

## **Integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel governance: a comparative perspective**

*Call for Papers for a Symposium in Public Administration*

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### **Theoretical background and state of the art**

This symposium addresses the question of the relationship between integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel governance. It does so by highlighting the added value of adopting a comparative perspective between the European Union (EU) and other entities, and, respectively of applying a multilevel governance framework to other contexts than the EU.

Many policy challenges to which decision-makers are confronted today – particularly in times of turbulence and/or crisis – require coordination beyond the national government, for example with subnational, international, and private actors (Ansell et al. 2017, 2-3). Hierarchical forms of coordination have reached their limits (Schout and Jordan 2005)

whereas non-hierarchical coordination and functional policy solutions have gained in importance (Hooghe and Marks 2003). Therefore, multilevel governance arrangements become ever more prominent (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Their multilevelness is embodied by the observation that politically relevant state and non-state actors from different levels – nation state, regional, local, and international – have to negotiate to find common policy solutions (Bache et al. 2014) or learn from one another (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006) to deal with pressing policy challenges.

Multilevel governance has sparked a lot of research across different disciplines in political science and public policy. A recently published compendium of essential readings in multilevel governance shows that the European Union (EU) and its member states (and regions) are the main “playing field” for concept development and empirical application of multilevel governance (Bache and Flinders 2015). Accordingly, this line of research is now the driver for theory-building in the multilevel governance literature (Stephenson 2013). At the same time, the question whether the EU resembles more a traditional international organization or a (federal) state remains contested. As Cini and Pérez-Solórzano (2016: 3) highlight, “although it might seem fair to claim that the European Union is unique, or a hybrid body, even this point can be contentious where it prevents researchers from comparing the EU to national systems of government and international organizations”. Some strands of EU research have approached the EU as a unique and unprecedented administrative, political and economic system ‘*sui generis*’ that requires a distinctive analytical approach (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999; Woll 2006). As a result, it is repeatedly argued that research on the EU could undertake more efforts to connect their insights to the broader study of similar or analogous phenomena (e.g., Börzel and Risse 2001; Thomann and Sager 2017; Treib 2014; Trondal 2010).

The fragmentation in the EU literature arguably complicates theory-building about multilevel governance in general. Indeed, the theoretical status of multilevel governance has remained ambiguous. On the one hand, there is widespread agreement about the descriptive prescriptions of the concept – the distinction of different levels and the empirical focus of the contributions (Enderlein et al. 2010; Bache and Flinders 2015). On the other hand, we still lack precise hypotheses about causal mechanisms in multilevel governance systems, notably concerning the relation of systemic integration (e.g., institutional, economic, functional, political) and problem-solving on different levels beyond the EU case (one exception related to economic integration is Scharpf 1997). This theoretical ambiguity has allowed researchers to apply multilevel governance to a variety of empirical contexts, yet the original inferential power of the concept has remained weak. Recent contributions to the literature on multilevel governance have made important steps forward to deal with the problem of theory building in multilevel governance (Piattoni 2010). In this vein, by adopting a comparative perspective, we propose a new theoretical contribution to the study of multilevel governance.

## Contribution of the symposium

This symposium contributes to the literature on multilevel governance by adopting a systematic comparative perspective and drawing from different theoretical lenses in order to learn about the general relationship between integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving capacity in multilevel systems.

