META-THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EUROPEANIZATION OF PUBLIC SPHERES: EXPLORING THE “GOVERNANCE EFFECT” THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF INSTRUMENTATION

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Submitted to
Central European University
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In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Policy

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Budapest, Hungary

2013
Abstract

This thesis aims to reveal that new institutionalist accounts of Europeanization are inhibited by their incapacity to grasp particular normative and cognitive effects of the unfolding ideal of European governance in domains of public policy. The present work is an attempt to offer ways to spell out alternative conceptual pathways which connect the emergence of new modes, logics and understandings of governance with specific mechanisms of Europeanization. The thesis explores the capacities of the policy instruments perspective to trace the “governance effect”. Following the presentation and analysis of constructivist and critical approaches to instrumentation as a mechanism of Europeanization, the paper provides an illustration for both research agendas through the example of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The thesis concludes that the study of instrumentation has the potential to open the way for the systematic consideration of approaches to governance both from an analytical and a theoretical perspective. Instrumentation is demonstrated to generate particular effects which play an important role in making Europe “governable”.
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**Introduction**

The growing abundance of literature on Europeanization posits the development of a promising field of research, which takes a distance from grand theories about the origins, means and ends of the European Union, and is rather concerned with transformations which occur as a result of the integration. Europeanization is not a theory per se, but rather a conceptual framework or a research agenda, founded on different meta-theoretical assumptions (Featherstone 2003). Certain scholars assign a post-ontological character (Radaelli 2002, 111) to the concept, making it appear void of contentions about what the European Union is, and are rather concerned with unveiling how the operation of the EU affects the political reality and what impacts it generates on domestic institutions and policies. Nevertheless, the argumentation put forward in the thesis is founded on the assumption that Europeanization as an analytical concept is inherently contingent upon some implicit theorization of the nature of the European Union. As much as sloppy usage makes it vulnerable to fallacies of conceptual stretching (Radaelli 2002), the post-ontological stance puts the concept at the risk of narrow and selective appropriation.

In his review article on Europeanization, Radaelli (2002) proposes a taxonomic approach focusing on policy processes which permits to refine the analytical focus of the conceptual framework, and also provides a catalogue of Europeanization mechanisms. Following Radaelli’s steps, the thesis considers public policy a domain where research can prove exceptionally fruitful, given that it is at the level of policy practice where specific mechanisms of Europeanization are most readily observed. But while Radaelli’s categorization of mechanisms seeks to embrace a variety of theorizations shaping the ongoing scholarly debate, it leaves little room for alternative explanations which do not share the assumption about the analytical separation between different dimensions of Europeanization, i.e. political logics, policy processes and ideation. This selective approach
can potentially inhibit the improvement of fragmented and often quite rigid frameworks aiming at the study of Europeanization-related policy change.

Particularly, there are still many ambiguities surrounding the meta-theoretical foundations of Europeanization in policy areas where interactions between European and domestic levels of policy-making are less formalized, i.e. in the context of network and multi-level governance. The thesis exposes that there is a theoretical and analytical void between definitional elements which refer to the emergence of particular modes, political logics and understandings of governance (Green Cowles et al. 2001; Radaelli 2002); and general causal accounts of cognitive and normative change, tracing policy diffusion and transfer as “framing mechanisms” (Radaelli 2002), guided by a state-centric institutionalist perspective (Berman 2013).

It will be argued that particular impacts of a “sui generis” form of policy-making (“new” governance) cannot be sufficiently grasped by the same analytical tools and conceptual strategies designed for studying the European Union in the settings of comparative politics or international relations. Studying changes in governance as an effect of European integration requires a more comprehensive view of interrelations between structures and modes of governance, and cannot rely on any more on a systematic separation of European and domestic layers of politics (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006, 38-39). This suggests that the so-called “governance effect” on policy processes might not be effectively traced on an episodic basis and only in terms of domestic policy change (Radaelli 2002, 124; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006, 39) attention must be directed therefore on broader implications on governance itself, both within and beyond the state.

The global argument presented in the thesis is that in order capture particular mechanisms of Europeanization associated with domains of “new” governance, the analysis should not solely focus on institutional processes that drive policy change, but should also aim to meaningfully
assess ideational elements. Research therefore must transcend agency- and state-centred accounts of policy change of new institutionalism and search for complementary interpretations informed by constructivism and critical social theory. The modest ambition of the thesis is to explore such strategies by introducing a policy instruments approach.

The adoption of a policy instruments perspective to study Europeanization in association with “new governance” is not a completely new idea in the scholarly field, although the issue is largely under researched. In an article published in 2006, Bruno et al. introduce the notion of instrumentation as a particular mechanism of Europeanization. The authors underline the role of instrumentation in the transformation of public policy processes via the dissemination of notions of “good policy”. This thesis recognizes the value of this scholarly encounter, but strives to extend its scope by systematically examining certain conceptual and methodological implications. The proposed approach attributes particular effects to instrumentation and considers them as part of a project of rationalization (Lascoumes 2004; Hasselbladh and Kallinikos 2000); exposing instruments as technologies of government, (Rose and Miller 2010; Walters 2002), which make international public spaces “governable” (Larner and Walters 2004).

The first chapter puts forward a constructive review of the core concept “Europeanization”, and proposes to further explore some issues related to concept ontology. More specifically, it strives to map out the core relationships between variables that play part in mechanisms of cognitive-normative change. The second chapter introduces the instruments approach and highlights its potential to reveal the interrelations of practices, ideas and politics. It proposes the consideration of “alternative” interpretative paths of instrumentation which are grounded in existing theoretical work. The third chapter discusses the importance of critique for the study of the “governance effect”. Finally, the thesis provides illustrations of situated accounts
of instrumentation through the example of quality assurance processes in European higher education, by recourse to interpretive analysis and in-depth expert interviews.

Although it appears challenging to combine or compare concepts and theories with different meta-theoretical backgrounds, there are a number of reasons which support such an attempt. First, the instrumental-critical approach outlined in here should be seen more a parallel than a rival approach to new institutionalist explanations (which are also very divergent), and therefore their quasi-comparative consideration does not violate meta-methodological universals. Second, there is a growing tendency among scholars to recognize the importance of question-driven research, which seeks to build bridges between rationalist and interpretative analyses of policy change (Yee 1996), as well as between constructivist and critical accounts of contemporary governance (Walters 2002, Dale 2004). Scholarly dialogue is already quite advanced in the literature on Europeanization (Jupille et al. 2003). The modest contribution of this thesis is to highlight further points of rapprochement.
One

1. Conceptual underpinnings of Europeanization mechanisms: an ontological perspective

Prior to the introduction of the instruments approach, the thesis must dismiss Radaelli’s claim according to which conceptualizations of the nature of the EU as a political system can add only limited analytical value to the analysis of policy processes (2000, 25). In order to advance towards a more meaningful theorization of Europeanization it appears necessary to acknowledge Goertz’s assertion, that “concepts are theories about ontology” (2006, 5). The thesis therefore proposes instead an ontological perspective which pinpoints the interrelations between different “secondary-level” (in this case: the political, the policy and the normative-cognitive) dimensions which constitute the background concept1 (Goertz 2006, 15). Thus it is argued that the researcher first needs to explore underlying approaches to the theorization of the European Union, before selecting relevant aspects which will become the cornerstones of the explicit systematized concept of Europeanization, according to the goals of the research (in this case, isolating specific mechanisms).

Following Radaelli’s (2002) steps, the chapter discusses core conceptual issues, and points out that the analytical separation between different dimensions of Europeanization predominantly resting on new institutionalist premises delimits the full conceptualization of mechanisms. It argues that in order to grasp particular mechanisms of Europeanization associated with domains of “new” governance in the socioeconomic fields; research must challenge conventional assumptions about the causal relationship between ideas and policy change and search for complementary interpretative explanations.

