). Such explanations predict that national policy-makers calculate the costs and benefits of EU-recommended courses of action in terms of policy objectives, not the objective of re-election. In the case of social learning, these cost–benefit calculations are made in terms of policy objectives, which have previously been redefined upon reflection on information relating to the nature of the policy problem.

Naming and Shaming

'Naming and shaming' and 'peer pressure' have also featured prominently in the literature. The precise relationship between these two mechanisms remains unclear. The literature uses them practically interchangeably to refer to the negative implications for national policy-makers whose country is under-performing with regard to indicators jointly agreed upon at the EU level (see for example Hodson, 2004; Zeitlin, 2005). National policy-makers, it is argued, pursue policy change in response to non-binding EU stimuli in order to avoid the 'informal sanction' of naming and shaming or the pressure of their peers (Heidenreich and Bischoff, 2008, p. 504; Trubek and Trubek, 2005, p. 357).

This article departs from conventional analyses of naming and shaming and peer pressure and argues that they constitute distinct causal mechanisms. Naming and shaming can form the basis of a rationalist explanation of policy change, whereas peer pressure is only consistent with a constructivist approach. The key distinguishing feature of naming and shaming is the publicity that its effective functioning requires.⁹ In this sense, evaluations of national performance that are made public are expected to embarrass national governments who are found to have performed badly and result in reputational losses, as they are available for opposition parties, interest groups and the media to use in their discourse (Büchs, 2008; De Ruiter, 2013; Hodson, 2004; Zeitlin, 2005).¹⁰ Such reputational losses

⁹ It appears as though the conflation of these two mechanisms originated in Hodson's analysis, which remains the most detailed. Strikingly, Hodson drew on Olson's analysis of social pressure, which has made explicit that two distinct 'kind(s) of social pressure may occasionally be operative' (Olson, 1971, p. 63, fn 18). One type of social pressure is generated 'through person-to-person friendships', the other 'through mass media' (Olson, 1971, p. 63, fn 18). We believe that our distinction between an explanation based on naming and shaming, which occurs in public, and an explanation based on peer pressure, which occurs in private, is more consistent with Olson's analysis.

¹⁰ Empirical evidence shows that the formulation of country-specific recommendations that follows the evaluation of national performance is 'a politically negotiated process ... between the Commission and the Member States' (Copeland and Ter Haar, 2013, p. 31). The Member States try to influence the wording of the Commission's recommendations or to have (parts of) recommendations removed and occasionally they succeed (Copeland and Ter Haar, 2013, p. 32; Mailand, 2008, pp. 356, 358–9). It does not follow, however, that 'recommendations are therefore quasi-extensions of the Member States acting in areas they themselves identify as a priority' (Copeland and Ter Haar, 2013, p. 32). If the Member States could exercise such control over the recommendations, they would be fairly responsive to them. The evidence, however, shows that responsiveness to recommendations is variable, yet overall rather limited (see Copeland and Ter Haar, 2013, pp. 30–1). Consequently, while the Member States regularly try to and occasionally succeed in influencing the Commission's recommendations, the latter remain beyond their full control and are more than a mere reflection of national priorities.

may in turn result in electoral losses. This causal argument is based on the premise that the electorate is both informed about these evaluations and willing to electorally punish a government under which their country has performed badly.¹¹ While the ‘cost/benefit choice mechanism’ (Checkel, 2001, p. 556) is the same as in the explanation based on instrumental learning, the type of cost–benefit calculations is different. Consequently, researchers can empirically test this mechanism by investigating the type of cost–benefit calculations that national policy-makers made before pursuing policy change. Establishing that the EU was causally significant via naming and shaming requires evidence that national policy-makers calculated the electoral costs of the continuation of the policy previously pursued.¹²

