

The Diffusion of Regional Integration: The influence of the European Union on Latin American regionalism



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I. INTRODUCTION

Situated between the national and global levels, regional organizations have gained increasing relevance in the international system. This has in part been due to their multi-level dimension, which ensures that regions are neither “wholly self-contained entities, nor purely extensions of global dynamics” (Acharya, 2016, p. 122). The geopolitical reconfiguration of the international system at the start of the 1990s led to an increase of interdependency between states, as they sought to address global challenges that transcended the capabilities of single nations. Although regional processes can be found throughout the world, the deepening and widening of the European Union (EU) has been the most visible example of the regional phenomena. Naturally, due to its history and market size, Europe has served as an institutional and procedural template of integration from which other regional organizations have modeled their own. (Tussie and Rigiroszi, 2012).

In response, the EU has actively sought to reinforce existing processes of political, economic and social integration beyond its borders, to other regional groups around the world (Tussie and Rigiroszi, 2012). In particular, the EU has pursued Latin America to establish institutionalized region-to-region partnerships, through which they have actively promoted the integration of their sub-regional counterparts (Dominguez, 2015). The receptivity of Latin American regional projects to the EUs support has resulted in the emulation of European institutional design and processes of integration (Tussie and Rigiroszi, 2012). Nevertheless, in spite of the European efforts “to construct other regions in its own image” (Bianculli, 2016, p. 607), regional organizations in Latin America and elsewhere have been reluctant to relinquish national power onto the regional bodies they establish. In this sense, although they emulate European structures, none have been able to replicate the transfer of political authority that endows Europe with its distinctive supra-nationality. The following paper seeks to address these results and answer the question of why, given the EU support towards regional integration, supra-nationality is not present in the Latin American sub-regions. The persistence of inter-governmental decision-making despite the imitation of European institutions begs for an explanation and is one of this paper's empirical and theoretical objectives. In this sense, the analysis is guided by the following research question:

Why do regional organizations display similarities in institutional design yet do not replicate the supra-national features of the European institutions they emulate?

To answer the research question, this paper proceeds in four steps. The first part reviews the existing literature on Latin America's regionalisms and the EU's historical actions in the construction of regions outside of the continent. Building on this scholarship, the paper develops and presents a theoretical framework of the stages and mechanisms through which the EU spreads its material and normative ideas on integration, as well as how these ideas are translated and internalized by the sub-regions. This paper will use two theoretical frameworks that are grounded on assumptions of norm diffusion and norm localization, to identify the variables that encouraged on one hand, and hindered on the other, the EU model of regional authority. In the subsequent section, the paper draws on case study reports and process tracing to present the impact of the EU on the institutional design of the sub-regions as well as to explain the domestic conditions that limit the scope of supranational authority. The final section summarizes the main findings and draws cross-case conclusions of why the sub-regions exhibit similar institutional designs to the EU without the delegation of sovereignty.

Through this examination, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature of comparative regionalism by placing value on the interdependence of regional organizations, which have been largely ignored in the field (Söderbaum & Stalgren, 2010). Within this relational framework, we shift focus from the EU onto Latin American regional dynamics, to promote an agency-based research agenda that centers upon the sub-regions, their institutions, history and interests, as our objects of analysis. Explicitly avoiding Eurocentrism, this paper does not ascribe value to the performance of the sub-regions in terms of whether and to what extent they conform to the EU model (Acharya, 2016). Instead, through the individual study of Central and South American sub-regions, this paper aims to also gain a broader understanding of what the EU can do realistically as a global actor. The overarching focus of the present analysis will rest upon inter-regional relations, and their unique role in the international landscape would shed light on our understandings of the emerging multi-layered and complex processes of the global system.

Research Methods and Case Studies

As cases to answer these questions we chose, based on a most similar systems design, two regional sub-groupings located in Latin America. In addition to the well-known case of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), the research will benefit from also observing the lesser-studied Central American Integration System (SICA) in the isthmus. Both organizations have been selected because they converge markedly in major context variables such as political systems, historical backgrounds and membership range. Additionally, both emerged in the same period of the end of the Cold War and have formal and institutionalized inter-regional relations with the EU, which leads to many constants. Likewise, both regional organizations present a similar scope (the number of integrated policy areas) as well as level (the extent of commitment to mutual decision-making). The key purpose of this design therefore is to isolate the effect of the intervening variables that could explain the variation in the levels of commitment to supranational decision-making.

Year Established	Institution (Abbreviation)	Member Countries	Inter-Regional Relations with the EU
1991	Common Market of the South (Mercosur)	Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela (2012)	1995
1991	Central American System of Integration (SICA)	Belize (2000), Costa Rica, Dominican Republic (2013), El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama	1991

Additionally, process tracing will be used to further disentangle the evidence about cause and effect of norm diffusion and analyze their trajectory of change and causation (Fioramonti and Mattheis, 2015). Moreover, this method allows for the study of regional integration as a sequence of events, which is well suited to unearth the intervening causal mechanisms and endogenous effects of the EU diffusion. In sum, the design of this research allows us to explore the way inter-regional relations with the EU influence the process of regional integration in a diversity of regional projects with different institutions, material endowments, and integration objectives. By assessing the similarities and differences in the impact of the European model in these diverse contexts, we can identify the variation of regional political authority across regions.

Regionalism and Regional Integration – Towards a Conceptualization

Central to this paper is an understanding of the guiding concepts pertaining to regions, regionalism, and integration. In terms of levels of analysis, regions are situated between the national and the global (Börzel & Risse, 2016). Moreover, ‘regions’ are not objective entities, but rather reflect upon social constructions that make reference to territorial location and geographical or normative contiguity (Börzel & Risse, 2016). A generally accepted definition of regionalism is greatly contested however, and its terminology shifts to reflect the fluid and multi-layered dimensions of regions. Taking into account that the present paper seeks to examine the processes of interaction between two institutionalized regions, we adopt Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse’s (2016) concept of regionalism, understood as a formal, primarily state-led initiative of region building among at least three states.

