Abstract: Niklas Luhmann's interpretation of modernity focuses on autopoiesis and functional differentiation as factors combining towards an unavoidable polycontextuality of modern society (Luhmann 1992). This paper aims at reemphasizing the fact that Luhmann's fully developed conceptual apparatus though provides highly relevant theoretical tools to cope with the question of intersystemic relations; and in particular as regards the issue, to say the least topical, of governance.

From this point of view, we claim for a serious consideration of two other crucial levels of differentiation. Firstly, recent developments in Modern Systems Theory tend to reappraise a longlasting territorial differentiation (Albert 1999) inherited from previous segmentary and stratified differentiations, which is notably active through numerous territorialized structural couplings. Secondly, Luhmann and other authors taking over from him rightly underline the importance of an organizational differentiation, its linkage with functional differentiation, and the central role of organization in structural couplings (for recent collective works, see Seidl & Becker 2005, Bakken & Hernes 2003).

We thus argue here that territorial, organizational and functional differentiations interfere with each other, territorial aspects playing a decisive role in the evolving complexity of modern society mostly through processes of structural coupling and territorialized organizations. Relying on a brief European exemplification, this paper attempts to demonstrate how processes of territorial and organizational adjustments can come with profound changes within functional systems.

Keywords: Niklas Luhmann; polycontextuality; territoriality; organization; European governance.

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In a first section and as an introduction, we will briefly present Niklas Luhmann's concept of functional differentiation, and its implications for modern society. Secondly, we will focus on critics towards Luhmann's construction of world society and of politics as autopoietic systems. Thirdly, we will introduce the issues of structural coupling, organizational differentiation and comme back to territoriatty, to appraise their central role regarding functional differentiation, functional systems' interpenetration and steering. The fourth section will be devoted to an exemplification: after defining “governance” at the light of previous sections, we will follow Jachtenfuchs (2001) on European governance as a self-description of the political system. Focusing on a specific European context of readjustment among organizations and intersystemic relations, we will try to echo our preceding theoretical remarks.


Firstly, we will present in a brief introduction Niklas Luhmann's understanding of modern society. We would like to underline here the fact that this vision is mainly a descriptive/theoretical one: Luhmann wants to emphasize the obsolescence of concepts inherited from the enlightenment, regarding the description of a society which has deeply changed (see Luhmann 1999:37 & following). Luhmann mainly aims at furnishing a more efficient reading-grid for modernity, and believes that systems theoretical approaches offer great promises regarding this goal. This issue is crucial, given the risk of deception brought upon expectations built on obsolete descriptions of social complexity; and moreover, within a governance or say, a steering perspective.

The most characteristic feature of Luhmann's theory of modern society may be his claim for a sociological focus on communication, rather than on action. This choice has huge implications, in particular as regards psychic, biological, physical systems, to be addressed as parts of the environment of society. This focus on communication is well explained by Seidl & Becker (2006):

While the concept of action is intimately bound up with the concept of the actor, agent or subject as ‘producer' of the action, the concept of communication is free of reference to any underlying subject. In this sense, the communication can be said to be produced by the communication system rather than by individual actors. (Seidl & Becker 2006:19).

In other words, a sociological focus on communication allows concentrating upon the social event par excellence, as a specific process which acquires its own logic and autonomy and gets loose from the participants in communication (see notably Luhmann 1995, chap.10, “society and interaction”). Indeed, Luhmann understands communication as the synthesis of the selection of information, the selection of utterance, and the selection of understanding (Luhman 1995:142): no “actor”, or participant in communication, can claim control over the unity of these three selections. Communication can only complete its unity at a systemic level, namely within one or several social systems (see Seidl & Becker 2006:19, quoting Luhmann).

Accordingly, Luhmann conceives of social systems as exclusively constituted of communication, and declined into three types, interaction, organization, and society itself - the latter being both constituted of the totality of social systems and of the totality of communication events. From here, the author claims that such social systems are autopoietic, namely they reproduce the network of their elements by means of the network of their elements: social systems in the sense of Luhmann's theory reproduce communications by means of communications. More precisely, Luhmann's

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2 For a more detailed approach of this question, see Hayoz 1991, or in English Seidl & Becker (2006).
sociology is a sociology of distinction: social systems constitute themselves upon the difference from their environment, each element of the system being oriented by this difference, the network of elements owing its closure to that difference, the system owing its unity to that difference.