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1 A background concept is understood as a “matrix of potential meanings” which determines the construction of systematized concepts (Adcock and Collier 2001, 532).
1.1. The ontology of Europeanization: towards a de- and reconstruction of the concept

Europeanization is a widespread term scholars use to characterize processes and outcomes of EU-induced transformations which alter existing domestic conditions of policy-making; or to refer to the “emergence” of new, genuinely European or hybrid forms of governance, which is the interest of this thesis. As the “conceptual skeleton” above shows, this “umbrella notion” is characterized by flexibility on the one hand, and lack of precision on the other. This definitional duality constitutes the object of concern in Radaelli’s article (2002), in which he “unpacks” scholarly definitions of Europeanization in order to obtain a systematized concept more easily amenable to operationalization. For the sake of connotative precision, he discards formulations which define “Europeanization” too broadly, that is, which extend beyond the direct effects of “Europe” on domestic policies (leading to policy change). He proposes a taxonomic approach focused on processes first by carefully drawing the boundaries of the concept, through the differentiation between Europeanization and its potential effects (e.g., convergence); and then by identifying three distinct domains (or dimensions) of policy-making where processes of Europeanization operate: a, macro-domestic structures (political, social and legal institutions and actors), b, public policy (including policy instruments), c, cognitive and normative structures (featuring discourses, norms, values and policy paradigms) (Radaelli 2002, 112-115). In short, Radaelli recognizes the multidimensional nature of the concept, and for the purpose of the research he finds the analytical separation of the different dimensions necessary. While he notes that “[t]he interaction between policy dynamics and the macro-political structure is perhaps one of the most interesting areas of Europeanization” (2002, 127), his focus on institutional processes that drive policy change prevents the capture of these dynamics within the proposed analytical framework. As it is
explained thereafter, this is largely due to the fact that Radaelli’s systematized concept strives to expose causal relationships which are underpinned by new institutionalist theories².

In the light of Goertz’s theory on multidimensional concepts (2006), Radaelli’s definition appears somewhat problematic, or at least unclear regarding certain aspects. Despite efforts to construct a more explicit and sophisticated concept of Europeanization, the framework designed by Radaelli is anchored in the pragmatism of the researcher and deliberately escapes questions about ontology. On the grounds of parsimony, he rejects the incorporation of a governance approach within his definition, and restricts the analysis to interactions between domestic and the EU level, without precisely defining the range of actors who participate in policy-making. (2002, 107). He refrains from considering insights from research agendas which theorize the EU as a “sui generis” political system in his model because of the incommensurability of such theorizations (2000, 25), and turns instead to more general accounts of policy change grounded in comparative politics and theories of organizational choice.

At the same time, Radaelli himself characterises his systematized concept as one that is “centered around the EU” (2002, 109) which arguably makes inquiries about the political nature of the EU (including the consideration of insights of the governance agenda) legitimate. Furthermore, while mainstream theorists of Europeanization do not explicitly link their formulations to debates about European integration, their concepts “are often couched within longer-established meta-theoretical frames” (Featherstone 2003, 12). Thus it is not erroneous to hypothesise that their background concepts are contingent upon how they regard Europe as a political phenomenon. To illustrate the divergent conceptual strategies authors

² The institutionalist approach is a heterogeneous theory which is prominent across a great variety of disciplines. The thesis relies on works of political theorists (Hall 1993, Yee 1996) and organizational scholars (DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Hasselbladh & Kallinikos 2000), focusing primarily on policy change. The thesis embraces the common distinction between three types of new institutionalism: historical, rational choice and sociological (sometimes referred to as constructivist). It also recognizes institutionalism as a theory of European integration (Pollack, 2005).
adopt to define Europeanization, Appendix A provides a comparative review of rival definitions of Europeanization. To better understand the conceptual ontology\(^3\) behind each formulation, Figure 1 (Appendix B) depicts them together in a meta-theoretical matrix. It is noteworthy that governance themes are present in more refined institutionalist analyses of Europeanization-related policy change (see definition by Green Cowles et al. 2003, Appendix A), but attempts at defining Europeanization in the context of governance remain isolated, implicit and unsystematic (Appendix A includes an example by Dale /2009/).

1.2. Mechanisms of Europeanization and ideation: analytical and conceptual barriers to the capture of the “governance effect”

Radaelli’s focus on *mechanisms* rather than outcomes offers a fruitful perspective for addressing issues regarding the relationship between governance theories and Europeanization studies centred on institutional and policy change. The growing tendency in the literature to replace questions of direction and degree of Europeanization (inquiries in terms of outcomes, i.e. convergence/divergence/stagnation or absorption/resistance/transformation) with “How?” types of inquiry (focus on processes) supports the need to strive for a more refined analysis which combines inputs from different research agendas. Studying mechanisms of Europeanization opens the way for complementary perspectives on the same phenomena.

Although Radaelli considers the merits of Europeanization definitions proposed by other scholars reflecting a broad range of theoretical accounts of European politics and even incorporates elements of them into his own formulation (see Appendix A); most of the conceptual elements which are integrated in his classificatory framework of *mechanisms*

\(^3\) It must be reiterated that the chapter adopts Goertz’s usage of the term “ontology”, understood here as “fundamental constitutive elements of the phenomenon”, and applied to “designate the core characteristics of a phenomenon, and their interrelationships” (2006, 5). In this sense, ontology does not refer to the classical scholarly questions about the philosophy of the subject (Jupille 2005, 210), but denotes a more specific conceptual ontology: constitutive elements of Europeanization which include theories about policy change, institutions, but also broader theories about the nature of the European Union.
(Appendix C) are steeped in new institutionalist traditions. A relatively common assertion across the new institutionalist literature is that Europeanization processes are unclenched by some kind of *adaptational pressure*, originating mostly in a “misfit” between European policy structures and domestic institutions (Börzel and Risse 2003, 60-63). This causality implies that there is a “tipping point” over time when this incompatibility is not in the interest of actors any more. This typically occurs when “hard incentives”, such as political conditionality associated with EU membership demand a certain degree of harmonization or convergence, or economic reasons push states to trade their interests for efficiency (so-called negative integration) (Green Cowles et al. 2001, 16; Pollack 2005, 41).

However, there are also a number of cases when this sequential and materialistic logic fails to provide a clear-cut answer. In the absence of competitive logics or coercive pressures, non-binding forms of policy-making (i.e. “soft” regulation, coordination, cooperation) can still result in Europeanization by unclenching normative and cognitive change in actors (member states, decision-makers, epistemic communities, etc.). In some cases, Europeanization leads to the internalisation of certain “ways of doing things” (Radaelli 2002, 108), that is, it does not merely constrain preferences and impose models, but generates collective understandings about efficient and legitimate ways of policy-making. In “soft” policy areas where there is no explicit EU-prescribed policy model to follow, Radaelli identifies “horizontal mechanisms”.

The thesis focuses on a subtype of horizontal mechanisms which are at play in the fields of socioeconomic governance: “the diffusion of ideas and discourses about the notion of good policy” (2002, 120). These include “cognitive convergence”, the legitimation of new “understandings of governance” and a very interesting, but not explicated proposition which Radaelli labels “the governance effect” (2002, 120-125), that is, the creation and diffusion of

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4 “Cognitive” as a label is assigned to phenomena which involve reasoning and knowledge, while “normative” characterises those which are constituted or guided by norms or principled beliefs. The thesis borrows these “labels” from the literature to designate specific forms of ideation, defined by Yee as “mental events which entail thought” (1996, 69).
specific modes (e.g., multi-level or network) and norms of governance. These mechanisms need further exploration, because at the moment they lack analytical and conceptual precision. But before outlining an alternative approach for tracing the “governance effect”, it is necessary to discuss some of the limitations of the current framework for studying ideational (cognitive and normative) processes which underpin governance-related mechanisms.

New institutionalist studies of policy transfer and policy convergence offer agency-centred explanations of ideational change, which means that they analyse the effects of ideational variables (beliefs, world views, policy paradigms, etc.) insofar as they constrain or shape the behaviour or identity of actors. Europeanization theorists draw on and combine various institutionalist arguments when explaining domestic structural change, by identifying institutions and their actors as mediators in processes of policy change, placing them in the role of carriers and bearers of ideas. For instance, Green Cowles et al. integrate social learning theory, which attributes transformational power to ideas and institutions on actors’ preferences (2001, 12), in their historical approach to structural change. Similarly, Börzel and Risse combine rationalist and sociological (or constructivist) logics of policy change: consequentialism (institutions may limit or support actors in the pursuit of their interests) and appropriateness (institutions influence behaviour through the promotion of norms, ideas and collective understandings) (2003, 58-69).