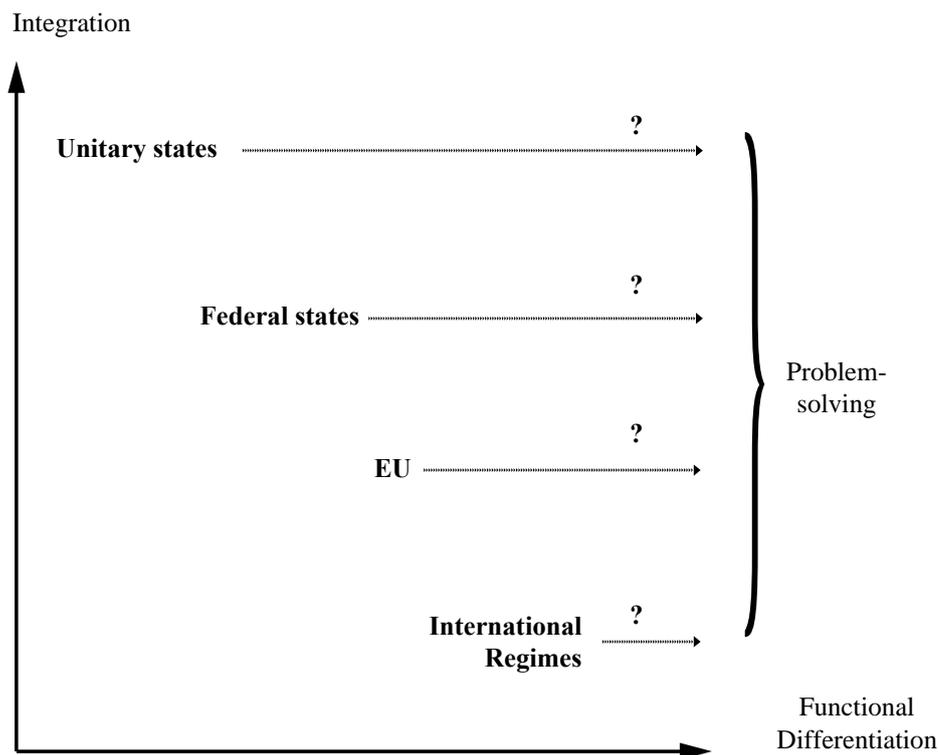
*Why a comparative perspective?* The EU is facing a crisis that not only puts into question the overall process of European integration, but also challenges the EU's capacity to effectively solve collective problems through multilevel governance. This makes it a timely case for exploring the question of the problem-solving capacity of multilevel governance from a broader perspective that also includes other political systems. The symposium explores this capacity, offering lessons for the EU and beyond. Precisely, we want to overcome three important gaps related to sector-specific patterns, to the cross-fertilization between analytic perspectives, and to effective problem-solving capacity in times of crisis. The unravelling of sovereignty and the complexification of democratic legitimacy and accountability render redistribution and horizontal coordination at the national level complicated in multilevel systems (Scharpf, 1997; Papadopoulos, 2010; Egeberg, 2016). What can we learn from comparing different policies for the problem-solving capacity of multilevel systems? How can different theoretical and empirical approaches produce cumulative knowledge about integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel systems? Accordingly, the contributions engage in theory-building on multilevel governance by comparing the EU and other cases, different policy sectors, or by integrating new and innovative theoretical perspectives. Thereby, the symposium aims, on the one hand, to advance our current understanding of the EU in important ways, and, on the other hand, to improve our cumulative knowledge on the potential and limits of multilevel governance.

*Learning about what?* The goal of these comparisons is to provide, cumulatively, a better empirical and theoretical understanding of variations in integration and in functional differentiation affect how problems are solved in multilevel systems. Such systems can be more or less integrated at the level of institutions (polity), policies, or in political terms. For example, *institutional integration* refers to the degree to which general legal, fiscal, administrative and general policy competencies are united – mostly at the top level – in multilevel governance systems (cf. for a discussion of the term institutional integration: Trein 2017). *Policy integration* targets the question whether a policy choice taken in one policy domain takes into account the effects that choice could have in other policy domains (Tosun and Lang 2017). *Political integration* refers to “the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing states. The end result (...) is a new political community, superimposed over the existing ones” (Haas 1958). It is mainly this understanding that underlies the notion of European integration (on economic integration, cf. Scharpf 1997). As the process of European integration increasingly faces challenges, the extent of functional differentiation

has gained salience. Functional differentiation refers to the delegation of authority in task specific jurisdictions that integrate different levels with regard to a specific task or policy challenge (Hooghe and Marks 2003, 237-9). This implies for the EU that policymakers would want to delegate authority away from the central state in some policy fields, such as banking and environmental legislation, but not in others (Leuffen et al. 2012). Accordingly, the possibility of *differentiated integration* in multilevel system was highlighted, referring to the fact that the EU's centralization (vertical integration) and territorial shape (horizontal integration) vary across policies (Leuffen et al. 2012).