Peer Pressure

In contrast to naming and shaming, peer pressure does not require publicity, but instead the ‘political determination of (EU) member-states to use (it) ... against recalcitrant countries’ (Radaelli, 2000, p. 34). National policy-makers must be willing to highlight discrepancies between the behavioural norms of their community (the EU) and the behaviour of their peers, and they must be willing to exert pressure on their peers to change their behaviour. Furthermore, national policy-makers ‘must consider a peer rebuke ... to be costly’ (Hodson, 2004, p. 240). It remains unclear, however, why they might consider such pressure costly and yield to it. It has been suggested that socialization ‘would certainly enhance the impact of peer pressure on domestic policy choices’ (Radaelli, 2003b, p. 54, fn 20). In fact, a recent review of the relevant literature concluded that ‘socialization for governmental actors’ has been the main effect of non-justiciable EU stimuli on welfare states, even though ‘they are the ones that are least willing to use it to reflect upon how to alter problem and/or solution framing in the process of ongoing welfare state reform’ (De la Porte and Pochet, 2012, p. 343). In this case, the term ‘socialization’ has been used rather lightly. If national policy-makers are not even willing to consider alternative definitions of policy problems or policy solutions presented during EU-level interactions, they have hardly been socialized. Socialization is ‘a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community’ (Checkel, 2005, p. 804). The nature of this process is highly transformative. According to constructivist approaches, with which this mechanism is consistent (Checkel, 2001, p. 557), once these norms and rules have been internalized, actors are driven by a logic of appropriateness, namely by considerations of what constitutes normal, right or good behaviour within the context of a given community (March and Olsen, 2004). In the case of the EU, socialized national policy-

¹¹ Although Zeitlin (2005) does not specify the reasons why a national government would prefer to avoid such ‘embarrassment’, Hodson (2004, p. 239) and Büchs (2008, p. 24) refer to naming and shaming’s negative implications for ‘a government’s credibility in the eyes of the electorate’ and ‘election turnout’ respectively. We argue that these implications are unlikely to provide sufficient incentive for policy change because they fall short of electoral punishment. The scope condition for the effective operation of this particular mechanism should be more restrictive: voters should be willing to electorally punish their government for bad performance.

¹² Naming and shaming does not make information available only to domestic actors, but also to financial markets (see Hodson, 2004, p. 239). In cases where this information has implications for an EU Member State’s creditworthiness, it might be the response of the financial markets that causes change in national policy. Such a causal relation will also be reflected in national policy-makers’ cost-benefit calculations that precede policy change, as it will increase the financial cost of the policy previously pursued.

makers under peer pressure become convinced¹³ that it is appropriate for them to comply with EU recommendations that would enable their country to achieve EU goals. Under such conditions, national policy-makers should be expected to yield to the pressure of their peers.¹⁴ Consequently, establishing that the EU was causally significant via peer pressure requires evidence that national policy-makers did not make cost–benefit calculations, but attempted to identify the appropriate course of action for a member of their community (the EU).

The precise relationship between socialization and social learning has thus far remained unclear, presumably because both explanations predict change in policy goals. In certain formulations, socialization and social learning do not appear to constitute separate mechanisms.¹⁵ This article argues that their usefulness will be maximized if they remain distinct. Learning by definition requires the provision and assessment of new information. Initially, socialization will indeed entail learning, as new members of a community will first be required to learn what the community's norms and rules are. Subsequently, however, socialization will require normative arguments, which will demonstrate discrepancies between national policy and EU rules and which will not necessarily be based on new information.

Discourse

Discourse has also been considered a mechanism through which Europeanization produces domestic change. As will be shown below, while there are analyses of discourse which are useful for research on Europeanization, these analyses tell us more about the Europeanization of domestic politics rather than national policies. It has been argued (Trubek and Trubek, 2005, p. 92) that 'discursive transformations' may explain policy change, as national policy-makers that make use of concepts introduced at the EU level 'tend to shift policy orientation'. Others have implicitly suggested fairly specific causal and temporal sequences. In these analyses, discourse is understood as 'both the policy ideas that speak to the soundness and appropriateness of policy programmes and the interactive processes of policy formulation and communication that serve to generate and disseminate those policy ideas' (Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004, p. 193). Moreover, discourse has been identified both as a dependent variable that Europeanization might affect and as an intervening variable that affects the likelihood of the Europeanization of national policies (see Radaelli, 2003a, pp. 36, 49). In this sense, discourse as a set of ideas is initially Europeanized, and subsequently discourse as a process that serves to disseminate these ideas facilitates the Europeanization of national policies. This article argues

