**Bridging Normative and Market Power Europe: the EU’s Diffusion of Market-related Norms and Policies in ASEAN**

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**Abstract:**

The past two decades have witnessed a tremendous increase in the scholarly attention paid to the European Union (EU)’s external relations as well as the nature of the union’s role in world politics. With an aim to contribute to the EU-as-a-power debate, this research explores how EU economic and market-related norms and policies have been promoted and received by taking the EU’s relations with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an empirical case study. Drawing on transnational diffusion literature, this paper seeks to bridge the existing scholarly discussions on the Normative Power Europe and Market or Regulatory Power Europe, offering a more nuanced understanding of subjects of the EU’s externalization, as well as the processes and effectiveness of the EU’s diffusion of market-related norms and regulatory approaches.

**Key words**: norm diffusion, policy transfer, economic liberalism, European Union, ASEAN

1. **Introduction:**

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a proliferation of conceptualizations of the European Union (EU) as a power in international politics. Central to the contemporary EU-as-a-power debate is the idea to “loosen the core assumptions of state-centred traditions of foreign policy analysis” (Rosamond 2005:469) and to identify the characteristics that distinguish the EU as an international actor (Lavenex 2014). With an aim to contribute to the vibrant EU-as-a-power debate, this research explores how EU economic and market-related norms and policies have been promoted and received by taking the EU-ASEAN relations as an empirical case study. In doing so, this research’s objective is three-fold: first, drawing on analytical tools from transnational diffusion literature, it critically reflects on the engagement between Normative Power Europe (Manners, 2002) and Market or Regulatory Power Europe (Damro 2015; Young 2015). It argues that the EU’s diffusion of market-related norms and policies in ASEAN serves as a telling example of the EU’s projection of normative and market/regulatory power in external relations. Second, the paper responds to an increasing volume of empirical research on the EU’s norm diffusion in ASEAN (Allison 2015; Murray 2015). Drawing on a wide range of primary data, this research advances our understanding of the processes and mechanisms of EU diffusion of market-related norms and policy-settings in ASEAN. Third, this study seeks to measure the effectiveness of EU externalization – a factor that remains underexplored in the mainstream literature on the EU’s normative or market power.

Among a rich diversity of scholarly contributions, the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) stands out as one of the most influential approaches to understand the EU’s global power (Manners 2002; Pace 2013; Larsen 2014). In his original formulation of NPE, Manners refutes the realist and agency-based approaches to EU external relations and contends that the uniqueness of the EU’s global role lies in the union’s ideational power–namely its “ability to shape conceptions of ‘normal’ in international relations” (2002:239). According to Manners’s initial definition of NPE, the source of the Union’s normative power derives from the EU’s embracement of a set of universal values including five ‘core’ norms (peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, human rights) and four ‘minor’ norms (social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, good governance) (Manners 2002:242-3). Interestingly, Manners’s early definition of normative power did not explicitly include the discussion on the Union’s externalisation of market-related norms.

Whereas NPE literature as prioritised the EU’s promotion of “universal legal cosmopolitan values” (Parker and Rosamond 2013:232)[[1]](#footnote-1), the concept of Market Power Europe (MPE) proposed by Damro (2015) suggests that the EU’s identity and international actorness are based on the material existence of the EU single market as well as the union’s ability to externalize its economic and market-related policies and regulatory measures (Damro 2015). The major distinction between Manners’ NPE and the concept of MPE lies in the fact that these two approaches conceptualise the source of the EU’s power and identity differently. As Damro (2012:682) points out, MPE approach does not consider the EU as having ‘a particular or different normative identity in order to understand it as a power’. Rather, according to MPE, the size of the internal market, the EU’s institutional features, which equip the union with sufficient regulatory capacity (see also Bach and Newman 2007), as well as interest contestation related to interest groups and societal pressures should be considered as crucial determinants of the EU’s power (Damro 2015; Lavenex 2014). Similar to the concept of market power, some existing literature sees the EU as a global “regulatory power” with a strong ability to influence the regulations of other states as a result of the union’s large market and sophisticated regulatory capability (Young 2015).

Both normative and market or regulatory power approaches can be seen as significant contributions to the wider EU-as-a-power debate in the sense that these two scholarly camps prioritise different dimensions of the EU’s international identity and privilege different mechanisms through which the union exerts its influence in world politics. However, these academic discussions have overlooked, or at least underestimated, two important issues.

The first issue, as Parker and Rosamond (2013:231) pointed out, is a lack of investigation into the normative dimension of the EU’s promotion of “economic liberalism” or “market cosmopolitanism” in the union’s external relations. Given that NPE focuses primarily on the EU’s promotion of socio-political norms, it attaches limited importance to the EU’s externalization of market-related principles and practices (Parker and Rosamond 2013:233; Orbie and Khorana 2015). On the contrary, discussions of the EU’s market or regulatory power tend to privilege the analysis of material, interest-based and institutional factors, paying insufficient attention to ideational elements underlying the EU’s market and regulatory power (Orbie and Khorana 2015).

As a result, within the EU-as-a-power debate, the norm-driven and interest-driven factors have been analysed as mutually exclusive elements, resulting in a longstanding “interests versus values” dualism in the study of EU external policy. More importantly, due to the distinction between the ideational and material, there is a lack of interrogation into the normative, ideational, and ethical dimensions of the EU’s economic liberalism (Parker and Rosamond 2013:232). To address this limitation, this research intends to bridge the existing literature on NPE and MPE, offering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interactions between different forms of EU power. This echoes the belief that focusing on one power does not negate the other (Orbie and Khorana 2015). The second issue neglected by the existing literature relates to the effectiveness of the EU’s external influence. In particular, within the existing literature, the effectiveness of the EU’s normative and market power – namely the outcome of norm and policy externalization – remains underexplored at empirical level.