Building upon these terms, there is little consensus on how to conceptualize the different forms of regional integration that exist in the world. This emerges, in part from the dual use of the term as both a process and a state (Dosenrode, 2015). At the end of the spectrum, regional integration is therefore understood as a sub-category of regionalism that results in the transfer of loyalties to a new center of political actors and "involves the setting up of supranational institutions to which political authority is delegated to make a collective binding decision" (Börzel, 2013, p. 508). Naturally, within this definition, the region that has achieved the deepest integration is the EU. Its *sui generis* nature is due to its international identity that stems from its complex institutional capacity and decision-making procedures and norms (Smith,

2003). The unique historical circumstances of the EU pushed for the delegation of competences to supranational institutions, chiefly represented by the European Commission (EC), European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the European Parliament (EP). Thus, EU institutions make supranational binding decisions in their legislative and executive procedures, reflected by the pooling and delegation of sovereign decision-making in specified policy areas (Smith, 2003).

Contextualizing Latin American Regionalism: From Independence to Inter-Regional Relations

Although the EU has inspired institutional and rhetorical elements of the regional schemes in Latin America, Europe is not at the origin of the sub-regional organizations under study. Regionalism has had roots and branches in the history of Latin American countries for centuries. The allusion to an imagined unified Latin America has been a leitmotif embedded in the independence of the continent in the 19th century (Dábene, 2009). Notwithstanding the rich tapestry of regional initiatives in the past, they have resulted in a single project; but rather, have led to the continuous creation and regeneration of regional schemes that build upon the lessons of earlier attempts (Bianculli, 2015).

The 1990s were characterized by an intense region-building decade that was based primarily on the tenets of inter-regional trade and the opening of markets (Rigirozzi and Grugel, 2015). Domestically, the member states of both SICA and Mercosur were emerging from a profound process of democratic restoration. Globally, the states faced ambiguity in the post-Cold War context coupled with a sudden intensity of international economic competition. Therefore, regional initiatives, emerged as a way to avoid marginalization by increasing political and economic advantage vis-a-vis a much more competitive and uncertain international system (Rivera, 2014). The emulation of regional institutional structures (institutional isomorphism), to EU institutions was facilitated by the fact that there were only a few regional models to follow (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983). In this sense, the regional schemes that emerged during this time in Latin America faced two examples of regional institutional design, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), championed by the United States, and the EU model (Fawcett, 2015). Based on the successes of the European Monetary Union, Latin America naturally perceived the EU as an image of an effective

integration, in comparison to NAFTA, which represented American pro-market interference (Vasconcelos, 2007). The context in this sense was conducive to make Mercosur and SICA member states emulate the structure of the most advanced organization in their field (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983). In sum, the EU has served as a blueprint for the revived construction of Latin American regionalisms (Bianculli, 2016).

The Role of External Influences on Regional Integration

Considering that the scholarship on inter-regionalism is embryonic, in answering the research question, this paper draws from several strands of literature on regionalism, European foreign policy and the historical relations between the EU and Latin America. In this sense, the literature reveals that the EU has been present at critical junctures of institutional evolution of both sub-regions. The European foreign identity has been expressed primarily through the institutions of the EC, the EP and the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Domínguez, 2015). In addition to promoting its own model of integration, the EU supports regional integration mostly for three other interrelated objectives: 1) for strategic considerations, 2) to pursue economic interests, 3) and for bureaucratic facility (Selleslaghs, 2014). The Association Agreements (AA) have represented the benchmark of the EU institutionalized relation with other regions and serve the purpose of mobilizing their structural and ideational power, facilitating persuasion, socialization, and emulation to shape the internal norms that govern the sub-regions (Fawcett, 2016). One particular organ, the EP, was one of the first institutions to establish contacts with Latin American regional organs, and has been an active ‘exporter’ of the tenets of political regional integration since the extension of co-decision powers established in the Maastricht Treaty and onward (Dri, 2015). For this reason, the EP is distinguished from other regional parliamentary bodies in that it is the first significant supranational parliament with concrete decision-making powers in the form of sovereign pooling (Doctor, 2015). In this sense, the EP has pioneered region-to-region dialogue and has supported the EC's activities in bolstering integration and parliamentary institutions in other regional organs. Their strategy has centered upon framing the idea of parliamentary democracy as an effective measure for solving regional problems. The EP, therefore, is a central component of the EU's internal and external ambitions and highlights the regions' robust institutional capacity.

Power relationships provide a baseline frame of analysis to explore the way norms, values and ideas spread and are adopted or rejected. In its interactions with other actors, the EU mobilizes its material power through the mechanisms of conditionality and competition. The links between the EU and the Latin American sub-regions are characterized by high levels of European investment and asymmetric trade, which have allowed for the EU to frame the agenda of the relations (García, 2015). As a means to get other actors to accept and adopt its ideas, the EU has heavily relied on conditionality through capacity building in the form of technical and financial assistance. The logic follows that conditionality manipulates the cost-benefit calculations of the targeted regions through the use of positive incentives. Additionally, capacity building provides target regions with the additional resources that facilitate the adoption and implementation of these strategic policy changes. Competition, in turn, emphasizes that the EU derives its bargaining power through the attraction of the size of its market. In sum, Central America and the Southern Cone regions are more likely to be compelled to emulate the structure and norms promoted by the most advanced organization in their field, in an effort to attain legitimacy and survive. (Rüland, 2014). The material conditions of the relationship provide a partial reference to explore the research question; yet do not exhaust the reasons for why the EU model of integration has been emulated to a degree.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diffusion theory approaches regionalism through a relational analysis and gives value to the process by which ideas, norms, values and institutions are spread across time and space (Strang and Meyer, 1993). In other words, it offers the necessary perspective to examine how regional “interests and identities are shaped in the process of interaction and inter-subjective understanding” (Söderbaum, 2016, p.29). Etel Solingen (2012) presents four stages of international diffusion, which are useful to conceptualize the way in which norms are transferred and involve: 1) an initial model, 2) a structure through which the message is diffused, 3) norm recipients reaction to the stimulus, 4) outcomes. Such an understanding opens the door for explaining how the EU’s model of regional integration -both as a normative and causal idea- spreads outside of Europe.