In his enlightening article on ideational analysis, Yee (1996) argues that institutional approaches to ideation and policy change come short of providing a comprehensive account of the causal effects of ideas on policies. Building on his meta-methodological insights, it is possible to identify problematic aspects of Europeanization mechanisms cited above. First, new institutional premises which underpin analyses of Europeanization mechanisms are concerned with the “encasement” of ideas in institutions (Yee 1996, 88) and focus on the

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5 Structure is broadly understood here as the ensemble of Radaelli’s categories of “domestic structures”, “public policy” and “cognitive and normative structures”, all of which are subject to Europeanization.
political opportunity structures which enable the institutionalisation of ideas. Second, they specify the role of ideas in supporting or constraining actors in the pursuit of their interests (conceptualized as strategic tools, “weapons”, “road maps” and “focal points”) or they attribute a transformative power to ideational variables which make them capable of changing the interests and identity of the agency (Yee 1996, 89; Berman 2013, 228). In the latter case, ideas have their “own capacities” (Yee, 1996, 94), that is, they have their own “objective merits” (e.g., scientific authority) which make them persuasive or politically salient (Yee 1996, 86-88), but they are diffused and institutionalised only when their bearers hold authority or are politically empowered within an organization or community. For instance, Börzel and Risse discuss the role of “epistemic communities”, “change agents” or “norm entrepreneurs” who successfully advocate the emergence of new (European) norms, practices and structures of meaning in their domestic environment (2003, 66-69). This is what Yee calls the “displacement” of the causal effects which ideas exert on policies “onto the political effects of the experts” (1996, 86), which means that their effects are subordinated to and conflated with the power of their carriers.

In other words, ideation is analysed to the extent it intervenes both as a constitutive and contextual factor (Berman 2013, 231) in policy processes which then are linked to effects of Europeanization, but it is not clear by what means ideation itself plays part in the induction of such effects, if at all. This is largely due to the fact, as Yee contends; that these types of institutional analyses make many tacit assumptions about ideas that remain untested (1996, 86-93). While they place emphasis on institutional structures which allow ideas to enter policy-making processes and on the conditions under which they may be accessible to political actors, little is known about the ideas themselves in terms of their emergence, political articulation, cognitive salience and visibility (Yee 1996, Berman 2013, 228).
How do ideas acquire their persuasiveness, and what inherent ("objective merits") or constructed qualities make some of them more appealing than others at a given moment? These underlying dilemmas also remain unaddressed by Radaelli (2002). His approach to ideation is primarily influenced by Hall’s concept of policy paradigms (1993), upon which he identifies “framing mechanisms” which operate in the absence of “adaptational pressures”. Cognitive and normative frames are broadly understood as prisms through which actors perceive reality: they determine what ideas are conceived as comprehensible and plausible for policy-makers and which are to be rejected. According to Hall, this institutionalized framework of ideas specify patterns of problem-solving (1993, 279). Changes in the system of beliefs and world views are often conceptualized as exogenous and shock-like (a response to specific economic or social conditions or “grand events”, such as crises or war), and lead to the overturn of the reigning paradigm, due to “the growing incapacity of a given paradigm to […] offer satisfying public policy solutions” (Surel 2000, 505).

However, there are missing links between the more generic and systemic approaches to “cognitive and normative frames”, a distinct dimension of Europeanization and particular mechanisms which operate in the European governance context. Based on the refreshing “critical reappraisal” of neo-institutionalism by Hasselbladh and Kallinikos, it appears that there is very little discussion within the scholarly community on how paradigm changes might play out on the embeddedness of institutions in their “rationalized environment” (2000, 698). In other words, while changes in normative and cognitive frameworks affect actors’ approach to policy-making as problem solving, the reasoning on the basis of which they judge a belief or paradigm plausible or “untenable” is assumed as constant and universal across contexts (Bevir 2010, 432). As a consequence, it is argued that these theories of policy change do not provide adequate grounds for explaining how particular logics or domains of governance emerge as a result of Europeanization. Although new institutionalist accounts embrace the
understanding of institutions as social constructs (i.e. Green Cowles et al.), so far they have not sufficiently questioned institutions as embodiments of ideas, which would allow them to study the intersubjective reification (or “objectification”) of ideas giving shape to institutional organization and producing durable patterns of action, meaning and actorhood (Hasselbladh and Kallinikos 2000). The fact that concepts of Europeanization concentrate predominantly on the diffusion of stable (already rationalized) patterns of policy-making (Hasselbladh and Kallinikos 2000, 701) and mechanisms of institutional isomorphism (such as mimetism⁶, learning and cognitive convergence /Radaelli 2002/) leaves the relationship between ideation and the emergence of new forms of organization and policy-making underexplored. It is argued here that in order to advance our understanding about Europeanization mechanisms in the context of European socioeconomic governance, institutionalist assumptions about the “inherent qualities” of ideas should be examined and critically challenged. Instrumentation, focusing on the social construction of public policy spaces via techniques and instruments (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007), introduced in the next chapter, is a stepping stone towards uncovering some of these “hidden” mechanisms of Europeanization.

The added value of the approach is twofold: it enriches the explanatory power of institutionalist approaches both from a methodological and a theoretical perspective. First, it permits to overcome certain problems associated with causality which arise when the analysis is solely based on new institutionalist premises. One major issue is endogeneity. As King, Keohane and Verba note: “insofar as ideas serve as rationalizations of policies pursued on other grounds, the ideas can be mere consequences, rather than causes of policy” (1994, 191). This implies that as long as ideational variables are not sufficiently defined on their own terms, and their effects are not isolated from those of their carriers, inferring causal relationships between ideation and policy change can be rather problematic. Furthermore,

⁶ Radaelli refers to the classification of types of institutional isomorphism (coercive, mimetic and normative) elaborated by DiMaggio and Powell (1991).
causality alone does not allow the researcher to have a full grasp on ideational mechanisms underlying Europeanization. To advance the more general argument proposed by Yee (1996), a forward looking methodological strategy towards uncovering particular mechanisms of Europeanization, such as the “governance effect”, may very well consist of both causal and quasi-causal or indeterminate accounts of the same phenomena, which require a turn towards interpretive analysis. The “policy instruments” perspective presented here relates both to constructivist and critical accounts of European governance. Both of them adopt interpretive strategies, in the sense that they analyse situated forms of reasoning which constitute practices and “technologies”, as well as the discursive formation of public spaces; which permits to overcome the aforementioned analytical impasse and offer a more nuanced analysis.

The theoretical implication of the approach must be interpreted on a much broader account, which is detailed throughout the next chapters of the thesis. The call for a more systemic consideration of the governance approach implies that the effects of European socioeconomic governance on policies cannot be accommodated within institutional accounts of Europeanization by simply increasing the number of actors. That is, despite contemporary attempts from scholars of Europeanization to cover an increasing number of actors beyond the state in their studies, their propositions still bear the reminiscence of state-centrism (Berman 2013, 221). This implicit constraint hinders the meaningful analysis of policy dynamics from a governance perspective which understands the EU as a self-organizing political entity. This approach also moves beyond the narrow understanding Europeanization in terms of compliance, so that it is no longer limited to the analysis of adaptation of domestic policy-making structures within member states to supranational “pressures”, but seeks to render the

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7 It is important to note that interpretivism here strictly refers to methodology, as both “critical” and “constructivist” theories show a great variation with regard to ontology and epistemology. (cf. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). Also, both “constructivist” and “critical” are used exclusively in reference to specific interpretations of instrumentation discussed in the thesis.
“governance effect” amenable to empirical analysis, by shedding light on the interaction of the three dimensions of Europeanization.
2. Europeanization from a policy instruments perspective: constructivist and critical foundations for analysing the “governance effect”

This chapter aims to outline the foundations of a research agenda which seeks to contribute to the refinement of the concept of Europeanization from a governance perspective, with the capacity to bridge the gap between definitional elements of Europeanization and their application in research. As the first chapter suggests, the purely institutionalist focus which orients the study of Europeanization processes fails to capture the interrelation of different dimensions of change in a systematic way, which results in partial or fragmented accounts of mechanisms in cases where new, decentralized techniques of steering are gaining ground. Conceptualising the “governance effect” as part of Europeanization requires the simultaneous mobilisation and reconciliation of traditional agency-centred theories of ideational and cognitive change and inputs from constructivist and critical approaches to the rationalization processes which prescribe norms of formal organizing and legitimate ways of governing certain spheres of public policy. The policy instruments perspective or notion of instrumentation can be considered as one way of overcoming limitations of mainstream approaches to Europeanization. The introduction of the policy instruments approach in the analysis of the “governance effect” also serves as a conceptual “passerelle” which opens the way for ideational accounts of policy change to embrace critical social theory.