In order to address these shortcomings in the existing debates, this research provides an empirically grounded analysis of the EU’s externalization of market-related norms and policies in ASEAN drawing on analytical tools from transnational diffusion literature. The EU–ASEAN relationship, which can be traced back to 1972, constitutes one of the oldest interregional and group-to-group relationships. Evaluating the EU’s normative power by analyzing the norm diffusion between the EU and ASEAN will be useful because of the relationship’s comparatively long-time span, the continuously evolving norm diffusion strategy, and the particularity of ASEAN’s geopolitical, institutional and ideational context. Furthermore, building on an increasing volume of literature on EU-ASEAN interregional relationship and the EU’s norm diffusion vis-à-vis ASEAN (see for example Allison 2015; Jetschke 2010; Jetschke and Murray 2012; Murray 2015), this research aims to contributes to this debate by adding new empirical observations concerning the EU’s diffusion of market-related norms and policies, which had previously received scant attention.

The remaining paper proceeds in the following matter. The next section develops an analytical framework which shows that diffusion theory not only offers a more nuanced approach to uncover how EU market-related norms and policies are promoted and received, but also effectively transcends the conventional distinction between the material and ideational, which has been central to discussions of EU foreign policy. The paper then examines the empirical case study of the EU’s promotion of market-related norms and policies in ASEAN. It not only disentangles the subjects of the EU’s externalization, but also identifies the key mechanisms and effectiveness of the EU’s externalization of market-related norms and regulatory approaches. The paper then concludes with a summary of the research findings.

1. **Transnational diffusion literature: bridging the research on the EU’s normative and market power**

Diffusion is commonly defined as a consequence of interdependent decision-making (Gilardi 2012). Specifically, it examines how prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for the remaining non-adopters (Strang 1991). A rich volume of literature explains why and how international norms (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Acharya 2004; Zimmermann 2016) and concrete policy settings (Simmons and Elkins 2004; Gilardi and Füglister 2008) diffuse across the globe.

Although diffusion is uncommon in the discussions on the EU’s normative and market/regulatory power, this paper demonstrates that it can be an effective tool for understanding the current subject matter as well as for advancing the NPE and MPE/regulatory power approaches. First, according to diffusion literature, “not all diffusion items share the same characteristics” as they differ in their degrees of specificity (Klingler-Vidra and Schleifer 2014:269). Whereas normative power and market power/regulatory approaches have not explicitly discussed the specificity of the EU’s items of externalization, it can be observed that empirical research on the EU’s normative power primarily focuses on the Union’s promotion of socio-political norms and principles that are general and vague on details (e.g., human rights, democracy), with limited attention being paid to concrete diffusion items such as precise policy settings or regulations (see for example Lerch and Schwellnus 2006; Pace and Seeberg 2013). To the contrary, market power/regulatory power literature prioritizes more specific ‘market-related policies and regulatory measures’ that cover various types of ‘internal EU legislation and instruments’, while neglecting the EU’s diffusion of general ideas and principles (Damro and Friedman 2018:1398). Diffusion literature helps bridge this gap and allows a more nuanced understanding of the substance of the EU’s subjects of externalization.

Specifically, diffusion literature differentiates diffusion items into three categories according to the levels of specificity: (1) the overarching ideas with low level of specificity, (2) the governance model with middle level specificity, and (3) precise policy settings with high degree of specificity (see for example Klingler-Vidra and Schleifer 2014). Analysing EU diffusion items in such way, diffusion literature effectively bridges the NPE and MPE or regulatory approaches by attaching equal importance to overarching ideas or norms and concrete policy prescriptions in the diffusion processes. In other words, it encompasses the analyses of the EU’s externalization of both general market liberal norms and precise market-related policies and regulations.

Second, diffusion literature offers a more nuanced insight into how EU market-related norms and policies travel across borders. In the existing EU-as-a-power debate, there is a lack of consensus on how to theorize the EU’s diffusion mechanisms. NPE emphasizes the persuasive tools of the EU’s exercise of power such as dialogue, engagement, argumentation, and the conferral of shame, while excluding coercion and solely material incentives (Manners 2008:57). MPE and regulatory power, instead, tend to adopt a flexible approach and deliberately refrain from defining the mechanisms of the EU’s externalization. MPE or regulatory power literature, therefore, remains open to the analysis of both ideational and material, persuasive and coercive diffusion mechanisms (Damro 2015; Young 2015). However, both scholarly camps focus heavily on EU-driven diffusion mechanisms, paying insufficient attention to indirect or recipient-driven mechanisms.

Diffusion theory helps address this limitation by categorizing mechanisms into two groups:

the first category is direct (sender-driven) mechanisms, which include positive or negative incentives and socialization (Risse 2016). Whereas incentives relate to diffusion through manipulating utility calculations (e.g. financial and technical assistance, economic sanctions), socialization relates to the internationalization of shared ideas and beliefs arising from interaction between actors. Another group is the indirect (recipient-driven) mechanisms, including competition, learning and emulations. Competition refers to the actor’s adjustment of behaviour towards ‘best practices’ as a result of unsolicited external pressures. Learning can be conceptualized as actors drawing on ideas, policies, and rules that have effectively addressed similar problems elsewhere and are transferable to their own context. Emulation refers to actors adopting certain norms or copying proven models from other actors in order to increase their legitimacy. While learning involves a rigorous review of external ideas or policy information, in emulation, political actors imitate ideas or policies only in order to appear similar (Heinze 2011; Risse 2016). By conceptualizing diffusion mechanisms in such way, diffusion theory provides a more sophisticated framework to analyse how EU market-related norms and policies travel across borders, with an equal focus on sender-driven and recipient-driven mechanisms.