¹³ Checkel (2001) uses the term 'social learning' to refer to this mechanism that entails 'persuasion' and 'convincing someone through argument'. As was mentioned above, we follow May (1992) and retain the use of the term 'social learning' for cases, where actors reflect on information relating to the policy problem itself.

¹⁴ There might be a set of cases in which national policy-makers should be expected to yield to the pressure of their peers even in the absence of socialization. It is plausible to argue that this might be the case in Member States, where a national 'compliance culture' prevails and compliance *per se* takes precedence over other goals. According to the worlds-of-compliance typology (see Falkner *et al.*, 2007, p. 405), this is the case in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, which belong to the 'world of law observance'. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the empirical record of this approach is at best mixed. See among others Thomson (2009, p. 14), who used 'exactly the same data' as Falkner *et al.* (2007), but reached 'starkly different conclusions'.

¹⁵ Radaelli (2008, p. 240), for example, has argued that Europeanization may entail 'learning by socialisation', which 'make (s) policy makers more aware of their interdependence and can inspire more commitment towards EU-level goals'.

that the first part of this sequence cannot be analytically separated from learning. If discourse as a set of ideas is related to policy instruments, the Europeanization of discourse will be the result of instrumental learning. If it is related to policy objectives, it will be the result of social learning.

The second part of this sequence appears more promising. Information acquired during EU-level interactions might be used as a political resource to construct a discourse – in the sense of a process that serves to disseminate policy ideas – that might serve various purposes: to present a policy problem as a legitimate addition to the agenda or prioritize a problem that is already on the agenda, to serve to check domestic pressure for a policy solution by providing one in a time-efficient fashion or to serve to legitimate a policy solution that has already been selected (Bennett, 1991; Graziano *et al.*, 2011; López-Santana, 2006). On the one hand, ‘co-ordinative discourse’¹⁶ (the use of ideas by policy actors in their attempts to co-ordinate agreement on policies) results in change in the preferences of (some of) the actors that participate in the policy-making process. On the other, ‘communicative discourse’ (the use of ideas by political actors in their attempts to communicate to the public the policy programme agreed upon in the context of co-ordinative discourse) results in change in mass public opinion. As Europeanized ideas become shared by a larger number of domestic actors and/or the public, reform capacity is enhanced, thus rendering policy change more likely (Schmidt, 2002, p. 900). In such cases of usage of EU resources in domestic discourse, no change in the definition of the policy problem or the alternative courses of action considered should be observable. In fact, this process is more accurately conceptualized as the Europeanization of domestic politics rather than national policies.

II In Defence of Process Tracing for Research on Europeanization

Process tracing is not without its critics in the literature on Europeanization. This section draws on the broader literature on process tracing in order to address these critiques and defend the usefulness of process tracing for establishing causality in research on Europeanization. According to Haverland (2006, pp. 137–8), process tracing is unlikely to allow researchers to establish the causal significance of the EU, regardless of whether the observable implications of alternative explanations that do not attribute causal significance to the EU are also process-traced. In this vein, the problem lies in developments, such as globalization, which occurred in parallel with European integration, and produce similar effects (Haverland, 2006, p. 137). In contrast to most of the literature on Europeanization, Haverland (2006, pp. 135–6, 139) has suggested that establishing the causal significance of the EU requires a comparison between EU Member States and non-members in order to introduce variation in the independent variable.