2.1. Introducing the policy instruments approach: the political sociology of instrumentation

The study of public policy instruments has proven useful for a range of different research designs in the past, including inquiries about the political sociology of government or about

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8 The political sociology of instrumentation takes a constructivist approach inasmuch as it studies the social construction of public policies.
the transformations of the modern state in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century (Kassim and Le Galès 2010, 2-5). More recently, Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) have developed a “political sociology approach” to instrumentation which has surpassed functionalist accounts\textsuperscript{9} in its scope of research and has enabled scholars to study the emergence of “new” modes of governance beyond the state. The definition of instrumentation elaborated by the authors puts emphasis on the mutual embeddedness of cognitive structures, power relations and institutional processes underpinning public policy processes. This understanding of the social architecture of policy change is amenable to the type of analysis proposed by Hasselbladh and Kallinikos (2000) which aims to identify the practical and discursive means by which institutional ideals acquire meaningful forms and stable patterns. Instrumentation as a research agenda is centred on two important conceptual tenets: the construction of \textit{public policy as a sociopolitical space} via techniques and instruments and the theorization of the relationship between the governing and the governed (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2010, 4).

The main implication of these core assumptions is that the choice of public policy instruments is a political act. Lascoumes and Le Galès (2010) contend that instrumentation produces its own effects and encapsulates knowledge about the ways of exercising social control; therefore it structures public policy according to a certain implicit political theorization about government and governance. Certain elements of Radaelli’s proposed definition of Europeanization (see Appendix A), such as “ways of doing things” and “logics of public policy” (2002, 108), are better explicated if instrumentation is introduced as a mechanism of Europeanization, because this approach consists of the interpretation of the role of instruments in processes of rationalization discussed earlier. It can be argued that the policy

\textsuperscript{9} According to the critique presented by Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) of the so-called functionalist literature on policy instruments, such kind of an analysis focuses primarily on local contexts which allow policy-makers to choose of the most appropriate or most effective instruments fit for generating certain policy outcomes, but it never questions the underlying rationality of the choice. This criticism rhymes with assertions presented earlier concerning the “tacit assumptions” about the analytical isolation of cognitive reasoning from situated and contextual embodiments of agency (see 8).
instruments perspective carries the potential to transcend the rigidity of mainstream conceptual frameworks of ideation as well as to pinpoint the relational and situated nature of different dimensions of Europeanization. According to Lascoumes and Le Galès, the research should involve the “deconstruction” of public policy processes (2007, 4), meaning that it should identify the nature of the problems to be addressed, the choice of instruments, their modes and form of operationalization as well as the political effects they produce. This strategy enables to reveal particular, local forms of reasoning (Bevir 2010, 432) which reflect not only the type of legitimacy that policy-makers seek to establish via their choice (e.g., scientific, technical or democratic rationality) but also the political effects they wish to attain (e.g., systemic resistance to external pressure, particular visibility or normative positioning of an issue) (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007, 10-14).

Policy instruments can thus be defined as political techniques which are used to introduce ideas into “material and social realities” (Kassim and Le Galès 2010, 5), as part of a project of rationalization which bring institutions into existence as relatively stable and meaningful entities. Consequently, it appears that instrumentation provides a more sophisticated account ideational variables missing from more agency-centred accounts of institutionalization. An instrument is conceptualized both as a form of power (which has its own effects) and as a type of institution (which is constructed rather than being accessible as “ready-made”) (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007; Kassim and Le Galès, 2010). These mechanisms of policy change reveal the complexity of the social environment which constrains actors’ choices and domains of action: cognitive-normative processes (stemming from the identity and belief-shaping power of ideas) and power relations (resulting in the need for reason-giving and legitimation). This shows that in reality the different dimensions of Europeanization are inseparable. Therefore, in order to understand the processes of rationalization underpinning European governance, the
researcher should aim at capturing this complexity and study the intersubjective context in which policy-making takes place.

Although the political sociology approach to public policy instruments (an essentially constructivist mode of inquiry) contributes both to the refinement of mechanisms of ideation and to the development of a more specific understanding of governance-related effects, there are still many questions that it leaves unanswered. Among these we find some of the same problems that have already been analysed above as part of the overview of existing theorizations of cognitive and ideational processes linked to Europeanization. Above all, two persistent challenges should be reiterated. First, the endogeneity problem cannot be completely eliminated even after the careful isolation of the contextual motives behind the choice of instruments. Because the normative and cognitive effects of instrumentation are considered as consequences of the strategic choice of instruments, which serves to mask different political intentions (Kassim and Le Galès 2010), ideas continue to function as “rationalizations of policies pursued on other grounds” (King et al., 1994, 191). Another shortcoming of the approach is the excessive concern with techniques and processes of objectification (Hasselbladh and Kallinikos 2000), that is, the formal organizing of knowledge about different ways of social control (organized relationships between government and society), and less reflection on the “subjectifying” effects of instruments, more specifically those which lead to the transgression of established boundaries and dichotomies of actorhood in the context of contemporary governance. The next section addresses these issues by offering a glimpse into possibilities for the application of critical social theory in the domain of research on Europeanization.

2.2. Critical approaches to instrumentation: governmentality and inscription

A further step from the constructivist agenda is to study instrumentation within the conceptual framework of governmentality. This perspective shifts the focus from sociological to
sociotechnical means of producing European ideals of governance. The critical approach represents a research agenda distinct from any of the previously presented theorizations in several respects, but only those relevant for the research topic will be discussed here. The link between the instruments approach and governmentality is quite self-explanatory: contemporary governmentality theory focuses on micropractices, techniques, devices; in other words it investigates the material inscription of the power-knowledge relationship into governmental practices via instrumentation and technicisation (Lascoumes 2004).

Governmentality is both a type of political analysis\(^{10}\) which permits to study “networked governance beyond the state” (Merlingen 2011, 149) and simultaneously constitutes an object of research as it is conceptualized as a historically specific form of political power (Walters and Haahr 2005, 292-293) operating through instrumentation. In recent years, the relevance of the governmentality perspective in the field of EU studies has significantly increased, when a group of scholars started to interrogate “Europe at the level of its changing practices” (Walters 2004, 156). This section underlines the pertinence of governmentality as a conceptual lens which brings valuable insights to the understanding of Europeanization as meta-governance.

First, it is important to highlight some of the key assumptions and epistemological foundations of critical social theory inspired by the political philosophy of Michel Foucault, which enable to position governmentality as a supplementary approach to the “cognitive” and “ideational” dimension of policy change and to trace alternative mechanisms of Europeanization on this basis. The thesis aims to reveal how the critical approach can contribute the debate and dialogue between different theorists of ideation (e.g., historical institutionalists, constructivists, etc.) and at the same time provide a particular perspective on

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\(^{10}\) The goal of governmentality as a research agenda is “to make explicit the forms of political reason and ethical assumptions that are embedded in our activities of government” (Walters and Haahr 2005, 290)
the “effects” of European governance. The following contentions are interpreted as alternative responses to the fallacies that inhibit the explanatory power of more “conventional” social constructivist accounts of public policy instrumentation.

The Foucauldian philosophy in which studies of modern governmentality are anchored, posits a quite singular ontology of the political and social reality in many ways. First of all, although both governmentality and social constructivist approaches adopt an interpretive strategy to challenge the stability of meaning in political and social contexts, constructivists cannot completely detach themselves from the rationalist project of causal inference (Walters and Haahr 2005, 292), as they attempt to trace causal mechanisms which connect ideational causes to political effects. Whereas governmentality is vested in historicism (a mode of reasoning), that is, it emphasizes the contingency, contestability and particularity of governmental practices and concepts which are used to capture the different aspects of the social life of political actors, such as ideas, intersubjective beliefs or institutions (Bevir 2010, 426-430).

By exposing the non-causal or quasi-causal properties of “variables”, the critical approach yields an alternative explanation sought after by the advocates of question-driven research and of meta-methodological reconciliatory attempts (i.e. pointing towards an “indeterminate causality” outlined by Yee (1996), as discussed in the previous chapter). Historicism implies that the relationship between practices and their legitimation (mechanisms of “reason-giving” serving to justify a given practice) is contingent upon their historical development, in contrast with the notion of legitimation of a deliberate, political or normative nature which is foregrounded by the political sociology approach. This kind of argumentation is capable of accounting for real-world inconsistencies\(^\text{11}\) between the formal organization of institutions

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\(^{11}\) As Lemke notes, “Foucault does not pose the question of the relation between practices and rationalities” (2002, 54-55) because there is simply no utility to study their correspondence, as in reality they do not cause but constitute each other.
and the ideas which are presented as their justification (Schaff 2004). “Rationalization”, the process of establishing reified patterns of “meaning and action” (Hasselbladh and Kallinikos 2000, 700) (broadly understood as institutions) is therefore not an appeal to some kind of “superior” reason, but is a product of historical practices (Lemke 2002, 55). This is very important in order to be able to contend later that instrumentation produces its own effects, separately from ideation and that legitimating “norms” are not exclusively instilled in actors by cognitive processes.