Furthermore, whereas normative power and market power approaches fall short of their ability to measure the effectiveness of EU externalization, diffusion theory provides analytical tools that can be operationalized for empirical investigation into the effectiveness of EU externalization. Specifically, diffusion literature identifies three types of diffusion outcome. The first type is full convergence or wholesale adoption of norms, ideas or policy settings, which rarely happens in practice (Risse 2016; Klinger-Vidra and Schleifer 2014). The second category is selective adoption or adaptation, which involves the recipient’s differential and partial adoption of norms, institutions and policies, adjusting them to particular local contexts. A number of studies showed that adaptation or selective adoption settles numerous cases of diffusion (see for example Klinger-Vidra and Schleifer 2014; Falkner and Gupta 2009; Radaelli 2005). These studies pointed out that when adaptation is in operation, ideas, norms and practices often alter in form and content (Klinger-Vidra and Schleifer 2014). The third type of diffusion outcome refers to resistance or rejection, which is characterized by limited import of external norms or practices at the point of adoption. In such situations, the targeted recipient explicitly resists or rejects particular normative models or policies promoted by external actors (Risse 2016). This type of diffusion outcome describes the failure of norm diffusion. Drawing on diffusion literature, this study further develops a list of benchmarks serving as empirical indicators when evaluating the effectiveness of EU’s norm diffusion in ASEAN at empirical level (see Table 1).

Table 1. Indicators of the effectiveness of EU norm and policy externalization

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Source: developed by the author

In addition, whereas conventional NPE and MPE literature prioritizes the role of norm-promoter, diffusion theory considers the recipient’s local context crucial to measuring the impact of the EU’s externalization. Researchers of diffusion literature consider this externalization to be mediated by local norms, political institutions, and economic structures (Klingler-Vidra and Schleifer 2014: 271). In brief, focusing on the specificity of diffusion items, effectiveness of diffusion, direct and indirect diffusion mechanisms and the recipients’ local context, diffusion literature not only offers a more holistic insight into the EU’s norm and policy diffusion process, but also compensates NPE and MPE/regulatory power approaches by addressing their limitations. The following table shows how diffusion theory’s analytical framework is compatible with and complementary to the NPE and MPE approaches.

Table 2. key features of NPE, MPE and diffusion theory

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1. **Disentangling EU externalization of market-related norms and policies in ASEAN**

This section applies the abovementioned framework to examine how EU market liberal norms and policies are promoted and received in the context of EU-ASEAN relations. Methodologically, this paper not only draws on qualitative content analysis based on a range of primary materials including EU and ASEAN official documents, statements, and media reports, but also adopts elite interview method. Seventeenth interviews were conducted with officials and researchers from the EU and ASEAN in 2017, using the semi-structured method. This method has two advantages when attempting to uncover causal mechanisms. First, it is a flexible way of conducting interviews, allowing new questions to be asked in the light of the responses of the interviewees. It thus facilitates a deeper exploration of the research topic. Second, semi-structured interviews facilitate the gaining of knowledge of the experience and interpretation of reality from the perspective of the people directly involved in the topic under investigation (Blee and Taylor 2002). Furthermore, these interviews reflect a comprehensive sample, including diplomats from multiple EU institutions and various departments in ASEAN who have contributed to the development and operationalization of EU-ASEAN cooperation.

This case study contributes to advancing the empirical research on the EU’s norm promotion towards ASEAN in two aspects: first, whereas the existing literature on this topic focuses primarily on the EU’s externalization of overarching norms and ideas such as regionalism (Allison 2015; Jetschke 2010; Jetschke and Murray 2012), human rights (Manea 2008) and constitutional norms (Hopkins 2015), this research enriches the empirical discussion on the subject by focusing on the EU’s externalization of economic and market-related overarching norms and concrete policy-settings vis-à-vis ASEAN. Second, this research advances our understanding of the effectiveness of the EU’s projection of normative and market power, which remains largely underexplored in the existing literature on EU-ASEAN relations.

***Specifying subjects of the EU’s externalization***

In order to disentangle the subjects of the EU’s externalization, this section draws on the analytical framework and disaggregates the EU’s diffusion items into three categories according to their levels of specificity. Above all, at the level of overarching ideas, it can be observed that the EU has actively promoted the general norm of economic liberalism in ASEAN. This observation echoes some existing literature which reveals that the external dimension of the EU’s economic liberalism is essentially manifested in the union’s objective to export its economic integration and single market model to ASEAN as well as its efforts to promote deep and comprehensive trade liberalization and regulatory convergence in the ASEAN region (Allison 2015). The overarching norm of economic liberalism can be observed in the EU’s global trade strategies. For instance, the 2006 communication on Global Europe explicitly pointed out pursuing deep and comprehensive trade liberalization at a global level constitutes the EU’s external priority in trade (European Commission 2006:2). The idea of promoting economic liberalism externally is also evidenced in the EU’s subsequent trade strategy documents, which sought to pursue further liberalization of investment and services and develop more systematic regulatory cooperation with major third countries (European Commission 2010:4; European Commission 2015b:11).

In line with the EU’s global trade agenda, the intention to externalize economic liberalism has penetrated deep into the EU’s external policies towards ASEAN. This observation is supported by the 2001 commission’s communication on “Europe and Asia”, which conceptualized ASEAN as a “force for liberalization and progress on trade and investment issues” (European Commission 2001:16). The document explicitly encouraged Southeast Asian countries to establish “open markets and a non-discriminatory business framework” and stressed the importance of “the integration of state economies into the free market” (ibid:5). Furthermore, according to the commission’s strategy document on regional programming for Asia (2007-2013), supporting ASEAN’s regional capacity building and economic integration was identified as the EU’s top priority in the ASEAN region (European Commission 2007).