In accounting for the construction and dissemination of a distinct European normative influence, scholars have often referred to the concept of ‘normative power Europe’ (NPE), first proposed by Ian Manners (2002). A common theme running through regionalism literature has been the description of the EU as a normative construct that in turn “predisposes it to act in a normative way in the world” through the diffusion of its norms, practices, and ideas through immaterial mechanisms (Manners, 2002, p. 252). The EU’s normative power is grounded on its “ability to shape conceptions of normal” in this case, what is an appropriate model and path of regional integration (Manners, 2002, p. 29). In turn, these normative assumptions also constitute causal beliefs about the success of strong regional institutions and sovereign transfer as the most efficient regional integration (Grugel, 2007). In this sense, the EU frames the issues of integration and articulates its power by prescribing what integration should look like if it is to be considered effective and legitimate (Börzel, van Hullen, Lohaus, 2013). The EU’s strong conviction about the relevance of its own integrationist model, in this sense, has served to construct a distinct foreign policy in which it reproduces itself through the projection of its own integration path (Manners, 2002). On a normative level, the EU diffuses its ideas through socialization and emulation that follow the discourse of appropriateness that aims to shape common understanding of actors’ interests and identity (Börzel & Risse, 2009). Figure 1 outlines the mechanisms of diffusion utilized by the EU, which can be used simultaneously in a given empirical event:

Table I - Types of diffusion

<i>Diffusion Mechanisms</i>	<i>Type of EU diffusion</i>	<i>Channels of diffusion</i>
<i>Conditionality</i>	<i>Material, active</i>	<i>Association agreements, technical and financial assistance</i>
<i>Competition</i>	<i>Material, passive</i>	<i>Large and attractive market</i>
<i>Socialization</i>	<i>Ideational, active</i>	<i>Political dialogue, cooperation, Inter-parliamentary delegations</i>

<i>Emulation</i>	<i>Ideational, passive</i>	<i>'Successful'</i>	<i>integration</i>
		<i>discourse/narrative</i>	

Note: Adapted from Tobias Lenz (2012)

Scholars of European integration are increasingly interested in studying the normative and ideational power of the EU, but few have yet explored the actual reach of the EU norms on regional organizations elsewhere. In this sense, the focus on the EU largely ignores the fact that ideas, values, and norms are never spread into a vacuum. To date, scholars of diffusion have not given sufficient attention to how the 'other' region utilizes the EU as a normative template (Warleigh-Lack & Van Langehove, 2010). This raises the question of what domestic conditions -both material and ideational- of regions and sub-regions, affect the way in which EU integrationist norms are emulated and adopted? (Lenz, 2012). At the most basic level, EU scholars tend to look towards the differences in structural conditions and material endowments as the reason why regional organizations do not follow the same path (Malamud, 2013). Although relevant, an exclusive material focus does not wholly capture the EU's normative reach or the normative orthodoxy that limits the replication of regional governance (Lenz, 2012).

The rare wholesale adoption of the EU model is best explained through Amitav Acharya's (2004) theory of norm localization, which aims to explain the process by which "norm-takers build congruence between transnational norms and local beliefs and processes" (p. 239). This understanding emphasizes the fact that the norm-recipients are far from passive and instead suggests that they are both active and strategic in their adoption of external norms from other actors. Instead, what is reflected is a selective adaptation and transformation of European institutional designs, decision-making, and norms in order to make them fit the domestic realities. This results from when EU norms and institutional solutions are perceived as good and desirable but not wholly appropriate to the existing realities. Norm localization in this sense emerges as a redefinition of external norms to suit local practices, objectives and ideas (Acharya, 2011). On the norm recipient side, the adoption and adaptation of ideas, norms and institutional designs into regional structures is expected, and emphasizes an active process of "translation, interpretation, incorporation of new norms and rules into existing institutions and also resistance to particular rules and regulations" (Solingen, 2012, p. 634). Consequently,

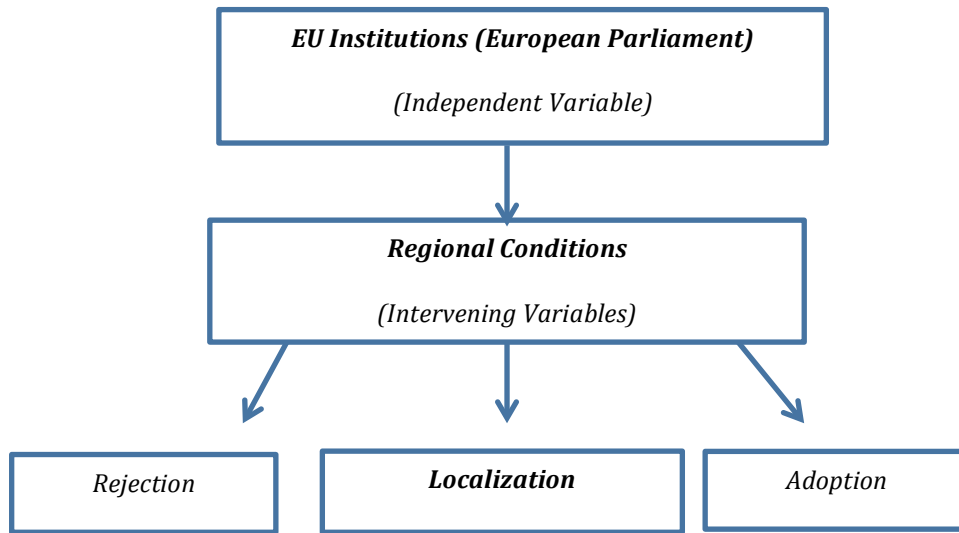
although there are crosscutting clusters of regional designs, the variation in contexts and national circumstances ensure that there is differentiation and hybrid normative outcomes (Acharya, 2016).

