

Cuadernos Europeos de Deusto

Núm. Especial 05 (Octubre 2022)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18543/ced052022>

INTRODUCTION

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.18543/ced.2553>

Publicado en línea: octubre de 2022

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Introduction

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.18543/ced.2553>

E-published: October 2022

Abstract: Beyond trade, investment, geostrategic and security challenges, as well as issues of connectivity and governance, the European Union-Asia Pacific dialogue has also boosted the involvement of civil society in international politics. The involvement of civil society can contribute to enhancing mutual trust and knowledge as well as democratization processes and channels for citizen participation in social issues that have an impact on people's lives. However, in the last decade, internal crises both in the EU and in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as a lack of political will on both sides to support the discussion of issues in non-official processes, seem to have slowed down the intensity of interregional interaction and cooperation between civil society organizations. This special issue of *Cuadernos Europeos de Deusto (CED) / Deusto Journal of European Studies* on "European Union-Asia Pacific social and cultural dialogue: involving civil society in interregional relations" aims to make a contribution to the knowledge and understanding of some of the major actors and factors that determine the evolution of social and cultural interregional dialogue.

Keywords: European Union, Asia Pacific, Central Asia, interregional dialogue, civil society.

The Asia-Pacific region is not only the world's largest and most populous, but also home to some of the fastest growing economies in the world. In recent years, the European Union has become a key trading partner for most countries in the Asia-Pacific region and aims to play a relevant role in its stability.

Beyond trade, investment, geostrategic and security challenges, as well as issues of connectivity and governance, the EU-Asia Pacific dialogue has also boosted the involvement of civil society in international politics. Since the first ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) summit held in Bangkok in 1996, ASEF (Asia Europe Foundation), as part of the ASEM architecture, has

been fostering intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, with the mission of enhancing better mutual understanding and knowledge.

In a parallel way, and through parallel summits, AEPF (the Asia Europe People's Forum), has mobilized civil society organizations, NGOs, higher education institutions, and think-tanks in order to promote the creation of an ASEM community of knowledge and stimulate dialogue on issues such as democracy and human rights, peace and social justice.

The involvement of civil society can contribute to enhancing mutual trust and knowledge as well as democratization processes and channels for citizen participation in social issues that have an impact on people's lives. However, in the last decade, internal crises both in the EU and in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as a lack of political will on both sides to support the discussion of issues in non-official processes, seem to have slowed down the intensity of interaction and cooperation between civil society organizations.

Drawing on these dynamics, this special issue of *Cuadernos Europeos de Deusto* (CED) / *Deusto Journal of European Studies* on "European Union-Asia Pacific social and cultural dialogue: involving civil society in interregional relations" aims to make a contribution to the knowledge and understanding of some of the major actors and factors that determine the evolution of social and cultural interregional dialogue. In line with the journal's interdisciplinary approach, five contributions discuss various topics and reflect on the participation of civil society in interregional relations.

Christopher Kimura opens this issue with the paper "Negotiating Capital and the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement". Discussing the 2019 European Union-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, the author states that, "while the agreement itself is an example of the growing strength of the EU-Japan relationship, it is also an example of how two vastly different trade regimes can overcome entrenched structural and administrative styles to reach a consensus". The author discusses the concept of negotiating capital in the framework of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). To this end, the author reflects on the legal and political conditions present in the agreement, from the perspective of the trade negotiating subjects, while assessing the impacts of those constraints on the negotiation outcomes. The differences between European and Japanese constraints determine the configuration of trade negotiators. While the European Union is a space conducive to the participation of civil society organizations in trade negotiation processes, in Japan the centralized composition around the hierarchy of the executive and a highly standardized network of bureaucrats limits the openness of the country's civil society in such processes.