Apart from promoting the overarching norm of economic liberalism, the Union attempts to diffuse more specific market-related governance models in ASEAN. These diffusion items with middle-level specificity have often been neglected in the conventional NPE and market power literature. Specifically, these middle-level norms include the organizational principles which are based on the EU’s internal market liberalization, standards harmonization and free movement of goods, services, capital and persons, as well as the principle of free and open trade compatible with the WTO framework and a rules-based multilateral trading system. These middle-level norms are closely related to the processes of internal market building and external trade practices, serving as operational guidelines for implementing the broader ideas of economic liberalism and economic regionalism.

These organizational principles and governance models can be detected in various EU official documents and interviews with EU officials. For example, numerous joint statements after EU–ASEAN meetings stressed the importance of rules-based free trade and WTO compatibility and “the commitment to uphold free and open trade, and support for a rules-based, transparent, and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system” (ASEAN 2018). The EU’s 2015 Communication on EU–ASEAN partnerships also emphasized that ‘recognized international standards and WTO principles’ should form the basis of trade cooperation and regional capacity-building (European Commission 2015a: 6). In addition, the promotion of economic governance models based on the EU’s own vision and experiences can be detected in various interviews with EU officials. Although in recent years the EU has become increasingly cautious about describing itself as a model for ASEAN economic community-building, data collected from interviews suggest that EU elites still have a strong desire to transfer the EU’s market-related operational model to ASEAN. As a former EU diplomat stated, “ASEAN still lacks an effective model of economic governance. If you look at ASEAN’s free trade: for trade in goods, yes; for services, not really; they don’t have free movement for capital and people”.[[2]](#footnote-2) The interviewee further contended that the EU’s single market and economic governance model can still provide valuable lessons for ASEAN, which ‘can learn from us, and analyze whether these experiences can be transferred into ASEAN’ (ibid.).

Furthermore, the EU seeks to promote precise market-related policy settings and regulations in ASEAN. These diffusion items with the highest level of specificity can be equated with the specific subjects of externalization in market or regulator power literature. In Damro’s formulation of MPE, the subjects of the EU’s externalization cover all types of internal EU legislations and instruments (Damro 2015). The novelty in this research lies in its attempt to create a link between NPE and MPE/regulatory power scholarships by examining how the EU’s market liberal norm can be transformed into concrete market-related policy-settings and regulatory measures.

Drawing on an analysis of various EU policy documents on EU-ASEAN relations (e.g. European Commission 2015a; EEAS 2016; EEAS 2017; EEAS 2019), the following table outlines some examples and key indicators of the market-related policies and regulatory measures that the EU seeks to externalize towards ASEAN stakeholders.

Table 3. Examples of the EU’s externalization of market-related policies and regulatory measures in ASEAN

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Source: developed by the author

By differentiating the EU’s overarching norm of economic liberalism and middle-level governance models from precise market-related policies and regulatory measures, the above discussion shows that the investigation into NPE and MPE or regulatory power can go hand in hand in empirical research. Furthermore, a closer look into the rationale behind the EU’s promotion of market liberal norms and policies in ASEAN reveals that a “normative” dimension of the EU’s economic liberalism (Parker and Rosamond, 2013) co-exists with the union’s pursuit of strategic self-interests. Based on documentary analysis and interview data, the research identifies the pursuit of economic and commercial interests as the primary motivation underlying the EU’s trade policy in ASEAN. Specifically, interviewees from the EU share a common view that economic interests, such as boosting investment flows and creating more opportunities for European firms, remain the main driver for the EU’s trade relations with ASEAN.[[3]](#footnote-3) This observation is supported by the EU’s intention to upgrade the EU-ASEAN partnership to a “strategic level”. The 2015 joint communication explicitly stated that “the EU has a huge stake in the success of ASEAN” which is largely due to ASEAN’s “high rates of economic growth as well as demographic dynamics” (European Commission 2015a:1). However, this does not mean that the EU has only pursued its self-interests in the region. In fact, this study observes that the EU’s externalization of economic liberalism in ASEAN is also driven by the EU’s normative considerations. For example, one EU diplomat pointed out that “we believe that the EU’s experience of economic integration can trigger prosperity and strengthen security and stability in Southeast Asia”.[[4]](#footnote-4) Another EU official shared a similar view and claimed that “as a regional organisation, the EU intrinsically believes in the model of regional cooperation and regional integration”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Thus, the EU intends to “help regional organizations, including ASEAN, address problems such as the absence of security architecture and lack of an internal market” (ibid). These observations suggest that, apart from achieving economic interests, the EU also seeks to pursue altruistic policy goals that it sees as being in ASEAN’s interests.

***Effectiveness of diffusion***

By evaluating the diffusion outcome against the list of indicators developed in Table 1, this sub-section shows that the effectiveness of the EU’s projection of normative and market power cannot be viewed as fixed and static; rather, ASEAN’s receptiveness to the EU’s market-related norms and policies have changed over the past two decades. As will be detailed in the later section, between the late 1990s and 2007, ASEAN was more receptive to the EU’s overarching idea of market liberalism as well as its single-market-building governance model. While this does not necessarily suggest that ASEAN had taken concrete steps and actions to pursue an EU-modelled single market, interview data collected from this research reveals that the EU’s ideas and model of economic integration had a strong impact on shaping the opinions of ASEAN key players in internal debates in the field of economic integration at the early stage of AEC development. Specifically, the EU’s overarching economic liberalism norm and its model of single-market building served as a more significant conceptual guide or a stronger reference point to ASEAN’s regional economic cooperation during the period of 1990s – 2007 in comparison to the recent decade. During this phase, indicator 3 can be observed, showing the EU’s influence on the construction of policy problems and agendas in the area of economic regional cooperation in ASEAN. Specifically, the EU’s vision of economic regionalism and its model of single market building served as an important external impetus for ASEAN to reconsider and reconceptualize its economic cooperation framework and objectives.