Taking into account that localization is a pragmatic response for new norms, its adoption depends on other factors beyond its perceived impact. These considerations include the “legitimacy and authority of key norm-takers, the strength of prior local norms, the credibility and prestige of local agents [and] indigenous cultural traits and traditions” (Acharya, 2004, p. 248). According to Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), norms as standards of appropriateness, are more likely to be internalized for reasons of legitimation, if prominent actors, such as the EU, hold the norms. Moreover, if new norms are perceived to fit into existing normative frameworks, they will be more successful. The domestic norms and institutions reflect upon what is considered appropriate and legitimate, so the more resilient these established frameworks of norms are, the less it will result in wholesale normative transformation. Additionally, norm-takers become more ‘receptive’ to a foreign norm, in situations when there is an identified problem, including periods of major security or economic crisis, systemic change (Cold War), or if there are domestic political changes in the norm-recipient. For this reason, regional organizations that are in their infant stages, and face more uncertainty or goal ambiguity, are expected to be more permeable to foreign stimuli (Malamud and Schmitter, 2011).

This paper is therefore guided by the analytical perspective of norm diffusion, for its emphasis on the way in which norms and ideas spread between regional organizations, as well as the channels of influence that facilitate this process. In order to test our theoretical claims, the paper focuses on one single case of clear institutional isomorphism in Latin American sub-regions, namely the *regional parliamentary bodies*. Firstly, by centering on one particular institutional source, we attempt to avoid a general assessment of the processes of diffusion and institutional dynamics. Secondly, considering that European Parliament (EP) is a supranational parliamentary assembly that distinguishes itself by its representative, deliberative, accountability and legislative powers, we reduce the alternative sources of diffusion. Furthermore, the EP has been an active promoter of the European model and regional integration, evident through the constellation of links with Latin American parliaments. All

these considerations therefore provide fertile ground for testing the theoretical claims of diffusion in regards to models and understandings of regional integration (Fioramonti and Mattheis, 2015). In turn, the similarity in content between the EP and the sub-regional parliaments will be used to gauge the reach of diffusion. Localization will be evidenced through the level of adherence to regional parliaments, as it is an effective barometer for the process of deeper integration, as experienced in the EU (Rivera, 2014). The results will be cross analyzed in order to isolate the intervening variables that constrain the diffusion of regional governance (De Lombaerde, 2006).

Figure 1: Norm Localization



Note: 1 Adapted from Amitav Acharya (2009)

A few assumptions can be derived from the aforementioned theoretical framework. Firstly, changes in the internal or external contexts of the sub-regions will lead to a greater ‘receptivity’ to the EU model; secondly, greater compatibility of the norms exported with the integration objectives and the normative underpinnings of the sub-regions will coincide with periods of transformation; and lastly, considering diffusion is an active process, a selective adoption of the EU model of authority transfer is more likely than wholesale implementation. The variations in the regional outcomes will highlight the domestic circumstances that explain why despite the EUs regional promotion, supra-national decision-making has not materialized in Mercosur or SICA.

III. CASE STUDIES

Common Market of the South (Mercosur)

The Southern Common Market (Mercosur) was founded through the Treaty of Asunción on March 21st, 1991, by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay (Mercosur, 1991). The Mercosur agreement came into existence at a point in time when the member states were experiencing democratic restoration (Rivera, 2014). The main concern in Mercosur was to keep their countries economically competitive in a context of intense commercial rivalry internationally (Rivera, 2014). In this sense, the regional group was established in a context where the member states faced profound political and economic ambiguities (Rüland and Bechle, 2014). Neoliberal political leaders in the member countries noticed the reconfiguration of the global economy that centered on regional economic blocs: namely the EU and NAFTA. This period coincided with the completion of the Internal Market in Europe, which played a crucial role in leading Mercosur to look towards the EU as an obvious reference point. At its core, Mercosur was primarily economic in nature, as it sought to increase intra-regional trade and establish a common market modeled after the EU. For this reason, the founding Treaty abstained from the subject of political institutions and instead centered exclusively on economic and commercial subjects (Treaty of Asunción, 1991; Vasconcelos, 2007).

The creation of Mercosur produced high expectations in the EU, as they saw it as a replication of the EU model of integration. At a first glance, Mercosur's institutional organization can be attributed to EU norms diffusion (Doctor, 2015). Mercosur's key decision-making organs of the Council and the Common Market Group resemble that of the European Council and the EC, respectively (Rüland and Bechle, 2014). Spurred through competition and emulation, Mercosur replicated certain aspects of the EU's institutional model under conditions created by the EU's mere existence (Lenz, 2012). For this reason, many European policy-makers saw the Southern Cone as a child of the European process and structures, which had to follow a similar path of integration (Matiaske and Brunkhorst, 2007). The EU's interest is also explained through the economic relevance of Mercosur in comparison to other regions. Both regions signed the Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement in 1995, as an effort to deepen their cooperation. In the negotiations of the AA, the EU actively sought to shape the understanding of integration through the use of persuasive power (García, 2015). This belief is

mostly evident in the narrative of the EU that argues, “regional integration in Mercosur could benefit from an increased understanding of the EU regional integration process” (European Commission, 2007, p. 23). The Agreement therefore stipulated EU financial support and technical knowledge for the construction of a common legal framework that would make regional integration possible in the Southern Cone (Börzel & Risse, 2009). This was carried out through the 2007-2013 Regional Programme, which designated €50 million for projects directed at strengthening the regional institutions, namely to enhance their democratic governance (European Commission, 2007).

In the negotiations of the AA, diverse EU agents actively mentored Mercosur on integration. In this process, the EP has been especially active in attempting to encourage its own parliamentary model (Dri, 2015). Their strategies and underlying beliefs are evident in the European Commission’s (2007) reports, which state, “increased awareness amongst future opinion makers and shapers through EU assistance could potentially create aspirations to emulate and imitate the EU successes” (p. 23). Through dialogue and persuasive power, they sought to influence the understanding of integration and the necessity of empowering regional political forums. The institutionalized framework has acted as a diffusion agent through socialization and persuasion of EU norms and institutional models and serves as an interesting case for both the theoretical arguments and the practical implications of the EU’s diffusion to the Southern Cone (Doctor 2015).