Another constitutive feature of governmentality is critique. Critique is understood as a mode of social inquiry which aims to destabilise and “denaturalize” the established, taken-for-granted ways we think about social and political phenomena (Bevir 2010, 429). It is primarily directed at uncovering the “normalizing” activities of political power. In the Foucauldian sense, critique is more than a simple research tool, it is the “art of voluntary insubordination” (Foucault et al. 1997, 32) of individuals who have been made subjects of their own contemporary reality and who adhere to a certain “truth” about the social world (Schaff 2004, 64). As a consequence, this has led to the realization for scholars of critical theory that “the concepts that organized our thinking about power could not comprehend the exercise of power in modern societies” (Rose and Miller 2010, 272). In other words, the underlying meaning of concepts used for theorizing contemporary reality is not fixed, but it is constantly being recreated and revised by various discourses about “truth” (Bevir 2010, 352). Critical theory therefore strives to reveal how meaning is produced in various contexts and historical settings, and avoids questions about the social construction of meaning (a genuinely constructivist exercise) (Walters 2002).

A critical exercise has several benefits for the matter at hand. First, instead of operating with conventional notions (such as institutions, ideas, and intersubjective beliefs) governmentality theorists analyse “governmental conduct” in terms of practices and political rationalities.
Practices are ways in which political power is exercised on its subjects and which acquire observable and material forms. They are underpinned by political rationalities. Political rationality is not a “resultant” of ideation (some kind of ideal representation of the reality), but of discursive formation, and is conceived as a certain regularity of practices (Rose and Miller 2010, 276). It enables to problematize a given domain of the social sphere that is to be governed in a way that the exercise of power in that field is conceived as “rational”. (Lemke 2002, 55; Schaff 2004, 59-60). In summary, political rationality addresses the intellect in a historically contingent way. It produces knowledge, which is never neutral or independent from politics (Lemke 2002), but always dependent on what is made “knowable” by a given constellation of practices.

What is important to underline here is that concepts which are used at any given moment to describe the political reality are understood and are given meaning in a certain historical context (including our times). Governmentality as a critical study of contemporary government challenges the duality which characterizes our thinking as subjects of political power, via the usage of dichotomies such as ideas and institutions, or practices and beliefs (Walters 2002, 91). A way of thinking which classifies the objects of inquiry into distinct categories of “real” and “ideal” will always encounter obstacles when attempting to grasp the its very conditions of embeddedness. As a reminder, it must be recalled how “mainstream” theories of policy change are struggling with the incapacity to pin down certain ideational variables and to spell out their “own capacities” in the aim of isolating their specific effects. Critical theory offers a remedy to these problems by showing how the development of norms, values and practices as bundled together in a “regime of truth”, a general yet historically specific form of political thought and expressed through “knowledge” (Dean 1994, 154)

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12 Rose and Miller contend that political rationalities have a moral form, which articulates the ideals and principles about the appropriate means of governing; an epistemological form which projects a certain vision of the nature of the objects to be governed; and an idiomatic form, which makes political rationality “thinkable through language” (2010, 276-277).
which produces discourses about what is considered “rational” or “normal” in a given social context. In this framework, the “capacities” of “ideas”\(^\text{13}\) therefore derive from the indeterminate relation connecting them with practices that allows them to be articulated as “underlying rationalities”. This does not suppose that ideas or intersubjective beliefs do not exert any influence on actors, but rather that the material forms in which they are inscribed (and which appear therefore also more banal or “naturalized”) affect them in a more direct and pervasive way, constantly “reminding and prompting” (Walters 2002, 92) human agency.

Consequently, governmentality reverses the direction of inquiry: instead of asking how actors’ interests and beliefs shape their actions, and consequently their own reality, it is rather about mapping out ways how their social world produces subjects (Bevir 1999, 357). Governmentality studies are directed at processes of subjectification, which is another reason why they bring an added value to studies of rationalization (cf. Hasselbladh and Kallinikos 2000). In this view, the subject represents a “pivotal point where practices and norms are connected” (Schaff 2004, 54), in other words, subjects are not simply “guided” in their action by theorizing relationships between the governing and governed, but in their very existence as subjects who adhere to certain norms and adopt a specific rationality upon which they act, they are, in Schaff’s interpretation of Foucault, “made possible” through social practices (2004, 54)\(^\text{14}\).

All of the above add up to the formulation of a particular, critical view on instrumentation. Contrary to the propositions of social constructivist, instruments are not mere carriers of ideas in the sense that they contain “implicit theorizations” about subjects and objects, but they have their own capacities to exert effects on actors (Walters 2002, 97), which are not exclusively legitimising (reason-giving) but also constitutive power effects. The way

\(^{13}\) Ideas in the critical sense are rationalized beliefs which agents hold against a particular historical background (Bevir 2010, 432)

\(^{14}\) This assertion derives from the notion of productive power which does not only restrict but constitutes agents. (cf. Merlingen 2011)
instruments materially shape subjects and thought is theorized as a process of *inscription*, and therefore they are often referred to as “technologies of inscription”\(^{15}\). The concept of inscription has been elaborated on Foucauldian premises by Walters (2002) and Rose and Miller (2010). They define inscription as “the material practices of making distant events and processes visible, mobile and calculable” (Walters 2002, 84) and as a way of „acting upon the real” by making domains of action “susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention” (Rose and Miller 2010, 283).

The thesis uses the notion to outline and illustrate a possible framework for conceptualizing effects linked to the emergence of an ideal of European governance. It must be noted however that as mechanisms of Europeanization, instrumentation and inscription are methodologically not designed to trace causal pathways or to provide a comprehensive account of policy change. Instead, they offer a “micro-sociological” perspective (Walters 2002) resulting in a complementary, “situated” analysis which can reveal particular dimensions of the “governance effect”.

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\(^{15}\) Technologies of inscription are types of *governmental technologies*: „the complex of mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions. (Rose and Miller 2010, 273)"
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3. Instrumentation in the field of “new governance”: the discursive formation and sociotechnical inscription of the “Europe of knowledge”

This final chapter reveals how the notion of instrumentation can work as a mechanism of Europeanization by revisiting the issues of concept ontology presented in the first chapter. The first part briefly discusses the role of critique in accounts of “new” governance and sets the ground for studying governmental processes in the European Union across and beyond states. The second part provides an illustration for research designs featuring the policy instruments approach in a specific sub-field of European governance (quality assurance in higher education) to conclude the argumentation about concepts and methods. Following Radaelli’s typology (see Appendix C), the focus of analysis from the proposed perspectives will be on specific “horizontal mechanisms” of Europeanization in the context of socioeconomic governance. One particular statement which needs further interpretation is that “the EU can change what legitimate governance is all about” (Radaelli 2002, 124). The “governance effect” refers to the legitimation notions of “good policy” as well as to the “prescription” of certain modes of governing. However, the interrelation between formal arrangements and normative aspects remain unspecified. The challenge here is to disentangle these processes and mechanisms in the light of different approaches to instrumentation.

3.1. The relevance of the instruments approach for the critical analysis of European governance

In the light of the previous chapters, introducing instrumentation as a specific path of Europeanization implies recognizing governance as a distinct research agenda (cf. Hix 1998) which generates knowledge about the European Union as a “sui generis” polity, and simultaneously “denaturalizing” the definition of governance and the concepts which underpin its theorization. A major obstacle to integrating the governance perspective in
Europeanization studies is that the governance approach as a research agenda is quite fragmented and is subject to scholarly debate. Governance can be considered above all as an ‘empty signifier’ which is used to describe governing without government (Rhodes 1996); but it has also increasingly been associated with a distinct ideal of governing unfolding in the European Union. A number of scholars (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006; Shore 2012) have drawn the attention on certain “normative” aspects of governance, which consists of linking the functionality of “steering” (efficient problem-solving in the social and economic fields) to legitimate (politically acceptable and justifiable) ways of governing. In this sense the understanding of governance in the European Union has evolved around concerns over the efficiency of problem-solving and principles of “good governance”, both of which function as narratives to “normalize” and “rationalize” governance as a form of social control. The two ways (analytical and normative\(^\text{16}\)) of mapping out political logics behind the “governance turn” (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006) have become increasingly intertwined with the emergence of “new” modes of governance\(^\text{17}\) in the economic and social fields. The “problem-solving” approach to governance stems from the underlying presumption that individual states do not have the capacity and the knowledge to solve complex socioeconomic problems (Pollack 2005, 37), hence the increased involvement of non-state actors in the policy-making process. The discourse on “good governance” is not an exclusive European construct, nor simply a political tool, but is also a general tendency in the literature to “import” the

\(^{16}\)The distinction between two labels (analytical and normative) is nominalist in the sense that the “problem” of problem-solving as the ethos of modern government (the pursuit of the public good by all efficient means) is a conceptual construct of governance theorists, therefore it serves above all an analytical end to synthetize all governance-related activities of modern states in the concept of “steering” (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006, 28-29); while the “normative” label refers to discursive activities which associated with the active diffusion of legitimating norms (e.g., transparency, cooperation, expertise, negotiated policy-making…).