This critique disregards crucial differences between qualitative and quantitative research. More precisely, Haverland has suggested research strategies that are better suited to quantitative research for a literature that is predominantly qualitative. Indeed, random selection on the independent variable is one of the distinguishing features of quantitative

¹⁶ For the distinction between ‘co-ordinative’ and ‘communicative’ discourse see Schmidt and Radaelli (2004).

research (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, pp. 239–41). Qualitative researchers, however, typically select positive cases on the dependent variable (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, pp. 239–41).

Furthermore, Haverland's critique disregards the notion of equifinality – the idea that there are multiple causal paths to the same outcome – which has been identified as an integral part of the understanding of causality in qualitative research (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, pp. 236–7).¹⁷ It should be made explicit that distinguishing the causal significance of the EU from that of other factors does not require researchers to establish that the substantive content of EU stimuli is unique. Indeed, as the use of non-binding stimuli is often intended to spread best practice, the EU by definition promotes policies which are already being pursued by certain national governments. Similarly, national governments in powerful bargaining positions might determine the outcome of EU policy-making on specific policy issues and impose national policy as EU policy, in which case the EU will again promote policies that are already being pursued by certain national governments. Finally, the EU might make policy recommendations that are similar to those made by international organizations, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development or the International Monetary Fund, which might also result in domestic change independently of the EU.

It follows from the above that the outcomes of Europeanization may also be produced by other factors either at the domestic or the international level, and therefore cases of Europeanization are cases of equifinality. If the substantive content of EU stimuli and the outcomes of Europeanization were unique, one would merely need to observe the outcomes that are unique to this process in order to safely conclude that this process has occurred. The existence of alternative sources of policy ideas and practices suggests that research questions related to Europeanization are indeed puzzling and worth exploring. The fact that cases of Europeanization are cases of equifinality suggests that 'the statement that the EU causes a particular outcome' does not '(imply) that if the EU were to absent (sic) that particular outcome would not occur' (Haverland, 2006, p. 135), precisely because other developments might also produce it. Similarly, equifinality renders evidence of similar domestic changes in both EU Member States and non-members insufficient to establish that the EU is not causally significant for changes in its Member States. Domestic change in non-members may indeed be the effect of causes other than the EU, such as globalization or a newly elected government's reform agenda. Such evidence, however, does not suffice to establish that similar domestic changes have been produced through the same causal path in all cases.

Given that cases of Europeanization are cases of equifinality, within-case methods, which establish causality by determining the causal mechanism through which an outcome has been produced (Bennett and Elman, 2006, p. 459), are particularly important for empirical research on Europeanization. As has been pointed out, given that such methods do not establish causality through comparison, they are 'not susceptible to selection bias' (Bennett and Elman, 2006, p. 461). Thus, the literature's emphasis on process tracing is justified because the latter is precisely such a method that makes it possible to

¹⁷ Strikingly, Haverland's discussion of globalization implicitly acknowledges that cases of Europeanization are cases of equifinality, yet his definition of causality does not.

establish whether the EU has been causally significant.¹⁸ It also makes it possible to determine the mechanism through which Europeanization has produced policy change, as the intervening steps between cause and effect, on which process tracing focuses, provide ‘diagnostic pieces of evidence’ that can (dis)confirm alternative explanations (Bennett, 2010).

It has also been argued – ironically, by process tracers themselves (Checkel, 2006, p. 367)¹⁹ – that the findings of research based on within-case qualitative methods such as process tracing are problematic because they are not generalizable. On the one hand, the scope for generalizability is indeed typically narrower in qualitative research, because its complex conception of causality directs it towards different research goals (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, p. 237–8). On the other, this critique should not be overstated. Generalizability does not depend on the method *per se*, but on a different element of research design: case selection. For example, if process tracing produced no evidence of Europeanization in a case where all or at least most of the conditions that render Europeanization likely were present – that is, in a most likely critical case of Europeanization – it would be safe to conclude that causal arguments regarding Europeanization have been substantially weakened and should be revised or abandoned. In other words, methodologically sound case selection ensures the generalizability of findings produced through process tracing, not process tracing *per se*.