The influence of the EU on transformational changes in Mercosur is manifest in the representative bodies of the sub-region. The initial Joint Parliamentary Commission (CPC) was the organ that initially united the members’ parliamentary delegations. This latter was transformed into the Parliament of Mercosur (Parlasur) established in 2007 as a substitute for the JPC, amidst periods of uncertainty and internal and external demands for deeper integration. The structure of Parlasur in this sense was designed to represent the citizens of Mercosur member states, and sought to respond to give impetus to the integration process through a balanced institutional framework and greater social participation (Lucci, 2013). In the case of Parlasur, the existence of a regional assembly based on proportionality and political groups symbolized a ground-breaking maturity in South America, where inter-governmentalism has tended to prevail. It presented an inherent incongruity between

Mercosur's foundational objectives to establish no more than a common market, which was reflected in the absence of a parliamentary dimension in the regional integration process. These attitudinal changes developed parallel to evolution of the integration project, with close assistance of the EU.

The transformation of the parliamentary body in this sense not only reflects the institutional emulation of the EP but also to a degree of internalization of the values and norms that are embedded in the EU model (Rüland and Bechle, 2014). Historically, the EU has aimed to shape visions inside Mercosur of what regionalism should be and of where it fits in the world. In response, the EU has displayed an internal bias towards supranational EU model as a way to overcome the regional stalemates. In their relations with Mercosur, they have consistently identified the lack or weakness of common bodies as a serious barrier for the effective functioning of the regional integration scheme (European Commission, 2002, p. 19). More specifically, the parliamentarization process that recently emerged in Mercosur was the result of ideational diffusion between Members of Parliament from the two regions (Stavridis & Irrera, 2015). According to Sean Burges (2016), *Parlasur* was a process primarily led by lawmakers of the member states in close alliance with international actors, namely the EU. The institutional shift was framed through the rhetoric of the European parliament, which promoted a more democratic system of regional governance (Grugel, 2007). As such, it reflects specifically European perspectives on region-building and governance (Grugel, 2007). The JPC's turn into a parliament reflected upon a period of ambiguity that coincided with the EP's support. The EU's funding was directed towards enhancing the institutional capacity of Mercosur by strengthening the legislative powers of its Parliament and other regional organizations.

Nevertheless, *Parlasur* differs in practice from its European counterpart in that its institutionalization and authority is low, and is, therefore, more similar to a deliberative forum rather than a decision-making institution (Acharya, 2016). This result is indicative of localization, reflected in the fact that the Constitutive Protocol of the organ does not allocate neither legislative nor executive powers. Instead, the activities include requesting reports from other organs, exchanging views of Mercosur's integration; draft legislation for the consideration of the Council, as well as to prepare draft bills for the harmonization of national

legislations (Malamud & Dri, 2013). In spite of the desire to increase pooling and delegation, the level of competencies and authority transferred onto the parliament remains weak as it serves a limited consultative role within Mercosur. In sum, the assembly lacks real competences of legislation and control, and the activities are nonbinding (Doctor, 2015). In its establishment, member states were explicitly clear Parlasur would not encroach on the principles of national sovereignty (Rivera, 2014). The weak parliamentary reflects upon the fact that Mercosur countries have remained committed to an intergovernmental regional process (García, 2015). Andrés Malamud and Clarissa Dri (2013) argue for this reason that “Parlasur is the ultimate example of the reluctance of Mercosur national authorities to share sovereignty and delegate power” (p. 237). This has primarily been due to the regional power’s (Brazil) opposition to any process that might place it as a minority (Vasconcelos, 2007). Nevertheless, the recent transformation of Parlasur reveals some potential for the future progress towards deeper delegation. Parlasur is undergoing its own transition from appointed to elected membership, as a way to enhance the organizations’ democratic legitimacy. In this sense, the potential progress of the regional parliament remains to be seen.

Central American Integration System (SICA)

Central American integration has been an enduring feature in the isthmus since the member states gained independence from the Spanish Crown. Previous integration efforts in Central America have in turn rendered the isthmus member states much more receptive to integrationist ideas. The first serious action came in 1960, when El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua signed the General Treaty on Central American Integration, which established the Central American Common Market (CACM) (Abrahamson, 2015). Nevertheless, this process was interrupted in the 1970s and 1980s due to the civil conflicts that shook the region. With the end of the political turmoil and the return of democracy, Central American integration gained a new impetus in the late 1980s with the conclusion of the peace process (Domínguez, 2015). A presidential summit in 1991 reactivated the integration of the region and gave birth to the Central American Integration System (SICA), which established a legal and institutional framework guided through the Tegucigalpa Protocol (Caballero, 2009). The founding treaty emphasized that the fundamental objectives of the integration process were "to bring about the integration of Central America as a region of peace, freedom,

democracy and development” (Tegucigalpa Protocol, 1991). In this sense, regionalism was perceived as the best means to strengthen member states’ capacity to create domestic stability and alleviate societal problems.

