

Introduction

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Abstract: The process of European integration has evolved through crises of governance towards ever greater integration of the societies of the participating member states, giving rise to new questions about the political organization of the European continent. At the same time, European societies have become ever more diverse, giving rise to new and complex problematiques of coexistence. Europe must now also deal with the consequences of an economic model based on the consumption of finite resources. Beyond specific crises and events, Europe is therefore faced with a multifaceted challenge of ecological, democratic and societal sustainability. To approach the challenges from the point of view of sustainability means to see the ecological, democratic and societal long-term viability of Europe as made possible by the continuous reconstruction of European societies through innovative cultural, social, economic and political practices under the ecological constraints posed by the limits of our planet.

Keywords: Sustainability, democracy, diversity, societal trust, magic concepts, Spitzenkandidaten, sustainable development, participatory democracy; European Citizens' Initiative, community-based tourism, imaginary, threat perception, factorial survey

Europe has been described as a model that is continuously 'failing forwards' through crises towards ever-greater institutional integration, supported by increased economic efficiency and prosperity. However, climate change has made it perfectly clear that the current model of economic expansion based on the consumption of finite resources and continuous contamination of the natural environment cannot continue to form the basis of the material underpinning of societal integration in Europe.

At the same time, we are also witnessing how the discussion regarding the *finalité* or 'end point' of European integration is increasingly on the political agenda, with political parties and social movements representing substantial parts of the European population openly questioning the current state of affairs in Europe as well as the spill-over logics of European integration associated with the 'failing forward' approach, openly advocating

for a spill-back, taking competences and functions back to the state, and reconstructing the nation-state as the most important focus for value orientations and political and social solidarity.

Furthermore, these agendas often include a securitisation of difference and a strong self-other dichotomy with diversity and human mobility being constructed as a threat on economic, cultural, social and religious grounds. In fact, the notion of the Anthropocene stresses precisely the interconnectedness of ecological, social, economic and political problems and struggles, epitomised by wars over natural resources, the challenge of managing a circular economy and climate change giving rise to increased human mobility, challenges to the redistribution of wealth in societies and the aggravation of existing and creation of new social and political cleavages.

Whereas the triple ecological, democratic and societal challenge that Europe faces may be conceptualised in terms of looking for solutions to crises, an approach from the concept of sustainability maintains a vision of the broader embeddedness of whichever specific problems we may focus on with an awareness of the broader patterns of ecological, political and social change at the beginning of the 21st century, in Europe and beyond. Sustainability has generally been thought of in terms of creating a balance between current and future human needs and aspirations in the intersection of macroeconomics (GDP growth), the environment (balanced ecosystems) and the social field (education, employment), which has again led to criticisms of the concept as having an inherently conservative analytical and political bias. However, the notion of a sustainable Europe does not need to imply a static, reactionary, self-sufficient and inward-looking Europe. In contrast, it could also be conceptualised as a dynamic concept that sees ecological, democratic and societal long-term viability as made possible by the continuous reconstruction of European societies through innovative cultural, social, economic and political practices under the ecological constraints posed by the limits of our planet, as well as the global embeddedness of the multifaceted challenges currently facing Europe.

In this context, this current issue 64/2021 of the *Deusto Journal of European Studies* include 4 articles about sustainability in and of Europe. They were written as part of the intensive programme of the Erasmus Mundus Master Degree Programme in Euroculture organised by the University of Deusto in June 2020 under the title “A sustainable Europe? Society, politics and culture in the Anthropocene” and in which participated more than 100 students and academic staff from the Euroculture Consortium that apart from the University of Deusto also includes: University of Groningen, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Jagellonian

University of Krakow, Palacký University of Olomouc, University of Strasbourg, University of Udine, University of Uppsala.

Trond Ove Tøllefsen opens this special issue with a systematic and critical examination of the contested concept of sustainability and its magical properties, in terms of its broadness, positive connotations, consensus adoption widespread use. Through a horizontal and vertical analysis, the article questions the meaning of sustainability in the context of millennia of human impact on nature. It becomes clear that although the magical properties of concept of sustainability have made it a victim of strategic misuse by self-interested actors, it has also allowed a broadly shared discourse on the responsible use of natural resources to be a powerful rallying point.

Trond Ove Tøllefsen abre esta edición temática con una examinación sistemática y crítica del concepto de sostenibilidad y sus propiedades mágicas, entendido como su amplitud de significado, connotaciones positivas, adopción consensuada y uso extendido. A través de un análisis horizontal y vertical, el artículo cuestiona el significado de sostenibilidad en el contexto de la historial larga del impacto humano en la naturaleza. Concluye que las propiedades mágicas del concepto de sostenibilidad han permitido generar un discurso compartido sobre el uso responsable de recursos naturales que moviliza a la acción, a pesar de que estas mismas propiedades mágicas también ha posibilitado su mal uso estratégico.

Carlos Espaliú Berdud, turns the focus to democratic sustainability in the EU, concretely in the parliamentarisation of the political system and the experiences with the appointments of the Commission president in 2014 and 2019. Whereas the 2014 appointment reflected a functioning of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system that could be considered a strengthening of the parliamentarisation of the EU political system, the 2019 appointment showed an opposite outcome. The author concludes that this was a result of a lack of respect for the results of the European parliamentary elections that contributed to decrease the legitimacy of the EU, and ultimately of the democratic sustainability of the EU as a political system in between the international organization and the federal state.

Eduarne Bartolomé, Hermann Dülmer and Lluís Coromina, focus on the societal sustainability of Europe, concretely how diversity in society generates threat perceptions and trust among different groups. The empirical basis of the article is a factorial survey carried out in Bilbao and Cologne that examined the impact on social trust of different factors, such as age, skin colour, religion and socio-economic conditions. The authors conclude that socio-economic factors are more important than cultural factors in terms of social trust, but also that numerous obstacles remain for the consolidation of social trust in a context of diversity. The creation of a

more inclusive European identity and a societally sustainable Europe will therefore require a change in general attitudes, through education and generational replacement.

Monica Pascoli analyses the impact of tourism on sustainability, with special emphasis on the societal sustainability of local communities. The author analyses how a tourist imaginary arises as a negotiated image through the negotiation of different stakeholders. The article is based on interviews carried out in Paularo, Italy. In this case, no dissonant constructions were found between stakeholders, although a large difference in the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage among locals and tourist professionals was found, both in terms of how it should be experienced and the meaning attached to different sites. This further indicates a great potential for community-based approaches to tourism as facilitator of societal sustainability.

About the author

Steffen Bay Rasmussen is associate professor of international relations at the University of Deusto and Director of Studies of the Erasmus Mundus Master in Euroculture: Society, politics and culture in a global context. He teaches courses on Public International Law and International Relations, including on the history and theory of European integration, comparative regional integration and public diplomacy and has been a visiting professor and researcher at various universities, such as the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael), the Sultan Qaboos University (Oman), University of Navarra (Spain), and the University of the Basque Country (Spain). His current research is centred on EU international strategy and diplomatic relations, public diplomacy as well as on EU international identity and ontological security. His recent publications include “The ideas and practices of the European Union’s structural antidiplomacy: An unstable equilibrium”, Boston, Brill, 2018.

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