III How to Process Trace the Observable Implications of the Four Explanations of Europeanization

Despite the usefulness of process tracing for establishing causality in research on Europeanization, little work has been done on the precise intervening steps on which it should focus. Following Moumoutzis (2011), we argue that process tracing should focus on the following dimensions of the policy-making process: 1) the definition of the policy problem; 2) the alternative courses of action considered; and 3) the manner in which the latter were assessed. These intervening steps have been selected because they are the ones for which the observable implications of the four explanations presented above are most easily distinguishable.²⁰ As was mentioned above, the preceding analysis increased the level of ‘theoretical uniqueness’ of at least one of the observable implications of each explanation for these intervening steps and the extent to which they are mutually exclusive, thus facilitating empirical testing.

¹⁸ This is not to suggest that comparison is not useful, but only that Haverland argues that it can resolve a problem (selection bias) from which process tracing does not suffer.

¹⁹ It should be noted that Checkel appears to have modified his position on this issue in his more recent work – see Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 13–14, 29.

²⁰ While we only have enough space here to cover explanations that attribute causal significance to the EU, researchers should also identify the observable implications of explanations that do not attribute causal significance to the EU for the same intervening steps. On selecting sources, generating data relevant to these intervening steps from them and drawing inferences from this data see among others Bennett and Checkel (2015, pp. 27–9, 31–2) and Rohlfing (2012, especially chapters 7 and 8).

As a first step, empirical research should establish how national policy-makers defined the policy problem that they intended to address.²¹ Evidence of this dimension of the policy-making process has diagnostic value, as different explanations have different observable implications for this dimension. Explanations based on peer pressure and social learning predict changes in national policy-makers' definitions of the policy problem and their policy objectives, while explanations based on instrumental learning and naming and shaming do not.

Consider employment policy. Both the Commission and the Council have identified problems which national employment policies should address, such as low female employment rates or labour market segmentation (Commission, 2010, 2013; Council of the European Union, 2010). It can be hypothesized that if the EU can effectively induce change in its Member States' employment policies, national policy-makers will begin to identify low female employment rates and labour market segmentation as problems that their policy should address. While explanations based on instrumental learning or naming and shaming cannot explain such changes because they predict no variation in the definition of the policy problem, the explanation based on social learning predicts that national policy-makers will begin to consider low female employment rates and labour market segmentation as employment policy problems after collecting relevant information during EU-level interactions. Alternatively, the explanation based on peer pressure predicts that during EU-level interactions, national policy-makers will become convinced that continuing to disregard low female employment rates and labour market segmentation as employment policy problems would undermine the EU's ability to achieve its goals. If empirical research shows no such changes in the definition of the policy problem, their absence should be considered disconfirming evidence for both the explanation based on social learning and the explanation based on peer pressure.

Subsequently, researchers should identify the various alternative courses of action that national policy-makers considered. While evidence of this particular dimension of the policy-making process does not allow researchers to distinguish between alternative mechanisms of Europeanization, it has diagnostic value for the distinction between explanations that attribute causal significance to the EU and explanations that attribute causal significance to other variables. To continue with the example of employment policy, the Commission and the Council have specified courses of action that might address the problems of low female employment rates and labour market segmentation. These include a particular conception of 'flexicurity', which requires changes in employment protection legislation that address discrepancies in employment protection for different types of contracts, lifelong learning policies that upgrade the skills of parents who return to work after taking care of family dependents and changes in social security systems that provide affordable access to childcare facilities (Commission, 2010, 2013; Council of the European Union, 2010). It can be hypothesized that if the EU can effectively induce change in its Member States' employment policies, national policy-makers will begin to consider these EU-recommended courses of action as alternatives to national policy. If

²¹ It should be noted here that there might be cases where one or more policy-makers made calculations different from those of the majority of their colleagues. Empirical testing of the explanations presented above requires empirical evidence of the calculations that dominated the policy-making process in each intervening step between cause and effect. See also footnote 7 on this point.

empirical research shows that national policy-makers continued to disregard both the policy problems and the courses of action identified at the EU level, their disregard should be considered disconfirming evidence for all four explanations presented here.