Numerous observations can be made from this case study, showing the existence of a certain degree of convergence between the EU’s single market model and ASEAN’s conceptualization of economic integration project at the initial stage of designing and formulating AEC. First, data collected from the research reveals that the EU’s model of single market played a crucial role in influencing ASEAN’s conceptualization of economic cooperation framework. Notably, a number of interviewees explicitly recognized the EU’s 1992 single market project as an important external impetus that prompted ASEAN policymakers to reconsider Southeast Asian region’s economic integration, especially at the early stage of designing ASEAN’s economic integration framework.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In the early 1990s, in light of the stalemate in the GATT Uruguay Round and increasing competitive pressures facing ASEAN by the development of NAFTA and the EU’s single market, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting called for a more integrated and more effective intra-regional economic cooperation in ASEAN region (Allison 2015), which was echoed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting later in the same year (AEM 1990). Despite some ASEAN member states’ scepticism and reluctance to pursue an ambitious economic and trade liberalization strategy, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) covered a number of components that seemingly draw from the EC’s model of deep integration, exemplified by the elimination of NTBTs, the harmonization of standards, and the reciprocal recognition of tests and certification of products.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is noteworthy that in the 1990s, some ASEAN member states’ policymakers openly supported an EU-modelled approach to economic integration. For instance, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad commented on the AFTA agreement in relation to the EU’s single market, stating that ‘movement towards a free trade arrangement is not as big a change as a single European Market, but for us, it is significant’ (cited in Kurus 1995:414). Later in 1997, he made another statement calling for the development of an ASEAN single market and economic union based on the EU’s model.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In the early 2000s, some ASEAN member states’ leaders made similar statements. For example, in 2002, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong contended that Southeast Asia should seek to model itself on the European Economic Community of the 1950s with the creation of a single market for goods and services. He noted that ‘the first step of moving to a single market I think can be taken over time…I myself would like to see ASEAN move into a single market, as I put it, in a European Economic Community mode’.[[9]](#footnote-9) Furthermore, in 2003, both Prime Ministers of Thailand and Singapore attempted to ‘urge more hesitant members of ASEAN to think big’ and encouraged the region to look to Western Europe’s experience of integration, especially against the backdrop of the wake of failure of the global trade talks.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In addition, the outbreak of Asian Financial Crisis, along with the rise of China and other rising markets in the late 1990s constituted another impetus for ASEAN to reconsider its economic integration plan by looking at the EU’s experience. A series of guiding documents on ASEAN economic integration published in the following years demonstrates a high level of convergence with the EU’s blueprint. For instance, the ASEAN Vision 2020 published in 1997 for the first time raised the idea of a common market in ASEAN’s official discourse, implicitly acknowledging the added value of the EU’s single market. The Bali Concord II adopted in 2003 aiming to create an ASEAN Economic community explicitly stated that the objective is to establish ‘a single market and production base’ (ASEAN 2003). The wording of these documents implies that, during this phase, the overarching ideas and blueprints produced by the EU’s single market had a high degree of receptiveness in ASEAN.

However, since 2007 ASEAN has become less receptive to the EU’s model of single market building. During the last decade, ASEAN’s approach to EU diffusion tends to focus on more concrete policy settings and prescriptions at the functional level. When evaluating the effectiveness of EU diffusion against the list of indicators during this timeframe, a number of key indicators in Table 1 (i.e., Indicator 1, 3 and 6) can be observed. Specifically, ASEAN has initiated and implemented various new policies in the field of economic and trade liberalization as a result of the EU’s direct support (Indicator 1). For example, with support from ARISE Plus, four integrated initiatives aiming at facilitating the building of the AEC were established and can be seen as significant evidence of EU policy externalization. These four initiatives are: ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS), ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety (ARAC), ASEAN Solutions for Investments, Services and Trade (ASSIST), and ASEAN Trade Repository (ATR).[[11]](#footnote-11) Another telling example of the EU’s effective diffusion of specific policy initiatives can be found in ASEAN’s newly developed statistical system ASEANStats which draws significant lessons from the EU’s Eurostat (Interview 16). ASEAN’s progress in terms of collecting reliable and accurate statistical data to monitor the process and results of regional integration is regarded as one of ‘the biggest and most visible success story of EU-ASEAN cooperation in recent years’ (European Commission 2013a:31)

Second, this research also finds that some of the EU’s policy initiatives have played a role in shaping and constructing the policy problems and agendas in ASEAN (indicator 3). For example, the EU’s practices in terms of liberalizing aviation market have been regarded as an important reference point and source of inspiration which has contributed to shaping ASEAN’s internal policy agenda of creating an ASEAN Single Aviation Market (ASAM). Specifically, ASEAN’s roadmap for the technical elements of the ASAM explicitly considers the EU’s Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research Programme and other regional concepts and developments as a crucial reference point which may be adopted for harmonization and air traffic management procedures in ASEAN.[[12]](#footnote-12) Another telling example is ASEAN’s adoption of the cosmetics regulatory scheme in 2008 to improve its cosmetics harmonization based on the EU’s cosmetics control as a model (Jinachai and Anantachoti 2014).

Additionally, the research also observes that the EU’s initiatives, especially its trade-related assistance programmes aiming to facilitate ASEAN’s economic integration, have been considered having positive impact on ASEAN (Indicator 6). According to the EU’s evaluation of trade-related assistance in third countries and interview data, various EU-initiated projects such as APRIS, ARISE, ARISE Plus, ECAP and COMPASS have received positive responses and comments from ASEAN stakeholders that involved in the programmes (European Commission 2013:668).