Inter-Regionalism EU-SICA: Asymmetry and Development

Although the isthmus region has less economic weight when compared to Mercosur and other regional organizations, the EU maintains the most developed inter-regional relationship with Central America (Fawcett, 2016). The EU involvement in the isthmus however, takes on very different motivations. Europe intervened early in 1980 to contribute to the peace processes aimed at ending the civil wars in the region through the San José Dialogue, launched in 1984 (Domínguez, 2015). The EU in this sense, actively participated in the construction of SICA, and the peace process served as a platform for the future relationship between the two regions. From its foundation, SICA replicated several EU supranational institutions, namely reflected in the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN), a supranational judicial branch reflected in the Central American Court of Justice (CCJ) and the Consultative Committee (CC) (Dabene, 2009). Politicians in the isthmus benefited from emulating the European institutions, chiefly because it coincided with the willingness on the European part to fund and support their integrationist experiments. Moreover, the institutionalized relations have primarily centered on development and cooperation dialogue. In this sense, the EU promotes and supports regional integration in the isthmus as a way to secure peace, stability, and development, as it proved to be successful in the case of Europe's own trajectory (Selleslaghs, 2014). Its active involvement in the peace processes allowed for the EU to be seen as a neutral peace actor with shared goals. Central America has been traditionally affected by political instability, civil wars and natural disasters that render the region more open to external assistance (Domínguez, 2015).

The AA signed in 2010 frames the present relationship between the EU and Central America, leading to the ‘first true region-to-region Association Agreement signed with the EU’ (European Commission, 2012, p. 21). The power asymmetry is more pronounced in the EU-SICA relationship, albeit, less economically dependent on Europe than Mercosur (Malamud, 2015). What is important in the Central American case, as far as EU involvement, has been the patent ‘manipulation of the negotiation environment’ that insisted upon deeper integration in

the isthmus as a prerequisite for the conclusion of an AA (García, 2015, p. 8). The EU in this sense exerted power by conditionality that the customs union had to be concluded prior to any negotiation of an AA (Dabene, 2009). The EU used its market access as a bargaining chip to impose closer regional integration in the isthmus (Lenz, 2012). At present, the Regional Indicative Multiannual Programme for the period 2014-2020, allocates €120 million to strengthening SICA's regional integration (European Commission, 2014). The current European actions reflect on the continued efforts to strengthen regional institutions in the isthmus by enhancing the regional accountability of the Central American integration process (Schulz, 2012).

The Central American Parliament: Emulation and Capacity-Building

The Central American Parliament is the legislative body of SICA and in broad terms, is considered to embody the parliamentary assembly of the isthmus region. PARLACEN emerged from the peace processes that ended the wars in the isthmus and has been the EP's main interlocutor in this region since its inception (European Parliament, 2014). They have supported the constitution and the development of PARLACEN since its establishment. In the case of SICA, the early documents of the parliamentary assembly reveal a convergence with the EU about the objectives of integration. In this sense, both the EU and Central America agreed upon the establishment of PARLACEN as a “means to dialogue for peace in the region” (European Parliament, 1995). The diffusion of regional understandings is reflected in the voting procedures of PARLACEN, which since its foundation has appointed the majority of its members through a process of popular, direct elections (Doctor, 2015). Additionally, the sub-region has been open to greater civil society participation through direct mechanisms, as reflected by the multi-level governance of the EP (Bianculli, 2016). The design and interests of PARLACEN demonstrate that EU model of regional integration has been diffused through both capacity-building and regular contacts with the EP's delegations. This contact has allowed for a constant stream of EU values and norms of regional integration, which served to shape the regional calculations of SICA in its foundation.

Norm diffusion has also been reflected through modest transformational changes within PARLACEN, which underscore efforts to deepen integration, through enhanced delegation (Lenz & Marks, 2016). The Protocol of Amendment to the Treaty of PARLACEN that came into force in 2010, aimed to endow the institution with the legal capacity to ensure a regional and permanent organ of political and democratic representation of Central American citizens' interests (Doctor, 2015). In this sense, the founding treaty limited the legislative's competencies to analysis, proposal, and recommendation. Among the most important developments, PARLACEN members enhanced PARLACEN's ability to propose legislation on regional integration to the Council of Ministers or to the respective bodies, as well as to propose initiatives to expand or improve the Central American integration process. In this sense, PARLACEN possesses some form of control regarding the monitoring of SICA's regional institutions, albeit very weakly (Doctor, 2015).

In spite of its aspirations, PARLACEN has not developed a legislative function similar to that of the EP (Malamud & Dri, 2013). A fundamental difficulty has been the absence of Costa Rica from participating in PARLACEN, despite the European insistence for their incorporation. Since its foundation and throughout its existence, Costa Rica has made it patently clear that it will not join PARLACEN, citing the lack of functionality and the high costs of the regional body as some of the key reasons (Malamud & Dri, 2013). Despite being a member of the regional integration, the refusal of Costa Rica to participate in the Central American Parliament is one of the greatest weaknesses of the integration project. This has been due to the fact that instead of promoting convergences between member states, PARLACEN further replicates disagreements along national cleavages. Additionally, the refusal of Costa Rica weakens the legitimacy of PARLACEN, since the latter is unable to make credible commitments or deliver demographic proportionality among the member countries of SICA (Doctor, 2015). More importantly, the absence of a key SICA member state brings to the fore the politics that underlie regional integration, as it is regarded as a potential loss of decision-making and the national veto (Malamud & Dri, 2013). In this sense, although the Parliament has operated for more than two decades and has benefitted from the financial and the technical support from the EU, it has not made progress in the sense of the deepening its competencies.

These weaknesses reveal that despite interest in having a supranational union, the level of legislative authority in the PARLACEN remains relatively low compared to the EP.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The influence of the EU integration model in Latin America is discernible primarily through the diffusion of institutional designs. As explored in this paper, the sub-regional organizations' establishment of regional parliamentary bodies points towards the existence of socialization and emulation as defined in the theoretical section of this paper (Rüland & Bechle, 2014). In spite of efforts to replicate the EP model, Parlasur and PARLACEN do not yet fit into the category of a supranational parliament, as compared to their European counterpart. This section proceeds to compare and contrast the different variables and limitations that support our theoretical assumptions of localization and offer plausible explanations for why inter-governmentalism persists in Mercosur and SICA despite the regional parliamentarization of the sub-regions.