Cem Nalbantoğlu's contribution, "EU-China relations and data governance policies: the role of civil societies in overcoming geopolitical challenges in cyberspace", focuses on the challenges of data governance based on a geopolitical understanding of the topic. Indeed, this dimension allows the author to reflect on the role that digital civil society organizations can play in the search for alternative solutions to avoid political conflict between the European Union and China on this matter. In addition, the author analyses the socio-political, institutional, legal and cultural impact of digitalization. To this end, the author contextualizes the reflection in the global framework, as he understands that this is where responses must be articulated to overcome the inadequacies and weaknesses of the cybersecurity and digitalization policies adopted by China and the European Union. The methodology employed by the author is based on the revisionism of the effects of global challenges, in this case digitalization and its connections with cyberspace geopolitics, from a perspective based on the search for solutions beyond reified legal frameworks. From this perspective, the author uses multiple proposals to support the catalytic role of digital civil society organizations in the resolution of security conflicts, as alternatives to power struggles in the geopolitics of data governance.

Mario Malo's paper, "Brief overview of the factual and ontological developments of the idea of "civil society" in Japan", discusses the origin and concept of civil society in Japan. In doing so, the author avoids static configurations, and focuses on the institutional, legal and socio-economic determinants that have been present in the genesis and evolution of the concept. To this end, the author uses a qualitative analysis in which environmental conditions such as war or natural disasters are present, which have been determining factors in the configuration of civil society as a concept that is autonomous from the State and society. The reflection is of interest in order to assess the synergies between civil society and citizen participation channels in Japan. Particularly suggestive are the observations regarding State dirigisme in participatory dynamics, as well as the contextualization of social movements in post-war and natural disaster times. The historicist and sociological methodology for approaching the object of analysis, the Japanese associative world, allows us to grasp the specificities of the social movements that have developed throughout history in Japan, as well as the shortcomings and weaknesses that have prevented the consolidation of some of these movements beyond the circumstances that led to their appearance.

Nguyễn Mậu Hùng's contribution, "The Modernization Resolution of Vietnam's Education System by the Francophone Road in the East-West Cultural Conflict of the Late Nineteenth Century and the Early Twentieth

Century”, describes the different phases of the implementation of the French education system in Vietnam, and discusses the effects of this system that went beyond the dynamics of colonization. The work contributes to the reflection on a civil society as a driving force for social, economic and cultural participation by drawing on the influences of the French educational model, which allowed the consolidation of critical and proactive thinking for the development of a solid civil society fabric. The author uses a wealth of bibliographical sources to analyse the effects of the French education system in Vietnam in terms of critical thinking and overcoming the hierarchical dynamics of Asian Confucianism.

Finally, **Sureyya Yigit**'s paper, “EU-Central Asian Civil Societal Relations: Unrealistic Expectations, Discouraging Results”, closes this special issue. The author approaches the concept of civil society from a metahistorical perspective, where economic, social, institutional and cultural factors play a decisive role. The paper is highly relevant for understanding the difficulties of introducing categories central to the European Union (rule of law, human rights, etc.) in Central Asian countries, without taking into account the complex environmental conditions of these countries. Of particular interest is the author's reconceptualization of the democratic factor from the perspective of the material impulses of the Central Asian countries. Also relevant is the approach to the role of NGOs in civil society considering the dynamics of domination internal to the Soviet heritage and the external dynamics themselves, which limit or constrain the role of NGOs as interlocutors of civil society in the democratisation process. The difficulties in consolidating a civil society similar to those of Western Europe invite reflection on the anthropological and cultural particularities of Central Asia, key questions for articulating new EU-Central Asia relations, which the author then specifies in the conclusions.

About the authors

M.^a Luz Suárez Castiñeira is Professor at the University of Deusto. After graduating in English and German Philology from the Free University of Brussels, she received her PhD in Comparative European Literature at the University of the Basque Country (1992). Since then she has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the University of Deusto in Modern Languages, Modern Languages and Management, and International Relations as well as in the Erasmus Mundus Master Programme Euroculture. She has done her research in the field of comparative literature, first, and later, since 2003, in the field of European

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