\(^{17}\)The term “new modes of governance” has evolved around the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC encompasses a range of technologies which rely on the systematic comparison of performance (benchmarking), policy learning mechanisms (sharing of good practice) and guides member state action through the establishment of indicators, standards and benchmarks (Dale 2004). This nonbinding or “soft” form of policy coordination (Pollack, 2005:389) represents a decentralized and post-regulatory approach to governance (de la Porte et al. 2001, 302), which means that it is characterised by a great degree of flexibility and adaptability to specific contexts.
neoliberal idea of the “new public management” to aliment discussions about the changing role of the state in European governance (Shore 2011, 294). All of the above ways of “talking about” European governance have amounted to problematizing techniques of new governance (and more specifically the Open Method of Coordination or OMC) as effective and legitimate ways to achieve common goals of a political vision, known as the European knowledge-based economy (put forward in the competitiveness agendas of Lisbon /2000/ and Europe 2020 /2010/).

In other words, mainstream scholarly inquiry is concerned with questions about “cross-legitimation”, i.e. the mutually constructive relationship between “modes” (formal arrangements) and “principles” (normative aspects) of governance, which is established via the development of specific instruments (such as the OMC). Radaelli discusses Europeanization effects related to “new” governance either as results of top-down pressure (processes of institutional isomorphism) or bottom-up (cognitive-normative) convergence (2000, 2002) both conceived as ways of securing legitimacy, but he only considers the political context of governance relevant for the analysis of Europeanization mechanisms inasmuch as traditional ways of policy diffusion by coercion or mimetism are limited by the flexible institutional set-up (i.e. new modes of governance allowing for varying degrees and “geometries” of integration in a given field\(^\text{18}\)). In these cases, he puts forward the concept of “technocratic legitimacy”, which is strategically used by European institutions to catalyse processes of institutional isomorphism and cognitive convergence (Radaelli 2000).

“Technocratic legitimacy” refers to a type of rationality which requires a high degree of professionalism in the process of policy-making. What is remarkably interesting in studies of European governance centred on “cross-legitimation” is the centrality of “expertise” (both in

\(^{18}\) In his article on policy transfer and institutional isomorphism in the European Union, Radaelli (2000) studies policy change in the field of EU monetary policy, and the development of “European” models. The findings of this article are also relevant for the OMC in the socioeconomic fields, because the EMU is considered to be a precursor of current coordination models and benchmarking exercises.
the problem-solving and legitimation processes). However, expert “knowledge” remains isolated from yet conflated with endogenous elements in the design, most importantly with the power emanating from the authority of their bearers (see 8).

Critical approaches to governance aim to displace questions of political legitimation and strive to illuminate instead how instruments (such as the OMC) underpinning distinctively “European” mode of governance are embedded in specific forms of reasoning which enable them to make certain aspects and fields (“spaces”) of Europe visible and governable. Rose and Miller (2010) contend that expertise has acquired a particular political salience with the rise of modern welfarism, which signals the emergence of a new mode of government (“social” government) which seeks to control various aspects of the life of individuals (e.g. health, lifestyle, wealth) by using scientific knowledge as an intermediary for achieving socio-economic goals. The “de-politicization” of certain fields by re-drawing boundaries between “political” and “non-political” (e.g., private, scientific, technical, administrative) spheres has led to the “technicisation of politics” (Rose and Miller 2010, 294-295). Similar processes can be retraced in the realm of European governance: providing technocratic legitimacy for changing public policy practices in member states can be interpreted as an attempt to redefine “large areas of policy as essentially ‘technical’ or ‘organizational’ matters to be decided on the basis of scientific and technical expertise rather than public debate” (Shore 2011, 289).

The difference between “technocratic legitimacy” and the “technicisation of politics” is manifest because the former is perceived as a strategic act (substituting democratic consensus), while the other term alludes to more profound transformations that have already entered the “cognitive surface” of agents (i.e. distinctions between political and non-political).

The fact that “governance” is problematized as primarily a problem-solving activity...
preconfigures the researcher to think in terms of the relations between political entities (member states, governments) and non-state actors (organizations, businesses, civil society) who engage in managerial activities and encounter problems of democratic legitimacy.

A further aspect of the “governance effect” that the critical approach strives to uncover is *subjectification*, which requires the study of different practices that shape the “conduct” of the governed thereby “aligning” their activities with governmental aspirations (Rose and Miller 2010, 281). This is closely related to the role of organized knowledge in modern governmental thinking, as it is upon policy-relevant “bodies of knowledge” that a particular political rationality acquires meaning and force (Merlingen 2011, 155). Shore argues that European governance relies on “diffuse techniques of disciplinary power” (2011, 299), operating with several centres of authority, instead of one central bureaucracy. This requires a specific, “network” mode of knowledge about “Europe”, constantly forming alliances between authorities and expert communities, which create the “reality” of a European policy field out of several national contexts (Walters 2002). The emergence of “particular understandings” and “modes of governance” in the European Union are therefore closely linked to certain effects of subjectification which operates primarily through sociotechnical means and prompts agents of the network to engage in self-regulation by means of *expertise* (Rose and Miller 2010, 286). This process is elaborated and illustrated in the following section.

### 3.2. Construction and inscription of the “Europe of knowledge” through instruments: the example of quality assurance in higher education

This section provides an illustration for instrumentation as a mechanism of Europeanization, by briefly sketching the outlines for a constructivist and a critical research agenda in a chosen area: the emerging regime of quality assurance in European higher education governance. It is important to note that the chapter does not provide a full and comprehensive analysis of the
issue; the aim is rather to exemplify the type of inquiry corresponding to each approach, thereby stressing their complementary value and their potential to contribute to the theorization of Europeanization. A “side effect” of this exercise is that it echoes the scholarly debate about the different cognitive and normative effects attributed to the instruments of “new” governance.

The establishment of higher education quality assurance processes in the European Union and across the European Higher Education Area\(^{21}\) (EHEA) has not directly occurred within the framework of the OMC, but is rather a product of a hybrid project, the result of a special synergy between the Bologna Process and the EU cooperation framework for education and training. The promotion of cooperation between European higher education institutions in quality assurance is one of the goals (action lines) of the Bologna process (cf. Bologna Declaration 1999), but it is also highly intertwined with the overarching theme of the “Europe of knowledge” within the European Union\(^{22}\). The quality of education can be therefore considered as a cross-cutting narrative and a strategic objective which has been made visible and is managed through a multitude of networked practices. Common guidelines, standards and procedures have been developed following the same methods and techniques (e.g., benchmarking, sharing of best practices) which are mainstreamed via the OMC. In this sense, the regime of quality assurance can be considered as a “mise en abyme” of system-wide socioeconomic coordination processes, therefore it is perfect subject for micro-analysis.

\(^{21}\) The European Higher Education Area was officially established in 2010 as a result of the intergovernmental Bologna process on the reform of higher education. The EHEA stretches beyond the European Union and is currently formed by 47 member countries. (EC 2013a)

\(^{22}\) Debate and cooperation on quality assurance on the European level is primarily sustained through intergovernmental (Bologna ministerial meetings and OMC thematic working groups), inter-organizational (policy forums) and professional (e.g., national quality assurance agencies) network dialogue and coordination. The European Commission gives a strong impetus to the process via funding (ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is financed by the EC); by monitoring progress (publication of reports) and by providing reference tools and databases.
3.2.1. Problematisations and representations of quality in a knowledge-based economy

First of all, in the light of instrumentation as a political sociology approach, quality assurance can be interpreted in terms of problematisation and representation (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007). The study consists of examining how the chosen instrument translates certain ideals of quality into national and institutional contexts; and then spelling out the type of legitimisation it provides for making quality a “problem” to be addressed on the European level. A comprehensive analysis involves the interpretation of instruments as cognitive and normative tools which were designed to create an intended political effect. As such scholarly endeavour would require extended research capacities, the present “meta-analysis” touches only central themes which orient the inquiry.