***Explaining the diffusion mechanisms***

This section shifts its focus from the effectiveness of externalization towards diffusion mechanisms. This research reveals that the EU’s projection of normative and market power in ASEAN has relied on a combination of EU-driven and ASEAN-driven diffusion mechanisms. Specifically, among the sender-driven mechanisms outlined in the analytical framework, positive incentives and socialization have played a leading role in the EU’s externalization of market-related norms and regulatory measures. This finding departs from some existing case studies which suggest that EU-driven positive incentives and socialization play a marginalized role in the process of EU diffusion of regional integration in Southeast Asia (Jetschke and Murray 2012). With regard to recipient-driven mechanisms, it is observed that ASEAN prioritized the mechanisms of competition and emulation in the early stage of AEC building, while shifting towards the mechanisms of learning in the recent decade.

Data collected from the research shows that the EU has provided considerable financial support and technical assistance to ASEAN in order to promote market liberalization and economic integration in the region. According to several EU diplomats, the EU has “spent a lot of political capital and money to support ASEAN’s economic integration”[[13]](#footnote-13) and plans to increase such support to ASEAN in the future.[[14]](#footnote-14) The implementation of a diverse range of Trade-related Assistance (TRA) projects can be seen as major forms of EU-driven positive incentives. Notably, between 2003 and 2018 the EU implemented over a dozen development assistance projects relating to economic and trade areas. Statistics show that between 2004 and 2010 the EU dedicated around 24.8 million Euros to TRA projects in ASEAN (European Commission 2013:110). Moreover, in the budget cycle of 2014–2020, the EU plans to invest 85 million Euros on projects aiming to improve sustainable and inclusive economic integration in ASEAN. This figure accounts for around 43% of the EU’s overall financial assistance to ASEAN (EEAS 2015). These TRA projects, which are characterized by the EU’s non-reciprocal financial and technical support, can therefore be regarded as evidence of positive incentives.

Moreover, the EU’s socialization efforts have often been intertwined with financial and technical assistance, which supports the assumption made by diffusion research that diffusion mechanism boundaries are often blurred in practice. EU-initiated socialization can be found in most TRA projects, in which the exchange of information, ideas, and experiences takes place between EU experts and ASEAN stakeholders. Numerous TRA projects, such as ARISE Plus, COMPASS, and ECAP, include a large number of seminars, workshops, or study visits, where EU officials and diplomats can share the union’s best practices and knowledge with ASEAN.[[15]](#footnote-15) For example, under the COMPASS project, socialization efforts took the form of “technical cooperation to provide advisory services, studies, workshops, to key officials of ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat officers (National Statistical Offices, Customs, Central Banks, ASEANstates)” (EU–ASEAN COMPASS 2013). In a similar vein, the ARISE Plus project has involved obvious EU-driven socialisation efforts, exemplified by various types of workshops, roundtable discussions, seminars, and forums on issues such as non-tariff measures (NTMs), trade statistics, and customs transit systems.[[16]](#footnote-16) With a dynamic combination of financial and technical support and information sharing, ARISE Plus serves as a flagship project through which the EU promotes the idea of economic regionalism and externalizes its policies and regulations especially in terms of trade facilitation and transparency, standards and conformity assessment, customs, transport and ACTS, as well as economic integration monitoring and statistics (ASEAN Plus 2020).

When assessing ASEAN-driven diffusion mechanisms, this study finds that ASEAN’s reaction to the EU’s promotion of economic liberalism has shifted over time. As mentioned earlier, between the late 1990s and 2007, ASEAN tended to imitate the EU’s overarching idea of economic liberalism and single market model. In this phase, two specific mechanisms–competition and emulation–played a crucial role in ASEAN’s internalization of EU-like ideas of economic liberalism and governance model. One important reason behind ASEAN’s institutional adaptation and the idea of AEC lies in ASEAN leaders’ fear of losing global competitiveness after the financial crisis.[[17]](#footnote-17) The necessity for ASEAN to strengthen its comparative advantage after the financial crisis constituted an important rationale for embracing deeper economic liberalization and integration. In such a situation, the EU’s norms and models of economic integration stood out as “best practices” that ASEAN wanted to draw on.[[18]](#footnote-18) As one former ASEAN diplomat recognized, in the early years of AEC formation, the EU provided a lot of inspiration for ASEAN, given the EU’s successful experience of integration and economic prosperity.[[19]](#footnote-19) This suggests that the mechanism of competition played a crucial role in helping ASEAN adopt EU-like ideas and approaches to economic integration during the early years of AEC-building. As a result of unsolicited external pressures (ASEAN’s loss of competitiveness and credibility after the financial crisis), ASEAN attempted to adjust their ideas or policies towards “best solutions” in order to obtain competitive advantages.

Furthermore, this research finds that ASEAN’s receptiveness of the EU’s market-related norms is also connected to the mechanism of emulation, through which ASEAN hoped to obtain legitimacy or secure its survival in an uncertain environment. One feature of emulation is political actors’ attempts to copy already proven ideas or policy items from their source model. Evidence of ASEAN’s attempt to imitate the EU’s overarching ideas and economic governance model can be found in various ASEAN documents as well as interviews. One ASEAN official recognized that during the decade following the financial crisis, “we indeed had a broad vision to imitate the EU’s way of economic integration”.[[20]](#footnote-20) Other evidence of emulation can be found in discourse from high-level ASEAN officials and policy experts. For example, as early as 1997, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad suggested pursuing the objective of being “a single market and an economic union à la the EU” during the Economic Minister’s meeting in October 1997 (Kurus 1995).