As reflective of one of the conditions of localization, the EU demonstrated upon having sufficient discursive influence and credibility as to convince Mercosur of internalizing EU-norms and attitudes of integration, which are reflected in their parliamentary transformations. In the case of Mercosur, this emulation arose from instrumental and strategic reasons expressed in the need to solve domestic cooperation problems. This result is congruent with localization in that the EU model triggered a progressive re-adjustment as a way to enhance the legitimacy and authority of the regional institution in a way that did not alter the fundamental identity of Mercosur (Acharya, 2004). Consistent with our theoretical claims, Mercosur has molded its calculations on the basis of strategic market access of the EU and the discourse of integration as a solution for the periods of economic uncertainty. The economic crises suffered by the member states and the inability to achieve its foundational objective of establishing a common market provided fertile soil for the receptivity of foreign models. In search of solutions to their regional problems, the EU's institutional design functioned as a 'cognitive shortcut' that inspired developments in of Mercosur to expand the means to achieve its integration objectives. This was reflected in Parlasur and the subsequent developments of direct elections, political groups and proportionality (Dri, 2011). It can be observed that the EP, both actively

and passively, encouraged the development of the parliamentary composition of Mercosur, which had been nonexistent in its initial years (Dri, 2011). Despite the legalization and constitutionalization of Mercosur integration, the political practice of its regional parliament remains weak. Additionally, the partial adoption of EU norms leads to the conclusion that Mercosur emulated the design of the EP to serve their legitimacy, authority, credibility, and power whilst simultaneously rejecting the EU regional governance that threatens their national control.

In contrast to Mercosur's parliamentary evolution, PARLACEN emerged as a EU-influenced decision to the challenge of democratic consolidation experienced at the time, and served to legitimate the isthmus externally in a context of political and economic upheaval. Additionally, the earlier parliamentarization of SICA displays the greater congruence that existed between the EU norms and the integrationist objectives in the context of its foundation. This receptivity led to a broader similarity of PARLACEN to the EP structure and functioning since its establishment. An important factor that explains SICA's greater openness to deeper integration was its common ground between the norm and the existing Central American impetus for these processes of political union. The Central American objectives in this sense are more compatible to the norms and ideas of regional integration that Europe seeks to project, which makes the isthmus more receptive to the notion of deep political integration as the most efficient solution to their regional problems. In the case of Central America, the weak parliamentary assembly is due to the fact that this political commitment is not shared equally among its member states.

In addition, the EU-SICA relationship is heavily influenced by material incentives, rather than ideational persuasion. The greater adoption of European norms in the institutional design of PARLACEN responds therefore to the fact that "contemporary dynamics of regional integration in Central America hinges on negotiating and implementing the association agreement with the EU." (Abrahamson, 2015, p. 2). In this sense, the changes of the parliamentary assembly to emulate the EU process, are an attempt to gain external legitimacy in a context of social, political and economic instability in the region. Nevertheless, the absence of legislative power in Parlasur is indicative of a byproduct of emulation. In other words, in an attempt to skip key stages of integration, Parlasur members have tended to

overlook the crucial normative foundations that are necessary to achieve a supra-national level similar to the EP and European institutions.

The lack of legislative power endowed to the sub-regional parliaments reflects upon a reluctance of the member states to delegate political authority to regional organs (Rüland & Bechle, 2014). Congruent with localization, the parliaments of both sub-regions that were inspired by the EP were adapted to be less intrusive on the national sovereignty by making sanctions conditional upon majority decisions by member states (Malamud & Dri, 2013). The case studies' in this sense present similar outcomes. The two sub-regions, while calling for greater integration, have resisted the delegation of sovereignty that is a necessary prerequisite for developing effective supranational functions, preferring instead to rely on lower levels of delegation (Mattli, 2003). Although both PARLACEN and Parlasur promote regional integration, their level of legislative authority remains relatively low compared to their European counterpart. Instead, the regional organizations in the sub-regions have favored informal processes, ambiguous competencies and non-binding outcomes and consensus, as opposed to the majority vote emblematic of the EU (Acharya, 2016). Despite the regional bodies, the regionalism in the isthmus and Southern Cone remain largely entrenched in intergovernmentalism. These results seem almost paradoxical against the existence of regional parliamentary assemblies and the backdrop of the EU's active promotion of its own institutional model.

How can we explain this outcome of delegated institutional diffusion from the EU, while the EUs pooled decision-making has not spread to a similar degree? The emulation of the EU in the establishment and reforms of the two Latin American sub-regions have simultaneously been adapted to respond to the traditional meanings and practices of sovereignty (Legler, 2013). Central to understanding the Latin American regional projects is the norm orthodoxy of the region. In this sense, the move from empire to state led to the construction of a framework of domestic legitimacy grounded on the principles of absolute non-intervention and sovereignty as both an abstract notion and as a tool to counter American hegemony in the Western hemisphere (Acharya, 2009). In this sense, the strict interpretation of sovereignty differs markedly from that conceived in Europe, where intervention can be justified on the means of balance of power (Acharya, 2009). The principle of sovereignty has

been integral for the identity of many Latin American countries and as such has been ingrained in legal and state practice (Acharya, 2004). The statist character of regional projects reflects upon the difference in strategic objectives that aim to achieve and defend their national interests (Bianculli, 2016). Nevertheless, the Latin American regionalisms focus on balancing against an external power indicate that the absence of supranational authority does not necessarily imply that governance is not occurring above the state (Legler, 2013).

The EUs imprint on the regional integration models of the sub-regions is limited by a reluctance to lose the national veto (Grugel, 2007). The scholarship of norm localization in other regions, namely East Asia and Africa, has equally recognized the attitudinal difference towards sovereignty as the main ideational constraint of the EU's ability to promote their understanding of integration abroad. Given the similar colonial legacies, it is not surprising to find a heavy emphasis on autonomy and sovereignty in Latin American, African and Asian regional groupings. The particular strength of the normative orthodoxy reinforces our assumptions on localization, as the reality reflects upon a partial normative transformation among the sub-regional recipients understanding of the importance of central political institutions (Ruland & Bechle, 2014). In this sense, although the existence of parliamentary assemblies that respond to regional prerogatives reflects upon the desire to achieve a political union, they do not fully adopt the normative foundations of parliamentary democracy that were pivotal for the EU process (Lenz & Marks, 2016). The institutions in the sub-groups have therefore not been able to easily transfer authority to a regional assembly since they derive their legitimacy from a strong domestic authority. In sum, the ideational and structural legacies have been a significant constraint for the exportability of the EU processes of regional governance in Latin American and world regionalisms.