At the European level, the notion of quality in higher education is an empty signifier. At least, the lack of consensus on an explicit definition in policy documents (even for procedural purposes, for instance in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area /ESG/) is apparent. The idea of quality as a general term for competence, excellence and consistency is shared on many levels, but quality as a European-level policy target remains vague and under defined. A series of expert interviews conducted with high-level representatives of various institutions involved in coordination and policy-making in the field of quality assurance has confirmed this statement. However, it is possible to discern different ways in which “quality” has been problematized and its “assurance” has been secured at the European level.

An interviewed expert at the European Commission (2013) stressed the centrality of the role that the quality of higher education plays in the context of the competitiveness strategy of the

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23 The interviewees represent a variety of stakeholders in higher education: a, European Commission, b, the European University Association (EUA) (representing over 800 higher education institutions) c, ENQA, (representing national quality assurance agencies) d, an external advisor of the E4 group (ENQA, EUA, European Student Union and the European Association for Institutions in Higher Education). Certain interviews were confidential; in these cases the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.
European Union; and linked it to the development of human capital and to the provision of skilled workforce. The need to coordinate national and institutional efforts at the European level in order to meet certain standards of quality is articulated in the context of global pressures on institutions which urge them to “produce graduates who are open-minded, flexible, and ready for the labour market” (interview with expert at EC, 2013). This rhymes with the objectives set out in the Higher Education Modernisation Agenda, which sees European universities as drivers of individual and societal advancement, contributing directly to economic growth and prosperity (EC 2011). The problem of quality is intrinsically linked to the competitiveness of individuals, institutions, and the economy. The discourse on the European knowledge-based economy is a legitimising narrative for EU-level coordination of higher education governance and prompts nation states to reaffirm their control over the quality of their higher education systems. The instruments devised for the support of national reforms promote the idea of “smart” regulation, which implies that instead of direct intervention; the state facilitates the improvement of existing institutional capacities, thereby “enabling universities to modernise themselves” (EC 2006). This corresponds to a distinctive trend what many scholars have labelled as the rise of the “evaluative state” (Maassen 1997; Magalhães et al. 2013). Quality assurance in this respect is a form of meta-governance (Magalhães et al. 2013, 99): an attempt to instil and diffuse certain principles of governance in highly differentiated environments.

The representation of the issue is exemplified by the operative definition of quality as “fitness for purpose” which is widely shared among stakeholders (Tia Loukkola 2013; interview with expert at E4 group, 2013). The term originates in the vocabulary of new public management (NPM), and has given rise to a certain “meta-idea” of quality (Stensaker 2007, 99), stressing the universality of quality management as a problem-solving approach which enhances the overall performance of a particular organization (Benchmarking Guide 2008, 23-24).
Universities are encouraged to adapt their “modernisation” strategies to the logic and values inherent to the type of instruments mainstreamed by the entrepreneurial model of quality assurance (Maassen 1997, 116) (e.g., techniques which allow quantifying, measuring and ranking performance). “Performativity” (Pasias and Roussakis 2012, 132), the focus on outputs, such as competences and learning outcomes has become a key factor in the assessment of quality across Europe. This trend can potentially lead to the transformation of the “traditional” mission of the university, because the “utilitarian argument” (Pasias and Roussakis 2012) may diminish the importance of moral and cultural imperatives of education. As the director of the ENQA Secretariat in Brussels noted (2013), learning outcomes do not tell a lot about the formative value of the learning process or environment, or about the level of performance, as they only signal the ability of the student to perform certain tasks.

The technocratic rationality behind quality assurance instruments can “neutralize” certain political effects that reforms of university governance have brought about. Quality assurance procedures developed at the European level contribute to the redefinition of the relations between institutions, governments and societies. The entrepreneurial university has seen the increase of its responsibility and managerial autonomy, as it operates in a competitive environment and needs to respond to the demands of its “consumers” (the students) (Burquel and van Vught 2010). Quality control in higher education is no longer the exclusive competence of national authorities, but is subject to international peer-review and public scrutiny. This particular “governance effect” can generate power struggles in national arenas, as institutions are increasingly empowered at the European level, whereas they are not necessarily involved in domestic decision-making (Tia Loukkola, 2013; interview with expert at E4 group, 2013).

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24 Learning outcomes are descriptors of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning. Learning outcomes have been developed within the European Qualifications Framework which aims at facilitating the mutual recognition of national qualifications (EC 2013b).
3.2.2. Quality assurance as “continuous improvement”: forming subjects through inscription

Turning now to the critical approach, instrumentation is can be interpreted and analysed as inscription. This means that instruments are seen as sociotechnical devices which act upon the conduct of agents rather than on their intersubjective beliefs. In simple terms, instruments (as technologies of government) above all operate through prescriptive and codifying effects, by the inculcation of “what is to be done” and “what is to be known” (Foucault 1991, 75). Quality assurance procedures are about making the performance of higher education institutions measurable, calculable and comparable. This is achieved through different types of external quality assurance mechanisms, each corresponding to a specific governmental technology: such as evaluation (auditing), comparison (benchmarking) and standard-setting (accreditation) (EC Progress Report 2009). The present section mainly focuses on the technology of benchmarking, which can potentially encompass a wide range of tools and devices (from the comparison of statistical data to complex learning processes), but which consists of two main elements: the systematic collection of data and self-evaluation (Benchmarking Guide 2008, 23-24).

The inscription of European higher education as a field of governance through technologies of quality assurance, such as benchmarking, can be analysed in terms of knowledge production, spatialisation and subjectification. First, of all, quality assurance procedures require specific forms of organized knowledge which make the EHEA visible and “operable”. The European Commission coordinates data collection and produces “knowable” objects which make the “quality” of higher education amenable to cross-institutional and cross-border comparison. Examples include multidimensional ranking tools25 which present statistical data on the quality of European higher education in an accessible and interactive form. They establish

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25 Examples: U-Map (www.u-map.eu); U-Multirank (www.umultirank.org); and Qrossroads (www.qrossroads.eu). These initiatives are funded by the European Commission.
categories\textsuperscript{26} which allow to accumulate distant and singular aspects of university activity in the form of “durable, mobile traces” (Walters 2002, 91), i.e. indicators ranging from graduate employment to “overall learning experience” (U-Multirank 2013). This specific “network” mode of knowledge is not centralized or bureaucratized, but rather works by mobilisation (Walters 2002, 302), bringing Europe into palpable existence as a hybrid polity of expertise and knowledge (Shore 2011, 302).

The EHEA is further constituted and made observable through language and space. As one of the experts noted, the conscious development of a common vocabulary was essential for making practice sharing and learning possible among stakeholders (Tia Loukkola, 2013), because it made them realise that they have problems in common. Furthermore, the procedural norms prescribed in policy documents (such as the ESG) which define way national quality assurance agencies function vis-à-vis the public and governments have made them “see themselves as part of a European area” (interview with expert at E4 Group, 2013). Other than creating a sense of “community” and “belonging” through language and formal spatial organization, the European dimension in higher education has transformed and penetrated traditionally “closed” spaces of public policy (Walters 2002, 102), which used to exclude the wider public on grounds of professionalism. The principles which govern the coordinated interaction of institutions, such as openness, transparency of information and accountability, have led to the creation of “an open education space” (Magalhães et al. 2013, 100), which mobilises and “makes” a “European public” (Walters 2002, 103-104). Walters cautions however, that this inscription of the public in governmental calculations of the EU should be seen as part of a political rationality of a polity attempting to construct itself (2002, 103-105) through specific knowledge alliances (between

\textsuperscript{26}These categories are: learning and teaching, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement (U-Multirank 2013).
governments, university and the industry); not by political means, but by relocating the problem of quality in the domain of expertise and problem-solving.

Finally, the critical approach sheds light on how quality assurance instruments “work” through the inscription of collective and individual conduct. The growth of benchmarking in higher education marks the search for continuous quality improvement. As an instrument designed for measuring and comparing performance, it has a more substantive goal other than the alignment of policies and the achievement of targets, which often goes unnoticed in studies of governance with a focus on problem-solving. The underlying rationality of the benchmarking exercise seeks to inscribe in agents a certain form of self-government (Rose and Miller 2010, 285; Dale 2004, 188). This is evidenced by a growing emphasis on good practice over good performance, which announces a “superior” quality model of continuous self-improvement. (Burquel and Van Vught 2010, 249). The long-term goal of establishing internal and external quality assurance mechanism is to engender a “culture of quality”, in which case closer “control mechanisms” (exercised by quality assurance agencies and governments) are eventually deemed unnecessary (interview with Director of ENQA Secretariat, 2013). The idea of “formative evaluation” (interview with expert at E4 Group) also supposes that the role of the government should not be restricted to sanctioning by accreditation, but to establish self-regulatory techniques in alliance with expert networks (Rose and Miller 2010).