Moving on to the later stage (since 2007), ASEAN’s utilization of indirect mechanisms underwent a significant change. During this time, the mechanism of learning became the primary ASEAN-driven mechanism characterizing its interaction with the EU. Unlike emulation, learning involves a process of reflection by the adopter in order to find effective solutions to a given problem. Data collected from interviews suggest that during this phase, ASEAN has gradually relinquished the desire to imitate the EU’s economic regionalism model, although it still believes in the benefit of trade liberalization in general.[[21]](#footnote-21) However, ASEAN no longer wants to pursue the ambitious goal of becoming an EU-style single market. According to an official from ASEAN Secretariat, “in the early 2000s and even until 2007, we may still have had an intention to become an EU-like economic community; now after ten years, ASEAN is improving its economic integration based on its own pace”.[[22]](#footnote-22) The official further explained,

“we do not have such aspirations for many reasons: we are much more diverse than any other region in the world, our member states cannot agree to develop a supranational body and they will not delegate foreign policymaking to an ASEAN institution… as a result, we gave up the idea of developing a single currency, free movement of people and a common ASEAN visa, which are still unrealistic” (ibid.).

A closer look at the latest version of AEC blueprint 2025, published in 2015, reveals that the language relating to the AEC goals has significantly changed since the 2008 version. It no longer mentions the objective of creating a single market and instead sets only the goal of creating a deeply integrated and highly cohesive ASEAN economy (ASEAN 2015:2). The 2015 version uses the term “seamless movement of goods, services, investment, capital and skilled labour within ASEAN” (ibid:3) instead of terms such as “free movement”. This implies that the objective of AEC has become less ambitious. As an ASEAN official confirmed, nowadays ASEAN explicitly avoids the use of EU-like terms to describe AEC goals, as ASEAN prefers to have regional integration based on their own pace and context.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The above discussion demonstrates that ASEAN has shifted away from emulating the EU’s ideas and norms of economic integration. After a decade of reflection on AEC-building and ASEAN institutional adjustment, ASEAN political elites increasingly believe that the organisation is not ready to pursue ambitious EU-style economic integration and institutionalization. Given the differences in economic development and political systems, ASEAN policymakers have realized that the EU’s model of economic governance cannot be transferred to the local context of Southeast Asia (Jetschke and Murray 2012; Murray 2015). Nevertheless, abandoning the objective to become an EU-modelled economic community does not mean that ASEAN has stopped learning from the EU’s ideas and practices relating to economic liberalization and integration. On the contrary, there has been an increasing amount of ASEAN-driven learning happening at the policy level, exemplified by ASEAN’s active learning from and selective adoption of EU-initiated policy settings relating to trade liberalization and economic integration. Contrary to some existing literature perceiving the EU as a passive reference point for ASEAN (Wong 2012), this research shows that the EU still plays a crucial role in inspiring ASEAN’s development of market-related policy frameworks and regulations.

An interview with an ASEAN official confirmed that ASEAN still seeks to learn from the EU’s experiences, especially in areas such as capacity-building and trade facilitation at functional level.[[24]](#footnote-24) ASEAN’s active learning processes can be found in many EU-initiated TRA projects. For instance, in the ARISE Plus project, ASEAN stakeholders have demonstrated strong willingness to learn from the EU. With support from the EU, four integrated initiatives aiming at facilitating the building of the AEC were established and can be seen as significant evidence of ASEAN learning from the EU. These four initiatives are: ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS), ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety (ARAC), ASEAN Solutions for Investments, Services, and Trade (ASSIST), and ASEAN Trade Repository (ATR).[[25]](#footnote-25) Specifically, developed jointly by ASEAN and the European Union, ACTS has facilitated ASEAN’s lesson–drawing from the EU’s practices. ASEAN’s official introduction to the ACTS instrument reveals that the EU’s assistance and values of free trade and market integration played a significant role in building the AEC in general and in establishing concrete policy settings such as ACTS.

To summarize, this section has revealed that the process of the EU’s externalization of market-related norms and policies in ASEAN has been characterized by a combination of sender-driven mechanisms (positive incentives and socialization) and recipient-driven mechanisms (competition, emulation, and learning). This observation complements the existing literature on the EU’s diffusion in ASEAN by investigating both sender-driven and recipient-driven mechanisms in shaping the process of EU’s externalization, allowing a better understanding of how EU market-related norms and policies travel across borders.

***ASEAN’s local context and its impact of the effectiveness of EU externalization***

A closer look into ASEAN’s local context shows that the organisation’s “normative prior” (Acharya 2004) – namely the pre-existing normative structure of ASEAN – has played a significant role in shaping its reactions and responses to the EU’s diffusion of market-related norms and policies. Whereas most of the existing research tends to perceive ASEAN’s cognitive structure as static and fixed (and dominated by the “ASEAN Way”), this study challenges that view. In fact, ASEAN’s normative considerations relating to market liberalization and economic integration have been evolving over the past two decades, and these normative changes have significant implications for ASEAN’s response to the EU’s externalization. This section examines the dynamic nature of ASEAN’s cognitive structure relating to economic liberalism before discussing how ASEAN’s existing normative structure has impacted the effectiveness of the EU’s externalization.

When tracing the history of economic integration in Southeast Asia, it can be observed that the overarching idea of trade liberalization is not new for ASEAN. As early as 1977, ASEAN member states signed a Preferential Trading Arrangement (PTA). This represented an important milestone for ASEAN economic cooperation, as the PTA marked the end of some ASEAN member states’ (especially Indonesia) resistance to trade liberalization (Dosch 2017). The PTA can be viewed as one of ASEAN’s early attempts to pursue intra-regional market liberalization, although the actual achievements of the PTA remained limited. In 1992, ASEAN member states agreed to implement the ASEAN Free Trade Area, which marked another breakthrough in ASEAN economic integration. These events imply an ideational shift among ASEAN decisionmakers, who incrementally embraced the idea of economic liberalization. This shift was partly caused by the shifting global economic environment, especially the trend of “new regionalism” in other parts of the world, exemplified by the establishment of NAFTA and the European Single Market (Dosch 2017).