In following these elaborations, we propose a two-dimensional analytical space that allows us to compare different systems of multilevel governance. As Figure 1 illustrates, in comparing multilevel systems' degree of integration, an ideal-typical axis spans from complete integration to no integration of the multilevel system. The axis could reach from a "simple polity", such as in unitary states, to a "compound polity," (Schmidt 2006, 229) which are, in our case, international regimes. Federal states are in the middle between these two extremes whereas the EU is located between the compound polity extreme and federal states in the middle of the axis. Another axis spans from "no functional differentiation" to "full functional differentiation". The contributions in this collection are going to explore the implications of different degrees of integration and differentiation on problem-solving. The literature features a notable ambiguity on the precise meaning of "problem-solving" as scholars across many disciplines refer to this term. For the purpose of this symposium, we define problem-solving as political actions that aim at dealing with pressing policy challenges. In other words, problem-solving is puzzling, i.e., "a collective puzzlement on society's behalf; it entails both deciding and knowing" and is different from powering, which are political actions aiming predominantly at seeking more power (Hecló 1974, 305-6).

*Figure 1: Integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel governance*



### Aim of the symposium

The goal of the symposium is to identify the effects of integration and functional differentiation on the effective problem-solving capacity of multilevel systems. EU research has proposed that the problem-solving effectiveness of multilevel governance varies between policy fields (Scharpf 1997). In this symposium, we seek to explore the implications of this finding beyond the EU. Intuitively and ideal-typically speaking, there is a trade-off between integration and functional differentiation across different levels in multilevel systems, in the sense that the more the levels are integrated institutionally, at the policy level or politically, the less governments at different levels can deal with specific policy challenges independently from one another. Here, levels of functional differentiation play a mediating role. For example, spillover effects and increasing integration at different functional levels of the multilevel system may put policymakers in a situation where they cannot deal with specific policy challenges independently, although they would prefer this for political reasons and the institutional integration of policy competencies would – in principle – allow this. For example, this could be the case in a context of turbulence, i.e., “interactions of events or demands that are highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable” and/or crises, which are events of “threat, urgency, and uncertainty” (Ansell et al. 2017, 2-3).

## Call for papers

To address these research questions, this symposium seeks to deepen our understanding of the problem-solving capacity of multilevel governance, by adopting a comparative perspective and drawing from different theoretical lenses. Accordingly, the contributions engage in theory-building on multilevel governance, notably concerning the relation between integration, functional differentiation and effective problem-solving. The symposium gathers contributions that analyze the problem-solving capacity of multilevel governance settings and allow for a theoretical conclusion about responses to policy challenges in multilevel contexts. For example, we seek contributions that approach the EU from a comparative perspective and that explicitly use theoretical, analytical or empirical insights from different varieties of the multilevel governance literature, other strands of literature, and from the investigation of empirical cases. Comparable cases include, for example, multilevel governance systems in other regions; other inter- and supranational organizations that span across different levels; and federal states. Useful theoretical and practical insights may be gained from the literature on democratic participation, policy integration, management reforms, risk regulation, policy learning, and implementation theory, to only mention a few. Potentially successful contributions make an explicit point on the comparison in which they engage, and pose research questions such as the following:

- How does the EU and other systems of multilevel governance (e.g., supranational organizations or federal states) compare in their relation of integration and problem-solving capacity?
- How do different degrees of integration and/or functional differentiation (not) affect problem-solving capacity for governments at different levels in the multilevel system?
- How do times of crisis and/or turbulence impact on problem-solving capacity in different configurations of integration and/or functional differentiation?
- How do integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving evolve in various multilevel contexts?
- Under which degrees of (institutional, policy, political) integration and/or functional differentiation do political conflicts impede effective problem-solving in multilevel governance systems?

Potentially successful contributions include:

- Comparative empirical analyses of integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel contexts that compare the EU to other cases, or compare different policy sectors within the EU
- Empirical analyses that make a theoretical contribution to integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel governance using other cases than the EU, or different theoretical perspectives that can inform the EU literature

- Literature reviews that go beyond discussing the state of the art regarding integration and problem-solving in multilevel governance by providing a novel and stretching argument or insight and hence make a valuable and original contribution to multilevel governance theory

Authors who are interested in contributing a paper should email an abstract of 500 words to the guest editors by September 22.

**Timeline (tentative)**

**September 1, 2017:** Communication of call for papers

**October 1, 2017:** Selection of papers

**November 15, 2017:** Deadline for draft papers

**December 1, 2017:** Authors' workshop in Lausanne, Switzerland

**February 1, 2018:** Submission of manuscripts  
Start of official review procedure

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