Analysing these effects of subjectification entails further reflections on the nature of modern power. Rose and Miller have developed a persuasive argument which attaches a particular political rationality to contemporary forms of governance, that is, it seeks to “govern through freedom” (Shore 2011, 301) in a way that it builds on the capacity of the agency to regulate their own activities. It can be argued that technologies of quality

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27 Benchmarking, as defined by the *University Benchmarking Handbook*, is “a process whereby an organization gathers data on its own performance and compares that against the best performance” (2010, 42 and 36).
assurance work the same way on higher education institutions just as the OMC aims to
guide member states through the “coordination of coordination” (Dale 2004, 191). It is
even more interesting to study how the concept of the “learning organization” (Burquel
and Van Vught 2011, 252) meets the idea of the “learning society”. In other words, the
pervasive nature of inscription touches not only collective bodies, but also individuals,
who are defined by the discourse on the Europe of knowledge as “lifelong learners”. In
his article on the discursive formation of the European education space, Lawn reveals
how the European Union situates the problem of competitiveness within the individual,
by linking economic and societal advancement to the individual commitment to self-

improvement, via lifelong learning strategies (2003, 331). This “individualisation of

responsibility” is considered to be the hallmark of advanced liberal democracies,
expecting both individual and collective bodies to continuously analyse and improve
themselves in all aspects (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, 54) in a way that they “align their own

personal” (or organizational) “choices with the ends of government” (Rose and Miller

2010, 286). Therefore it is possible to see the “governmentalisation” of the education

sphere as a specific mechanism of Europeanization, by which the European Union relies
on modern governmental technologies to coordinate the conduct of member states,
organizations and individuals. Inscription technologies represent an alternative to
“cognitive convergence” and social learning, in the sense that the instillation of self-
government as a prescriptive norm in subjects is a largely tacit and contingent process. In
the light of this critical reflection, conceptualizations of new “logics” of governance
featured in the Europeanization literature gain a whole new perspective.

28 This formulation rhymes with Foucault’s definition of government, the “conduct of conduct” (Lemke 2002,
50)
Conclusion: Instrumentation as a mechanism of Europeanization

This thesis has shown that the policy instruments approach has the potential to meaningfully contribute to the organization of a focused and well-grounded research agenda on Europeanization. Instrumentation offers a strategy to uncover the “hidden” pathways through which effects of Europeanization are channelled. This perspective is especially fruitful for grasping how Europeanization leads to the redefinition of governance in specific contexts. The goal was to spell out specific normative and cognitive mechanisms which amount to the “governance effect”, i.e. the emergence and diffusion of new modes, “logics” and understandings of governance. Instrumentation can be regarded as a particular mechanism of Europeanization; generating ideational and material inputs in public policy processes which establish the concept of European governance as legitimate and rational. This implies that not only certain “modes” of governance are preferred over others, but that (previously distinctively domestic) spheres of public policy acquire a European dimension.

The thesis concludes that there is substantial analytical value in the adoption of an “ontological” perspective to theorize policy change in the context of Europeanization. The systematic consideration of approaches to governance permits to overcome certain limitations of current frameworks inspired by new institutionalism, which rely on the methodological separation of domestic and supranational layers of policies; as well as the isolation of political structures, public policy and normative-cognitive “frames”, as distinct dimensions of Europeanization. The thesis has pointed out that the conceptualization of instruments of “new” governance as social and technical devices brings a complementary perspective to the analysis in three respects. First, it enables the study of Europeanization mechanisms which operate via the close interrelation of politics, policies and ideas; by highlighting the role of the choice of instruments and of the instruments themselves in the rationalization of concepts of efficient policy-making and legitimate governance. Second, it offers a more nuanced and
situated analysis of cognitive and normative processes which lead to shared understandings of “good” governance, by showing how instrumentation plays a part in giving ideas material forms and political salience. Finally, the interpretative approach represents an improvement on general causal accounts of cognitive and normative change, because it reveals how the institutionalisation of “ways of doing things” (Radaelli 2002, 108) is contingent upon particular, indeterminate forms of reasoning. In the case of higher education governance, for instance, the “rationality” of the practice of quality control is evaluated on the basis of multiple global, European and local discourses which problematise the issue in relation with the “performativity” of the institutions as well as of the knowledge economy.

Furthermore, the instruments approach opens up alternative ways to theorize the “governance effect” beyond the EU-member states divide. Above all, it isolates specific effects of instruments as independent institutions which contribute to the social and sociotechnical construction of new European public spaces. “New governance” primarily relies on techniques which create dynamic alliances between policy-makers, experts, stakeholders and the public. In the absence of legally binding rules, the “governance effect” can be interpreted as a process of legitimating and normalising certain ways of governing the welfare of European societies through networks, relying on expertise.

The critical perspective goes even further and sees instruments as political technologies through which the “technicisation of politics” is achieved in the European knowledge economy, where the responsibility to govern is relocated in the sphere of the “non-political” (Rose and Miller 2010, Bevir and Rhodes 2010). Instrumentation in this sense is a more tacit way of shaping the conduct of subjects (subjectification), producing effects which are distinctly separate from ideation. The illustration of inscription has shown that “norms” are not exclusively instilled in actors by cognitive processes. The “governance effect” from this perspective is a direct manifestation of inscribing principles of self-regulation (“continuous
improvement”), which has further ethical and moral implications for the study and practice of European public policy, if it remains unexposed and unproblematised.

Scholars who claim that governmentality is a valid framework for analysing European governance see the EU as a playing field of different governmental projects, which manifests via practices “borrowed” from modern governments (Walters 2004). Upon the consideration of relevant works, it is suggested that understanding Europeanization of the socioeconomic spheres requires the study of the “making” of Europe through governmental technologies (meta-governance).

Although the relatively narrow scope of this explorative exercise has prevented a more comprehensive analysis and a meta-methodological synthesis, it has shown the value of complementarity between general causal theories and situated accounts, which permits research to overcome limitations such as state-centrism in studies of Europeanization or methodological constraints imposed on the conceptualization of ideation. Further research will be needed to accommodate these approaches for the purpose of rigorous analysis.
Appendix A

Definitions of “Europeanization” by selected authors

Green Cowles, Caporaso, and Risse (2001, 3)

“We define Europeanization as the emergence and the development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal and social institutions associated with political problem solving that formalizes interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules. Europeanization involves the evolution of new layers of politics that interact with older ones.”

Börzel and Risse (2003, 17)

“‘Europeanization’ entails absorption, accommodation, and transformation of [the domestic institutional] setting in response to the demands of EU membership.”

Radaelli (2002, 108)

“Processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Level of Conceptualization</th>
<th>Level and Focus of Analysis</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Meta-Theoretical Foundations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Cowles, Caporaso, and Risse (2001)</td>
<td>background (explicit) and systematized</td>
<td>political institutionalization</td>
<td>formal and informal norms, rules, procedures and practices at the European level</td>
<td>emergence of distinct structures of governance (at the European level)</td>
<td>‘goodness of fit’ + mediating factors</td>
<td>interaction of different levels (‘layers of politics’); top-down approach</td>
<td>historical institutionalism combined with a “thick” (sociological) understanding of institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Börzel and Risse (2003)</td>
<td>systematized</td>
<td>changes in domestic institutional settings (policies, politics, policies)</td>
<td>transformation, adaptation, absorption (in response to Europeanization pressures)</td>
<td>domestic change</td>
<td>differential empowerment of actors by redistribution; socialization and social learning</td>
<td>top-down approach</td>
<td>rational choice and sociological institutionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radaelli (2002)</td>
<td>systematized</td>
<td>policy change in institutional context, public policy processes</td>
<td>construction, diffusion, institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, policy paradigms, and logic of politics and policies</td>
<td>policy change</td>
<td>coercion, mimetism, negative integration, “framing” mechanisms</td>
<td>bottom-up design: impacts of EU at the level of domestic policy choices</td>
<td>institutionalist perspectives in comparative politics and organisational studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale (2009)</td>
<td>background (implicit), policy area specific (higher education)</td>
<td>policy paradigms, programme ontologies, education systems</td>
<td>construction of Europe as a hegemonic project, “thickening discourses”</td>
<td>creation of a European space/area of education</td>
<td>paradigm shifts, generative context (normative framework)</td>
<td>interpretive</td>
<td>critical approach, which calls into question the problem-solving ‘theory’ of governance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Appendix C

Taxonomy of mechanisms of Europeanization by Claudio M. Radaelli

Source: Radaelli 2002, 122
References