As a consequence, the presidential tradition of the Latin American states curbs the wholesale applicability of regional integration models. On one hand, the European integration has primarily evolved to reflect its parliamentary tradition, and the establishments of such assemblies are often related to the deepening of EU integration and the "legalization and constitutionalisation of regional governance" (Rüland and Bechle, 2014, p. 81). The institutions in the sub-groups divert from the EU integration path because they derive their legitimacy from different sources than from those of Europe. In this case, it is important to

highlight that all Latin American states have a presidential system of government and as such present a greater reluctance to transfer sovereignty unto regional parliamentary bodies (Dri, 2015). As a consequence, Latin American regionalism has developed through statist control and authority. The result is that instead of empowering their regional parliaments with effective legislative authority, the regional organs of the sub-regions further transferred the control of integration onto the individual states and their presidents. In the Southern Cone and the isthmus, the national presidents are the central actors guiding the regional integration processes. Despite the existence of parliaments that support horizontal accountability, they remain weak because the member states have depended heavily on their domestic structures, especially their executive branches, in order to control the path of integration. In this sense, parliamentarization tends to strengthen the executive at the expense of national and regional parliamentary assemblies (Malamud & Dri, 2013).

As previously outlined, localization is evident when only a partial normative transformation among the norm-recipients occurs as they are made to fit consistent with the context (Ruland & Bechle, 2014). Hence, a transformation through norm localization occurs when there is a redefinition of foreign norms that are perceived as desirable but are not consistent with the domestic reality. Localization is reflected in the contradictory results of how despite the fact that Mercosur and SICA have both built institutions associated with supranational powers, the presidents have never accepted ceding control of the integration process (Dabéne, 2009). An explanation to these results stems from the fact that the action emerged as a top-down decision to imitate the EU structures. As a consequence, the designs of the regional institutional schemes tend to emphasize presidentialism rather than promote horizontal accountability, even if they imitate EU institutions when developing their own (Tussie and Rigirozzi, 2012). In this sense, presidentialism further ensures that supra-nationalism remains a dead letter in both regional groupings.

V. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

This paper has explored the dynamics of EU influence on regional integration in the Latin American sub-regions. The research sought to address why regional parliaments emulated the EP, which is associated with EU deepening of integration; yet do not function on the same

level of supra-nationality. This paper tackled this question through a comparative analysis of two case studies of Mercosur and SICA with concepts derived from norm diffusion theory and localization. It was observed that the parliamentarization was enhanced as a result of internal regional demands alongside European normative diffusion.

The study's analysis leads to two main conclusions. First, the observations confirm that the EU was used as a reference model at various points of Mercosur and SICA's foundation and evolution. Second, it contends that despite some institutional isomorphism in Mercosur and SICA, localization resulted in a selective adaptation of the EU normative model of integration. In this sense, member states of Mercosur established and sought to gradually empower their parliamentary assembly as a response to internal and functional demands. Conversely, SICA's parliament has emulated the EP since its establishment, as a way to resolve regional instabilities as well as to attain external legitimacy. In spite of the regional institutions, the sub-regions parliamentary assemblies are not endowed with similar competencies or authority as the EP after which they are modeled. The theory of norm localization suggests that the low levels of authority and pooling of decision-making are a result of the strong normative prior of Latin America. The research highlighted that in the two cases, the members of the regional groups hold a more absolute understanding of the sovereign principle and doctrine of non-intervention. The EUs diffusion of its model of regional authority is therefore limited by a reluctance elsewhere, to lose the national veto. Lastly, the long-standing presidential systems of the Latin American states equally curb the possibility of transferring authority to a parliamentary regional body, as presidents prefer to have greater control of the integration process.

Taking into account that the overall purpose of this paper was to stimulate further thought on how regions interact and shape each other, there are two potential avenues that could build on the present study. Firstly, the findings would be strengthened through a broader analysis on the perception of the EU in the sub-regions of Mercosur and SICA. This would entail fieldwork in the form of surveys and interviews that include both the state and non-state agents that contribute to regional integration. Such an analysis would provide first-hand insight into how the transmission of values and norms shape their interests and identities over time. Such an evaluation would find a special relevance within the recent crises in Europe, which serve to

demonstrate that although the EU has set itself as an example of integration, the region is not immune to economic and political turbulences. In this sense, it would be fruitful to assess how recent regional crises such as the Eurozone, and 'Brexit' have not only challenged the representative democracy of the EU but also whether they have undermined its credibility as a 'golden standard' of integration and political union.

The findings of this research raise important practical and theoretical implications for the study of comparative regionalism and regional integration. Firstly, is that the EU regional integration model is not easily diffused as it would require historical, political and economic conditions that are similar to those the EU is grounded upon. In this sense, the EU can find greater weight as a global actor by promoting symmetrical forms of cooperation with other regions rather than by forcing the reproduction of its own integration path. Considering that supra-nationality is absent in the two cases studied, it would be useful to understand the specific forms of governance that are being practiced in regions in Latin America. Although each region is distinct in this sense, they converge in that the regional integration processes are a manifestation of attempts to reconfigure the scope of political authority beyond national borders. This regional commonality underscores an important need for scholars of regionalism to shift attention to the processes that exist outside of Europe and how regional governance emerges, develops and is transformed in other parts of the world. There is a strong case for rethinking the theories and methods of regionalism to shed light into alternative patterns of regional governance and regional possibilities that exist beyond supra-nationalism. Ultimately, the study of regions outside of Europe brings to the fore an important question regarding whether non-supranational schemes of regional governance are equally successful or inferior to supra-nationalism for solving regional and global challenges.

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