European Journal of Innovation in Nonformal Education (EJINE)
Volume 2 | Issue 2 | ISSN: 2795-8612

Brand of Territories as a Tool of Soft Power of European Countries

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A B S T R A C T

The fundamental characteristic of the external action of the European Union (EU) in recent years has been the use of the so-called soft power. This soft power has made the Union a key factor for the development of a large part of the world's regions. The last decades the EU has participated in a considerable amount of projects in the economic, cultural and political fields in order to fulfil the article 2 of its founding Treaty and thus promote their values and interests and contribute to peace, security and sustainable development of the globe through solidarity and respect for all peoples. Nevertheless, EU's interventions in different regions of the world have not been free of objections that have placed in the spotlight a possible direct attack by the Union to the external States' national sovereignties, thus creating a principle of neocolonialism by the EU.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:
Received 06 January 2022
Received in revised form
26 January 2022
Accepted 24 February 2022

Keywords: brand, union, soft, power, national, key.

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In the late 1980's, Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, defined the term 'Soft Power' as an ability of a State to influence others to do what it wants without force or coercion. This concept could now be seen as an alternative to the traditional hard power based on the raw involvement of aspects such as military and economic means. Nowadays, international actors are becoming more and more aware of the great advantage dominating this form of power would imply, and a clear example of this is the European Union (hereafter, EU). This confederation of states is known for its civilian form of power. This type of power refers to the centrality of the economy to achieve goals, the primacy of diplomatic cooperation to solve international problems and the willingness to use legally binding supranational institutions to achieve international progress among others. Since journalist and political analyst of European integration Louis-François Duchêne linked the EU's modus operandi to this concept, soft power and civilian power have been two of the Union's most defining terms. It is also true to point out that certain aspects of soft power have been identified with the forms featured in the so-called Neo-colonialism theory. The various meanings of this rationale suggest that the use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures used by superpowers to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies, can be interpreted as a form of new colonialism. Despite the ambiguity of the term, scholars in postcolonial studies have agreed that neo-colonialism originated with Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and arguably one of Africa's most influential political leaders (Warrior, 2005). According to Nkrumah, the aim of neocolonialism is economic domination at the satisfaction of a few. Nkrumah became aware that the gaining of independence and national sovereignty by African states were symbolic and in no substantial way changed the relationship between the colonial powers and the colonized state. In effect the formal granting of independence "created a more Manichean system of dependency and exploitation" (Nkrumah, 1965).Furthermore, the idea of neo-colonialism has widened throughout time and goes beyond its predecessor's ideas. In "Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction", Robert Young sees neo-colonialism from a two-fold perspective in which "development and dependency theory" and "critical

development theory" add up to Nkrumah's perspective. As follows, he suggests that aspects such as economic growth and the progressive linear model of development have been so profoundly established in the neo-colonized states, that they have no other option but to join the system. As a result, he expands the neo-colonialism concepts and adds that the term "development" can nolonger be theorized entirely in economic terms but has to incorporate other dimensions like culture, gender, society and politics as well (Young, 2016). Thus, the aim of this analysis is to tackle three of EU's soft power forms— economic policies, cultural initiatives and its role as a mediator—in its quest for strengthening its international image and to what extent these soft power forms could be related to the premises of neo-colonialism and its newly aroused sub-theories.

With regards to the first form of power, the European Union (EU) is one of the most advanced and stable economies in the world. Being composed of 28 States, it can be considered the first commercial and economic power in the world (European Union, 2018). The economy of the Union in terms of production of goods and services, that is, its GDP, is above the GDP of the United States, with approximately 15,327,219 million euros (Eurostat, 2018). In addition, trade accounts for a great significance regarding the Union's performance in the international sphere. These outstanding economic data may be the reason why the Union has decided to focus on economic international policies as one of the backbones of its soft power policy. The EU is involved in both: in trade agreements to encourage cooperation and in several cooperation and development projects using its great economic potential. This is EU's way of doing soft power. As follows, more than half of the global development aid comes from the EU and it goes to the middle and low-income countries. In 2013, the EU spent 56,200 million euros in development aid (European Commission, 2014), coming from its own funds and from the national budgets of the member States.Following these lines, the EU has cooperated with Latin America over the last two decades, contributing with more than 1,000 million euros of investment (European Commission, 2014). This approach between both parties implies a positive collateral effect in both diplomatic and economic relations. As follows, taking into account neocolonialism features, this type of direct collaboration with the EU as a promoter, could be interpreted as an attempt of regional hegemony as well as a greater European influence in the Americas. Nevertheless, in this soft power context, European capital investments are seen as a privileged tool to share the experience and know-how of regional Europe with Latin American partners. Since 2007, approximately 556 million euros from the EU were earmarked for development in the field of social cohesion, water management, private sector development and higher education (European Commission, 2014). As evidence has shown, this type of investment in these specific projects has worked quite well. The improvement in these fields, especially in the development of the private sector and water management seems like they have caused a better perception of the EU in Latin America. Also, in the current stage (2014-2020) the EU will allocate almost 2,500 million euros to the Latin American region. These grants are intended to be used in the fields of security, good governance, social equity, environmental sustainability and the region's inclusive economic growth (European Commission, 2014). These economic aids are directly aimed at both society and the States. A fundamental element of EU soft power that is taking part in the strategy is the need to perform as closer as possible to the society. If actions are taken closer to the people, then it is easier to influence the actions or interests of that region. Nonetheless, by over influencing on issues of relative importance such as good governance or security, Latin American society can interpret these approaches as threats to the control of its region. The truth is that these economic projects do not mean a direct takeover by the EU, but are an economic contribution to enhance development. The EU, following its democratic and solidarity principles, considers that the aim behind the EU strategy is to help foreign societies to learn how to help themselves, so that they are able to develop their structures once they haveFollowing these lines, the EU has cooperated with Latin America over the last two decades, contributing with more than 1,000 million euros of investment (European Commission, 2014). This approach between both parties implies a positive collateral effect in both diplomatic and economic relations. As follows, taking into account neocolonialism features, this type of direct collaboration with the EU as a promoter, could be interpreted as an attempt of regional hegemony as well as a greater European influence in the Americas. Nevertheless, in this soft power context, European capital investments are seen as a privileged tool to share the experience and know-how of regional Europe with Latin American partners. Since 2007, approximately 556 million euros from the EU were earmarked for development in the field of social

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