Between the late 1970s and the 1990s, ASEAN’s gradual acceptance of the idea of economic liberalism created a degree of normative congruence between ASEAN and the EU. The Asian financial crisis accelerated ASEAN leaders’ ideational shift, in that the crisis strengthened ASEAN political elites’ desire for deeper and more comprehensive economic integration. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, ASEAN’s desire to pursue deeper economic liberalization resonated with the EU’s intention to promote economic liberalism externally. This normative congruence at the level of overarching ideas paved the way for ASEAN’s further adoption of the EU single market model in the initial design of the AEC in 2003. As mentioned in the previous section, during the early years of AEC creation, ASEAN resonated with the EU’s idea of economic liberalism by trying to imitate the EU’s single market model. Since 2007, however, ASEAN gradually abandoned the EU-like blueprint of economic integration, although learning can still be observed at the level of precise market-related policies and regulatory measures. It is worth investigating what factors might explain this shift.

One major problem was that ASEAN’s desire to pursue deeper economic integration based on the EU’s governance model was constrained by the ASEAN’s fundamental political norms of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference. In other words, the tension between ASEAN’s political principles and economic norms led to the exclusion of an EU-style governance model from the AEC agenda. As an ASEAN official pointed out, political norms such as non-interference, state sovereignty and consensus-based decision-making remain fundamental priorities for ASEAN and are unlikely to be challenged or replaced in the foreseeable future.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Another factor in ASEAN’s lowered expectations of economic integration lies in its institutional structure and capacity. In particular, interviewees from ASEAN pointed out that there is little similarity between the EU and ASEAN in terms of institutional structure. The low level of institutionalization has been a major constraining factor for ASEAN to achieve further economic integration.[[27]](#footnote-27) Another interviewee attributed the adaptation of AEC goals to ASEAN’s institutional and legal limitations and argued that “ASEAN is only at the very beginning of building a rule-based institutional framework”, which makes it difficult for ASEAN to develop a centralized common commercial policy as the one of Europe.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Another problem is that ASEAN Secretariat lacks substantive power, capacity, and funding to implement the ambitious goal of establishing a well-functioning single market. As one former ASEAN diplomat mentioned, many of the EU-funding projects did not go beyond five years, as ASEAN cannot fund the projects beyond five years on their own.[[29]](#footnote-29) An additional domestic factor that constrained ASEAN’s pursuit of the EU-styled economic integration lies in the region’s high level of diversity. One ASEAN official explicitly acknowledged that one of the main reasons why ASEAN gave up the objective of becoming an EU-like single market is that “ASEAN has such a high degree of diversity that our member states may never agree on the development of a supranational institution”.[[30]](#footnote-30) The intergovernmental nature and diversity of ASEAN have significantly constrained the EU’s externalization of market-related ideas and policies in the region, which is reflected in the failure of the EU-ASEAN regional FTA negotiations in 2009 and the Union’s shift towards a bilateral approach of FTA negotiation with individual ASEAN member states (Meissner 2016). This view is shared by numerous interviewees from the EU, who pointed out that the high level of diversity and difference among ASEAN members in terms of economic and political systems was a major obstacle for the EU when trying to promote economic liberalization and integration in the region. These factors relating to ASEAN’s domestic normative and institutional structures help explain how local context plays a significant role in impacting the outcomes of the EU’s externalization of market-related norms and practices.

**Conclusion**

By analysing the process through which the EU externalises its market-related norms and practices in ASEAN, this study problematises the conventional distinction between normative and market/regulatory power in the EU-as-a-power debates. Specifically, drawing on analytical tools from diffusion literature, the research provides an in-depth analysis of how the EU’s overarching idea and model of economic liberalism as well as specific market-related policies and regulatory measures are promoted and received in ASEAN. In doing so, this research shows that the EU’s projection of normative and market power in ASEAN has relied on a dynamic combination of EU-driven and ASEAN-driven diffusion mechanisms, which has ultimately resulted in ASEAN’s partial adoption of the Union’s market-related ideas, models, and regulatory policies. The paper makes two contributions to the existing literature. First, it provides a more nuanced analytical framework which can effectively bridge the research on NPE and market/regulatory power, given that diffusion literature pays equal attention to general norms and precise policy settings. Moreover, by evaluating the rationale behind the EU’s interactions with ASEAN, this study shows that there exists a normative dimension of the EU’s externalization of economic liberalism in ASEAN which co-exists with the union’s interest-driven policy objectives. Such observation helps remedy the longstanding “ideational versus normative” dualism in the study of EU foreign policy.

Second, the research contributes to advancing the empirical research on the causal mechanisms and effectiveness of the EU’s projection of normative and market power. As shown in this case study, the process of the EU’s externalization of market labour norms and policies in ASEAN has been characterized by complex interactions between sender-driven and recipient-driven diffusion mechanisms. Moreover, it is observed that the effectiveness of the EU’s externalization has changed over time: although in the early years following the Asian Financial Crisis, ASEAN intended to imitate the EU’s overarching idea of economic liberalism and regional integration model, it now tends to selectively draw lessons from the EU’s market-related policy prescriptions and regulatory measures from a functional perspective, hoping that these specific policy settings will fit ASEAN’s own pattern of economic liberalization. The paper has shown that the shift in ASEAN’s receptiveness is closely associated with the organization’s domestic factors, especially its changing normative conditions and limited institutional and legal capacities. It also argued that investigations into the EU’s normative and market/regulatory power in world politics should take into consideration the active role that the norm-recipients can play in determining the EU’s external influence.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**Data availability**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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