As a final step, empirical research should establish whether national policy-makers calculated the costs and benefits of the alternatives that they considered and, if so, the type of costs and benefits that they calculated. Evidence of this dimension of the policy-making process also has diagnostic value. The explanation based on naming and shaming predicts that national policy-makers calculate the costs and benefits of EU-recommended courses of action for their re-election, while the explanations based on learning predict that they calculate their costs and benefits for policy objectives. The explanation based on peer pressure predicts that national policy-makers do not make cost–benefit calculations and that they take EU-recommended courses of action because they become convinced that it is the right thing to do for officials of an EU Member State. If empirical research shows that policy change was the result of cost–benefit calculations (regardless of type), these calculations should be considered disconfirming evidence for the explanation based on peer pressure. If empirical research shows that national policy-makers selected an EU-recommended course of action, such as improving access to childcare services because they calculated that it would facilitate the participation of women in the labour market or introducing more open-ended contracts for labour market outsiders because it would reduce labour market segmentation, these calculations should be considered disconfirming evidence for the explanation based on naming and shaming. In contrast, if empirical research shows that national policy-makers selected such EU-recommended courses of action because they calculated that if they had not, they would have endangered their re-election, these calculations should be considered disconfirming evidence for the explanations based on learning.²²

Conclusions

In contrast to frequently under-specified analyses of mechanisms of Europeanization in the literature, this article has made the explanatory logic underlying each mechanism explicit. The guiding principle in this process of refining these causal mechanisms has been the need for distinctive observable implications for the intervening steps between EU stimuli and change in national policy, on which process tracing focuses. The result of this process of refinement is that none of the four explanations presented here are observationally equivalent. They hypothesize causal pathways that differ from one another with regard to at least one intervening step between EU stimuli and domestic change. In particular, the explanation based on social learning and the explanation based on peer pressure predict change in the definition of the policy problem, while the explanation based on instrumental learning and the explanation based on naming and shaming do

²² It should be noted here that EU Member States that are subject to the Excessive Deficit Procedure are required to submit an economic partnership programme which describes the necessary structural reforms in a manner that develops their national reform programmes and is consistent with Europe 2020 and the guidelines for the employment policies of EU Member States (see Regulation (EU) No 473/2013). It is therefore conceivable that sanctions might be imposed on euro-area member states that fail to comply with decisions, which are made within the context of an excessive deficit procedure and are related to employment policy. If change in national employment policy is the effect of such sanctions, this will be reflected in national policy-makers' cost–benefit calculations that precede policy change, as such sanctions will increase the financial cost of the policy previously pursued.

not. The explanation based on social learning predicts that change in the definition of the policy problem is the result of new information, whereas the explanation based on peer pressure predicts that it is the result of normative arguments. The explanation based on instrumental learning predicts that national policy-makers make cost–benefit calculations in terms of policy objectives, while the explanation based on naming and shaming predicts that they make cost–benefit calculations in terms of the objective of re-election. In contrast, the explanation based on peer pressure predicts that national policy-makers do not make cost–benefit calculations, but attempt to identify the appropriate course of action for a member of their community (the EU) instead.

This article has provided detailed guidelines on how process tracing can be used to test the four explanations presented here empirically, using examples from employment policy, where the use of non-binding EU stimuli has been widespread. Process tracing is well suited to establishing causality in cases of equifinality and the use of process tracing demonstrated here is uncommonly advanced. As both the intervening steps between cause and effect and the observable implications of the relevant mechanisms for these intervening steps have now been specified, future research can move from ‘historical narratives’ to ‘analytical explanations’ of policy change as the outcome of Europeanization. The analysis presented here can serve as a template for research on the Europeanization of policy areas other than employment, especially where EU stimuli are not binding (e.g. foreign policy or social inclusion).

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