In other ways, Luhmann's systems are differences between a system and its environment (Luhmann 1999:51), they can reach this environment and its complexity only through their very own logic, processes, organization. In this sense social systems are closed ones, namely they constitute upon an operational and informational closure. This closure is however the very source of systems' openness, insofar as systems “know” their environment only by means of this distinction: the communications that constitute social systems always refer to some extent to their environment, and the system observing itself through that difference always observes its environment.

Thus following Von Foerster, Luhmann focuses on the recipient side of the communication, namely the production of information within the system, notably but not only in response to perturbation by the environment. Shortly, two aspects are interlacing here to converge towards Luhmann's constructivist perspective: the selection of understanding as a production of information, which Luhmann would describe as contingent; and the situation of double contingency that emerges every-when two systems take part to communication, producing co-dependent and still contingent information. Luhmann takes double-contingency to be at the source of every social system or emerging social order, as the emergence of determinacy from uncertainty (Luhmann 1995: chap. 3).

As was suggested, this peculiar conception of social systems applies to society, which as a system has to be understood as based on a difference, closed, autoreferential, and autopoietic. Moreover, society as the totality of communications can only be understood as worldwide, given that these communications can from now on be interconnected all over the globe (Albert, 1999:253). To this extent, technical progress such as printing press have a crucial importance for the development of modern society's specific complexity (see notably Luhmann 2000). On this basis Luhmann claims to draw a “univocal concept of society and a theory of the societal system” (Luhmann 1990a:292, my translation):

Society can now be apprehended as an autopoietic system constituted by communications and which itself produces and reproduces the communications that constitute it by means of the network of these communications. (Luhmann 1999:52, my translation)

Obviously – despite and indeed thanks to its self-closure – society remains a system in an environment. It is a system with boundaries. These boundaries are constituted by society itself. (…) Insofar as this principle of self-constituting boundaries becomes clear, society differentiates itself. Its boundaries are independent of natural features like ancestry, mountains, or seas, and as a result of evolution, there is finally only one society: the world society, which includes all communications and thereby acquires completely unambiguous boundaries. (Luhmann 1995:410, my emphasis)

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3 The concept of self-observation may clarify that: “self-observation is the introduction of the system/environment distinction within the system, which constitutes itself with the help of that distinction; self-observation is thus the operative factor in autopoiesis, because for elements to be reproduced, it must be guaranteed that they are reproduced as elements of the system and not as anything else.” (Luhmann 1995:36-7)

4 See, for example, Von Foerster 1978: “the environment does not contain any piece of information, the environment is how it is” (p.146, my translation).

5 “something is contingent insofar as it is neither necessary nor impossible; it is just what it is (or what will be), though it could also be otherwise. The concept thus describes something given (something experienced, expected, remembered, fantasized) in the light of its possibility being otherwise; it describes objects within the horizon of possible variations.” (Luhmann 1995:106)

6 Hereafter, we will refer to society by the adjective “societal” (system), to avoid confusion with the more general term of “social” (system).

7 It is due to be noted here that Albert and Hilkermeier, if taking into account Luhmann's argument, also consider this point to be a necessity within his theoretical apparatus: “the world provides a necessary phenomenological horizon
As for him, Luhmann considers modern society to be primarily organized by a principle of functional differentiation, society being differentiated into subsystems, each in charge of a peculiar function of modern society. The crucial point is that every such functional subsystem of society will differentiate and develop its own autopoiesis, its own boundaries, its own communication code, its own society. From an historical point of view, functional differentiation is a third phase of social differentiation which supplants, as the primary principle of differentiation, segmentary differentiation -or “differentiation into similar units” (Luhmann 1995:190)- and hierarchical/stratified differentiation:

One can describe a society as functionally differentiated as soon as it develops its main subsystems with a view towards specific problems which then will have to be resolved within the frame of every corresponding functional system. This implies to renounce to a fixed hierarchy among functions (…) Instead of such a hierarchy (…) one should establish the rule according to which every system takes its own function to take precedence over others and then conceives of others functional systems –and in fact of society as a whole- as its environment. (Luhmann 1999:43-44, my translation)

Functional differentiation then implies a high level of complexity for each of these subsystems, which can only be attained through an “autopoietic take-off” and a radical autonomy. Functional differentiation implies strict self-reference of functional subsystems, from which results heterogeneity of modern society, torn between its subsystems and corresponding functions: one and only judges for their own functions, functional subsystems of society can't coordinate, and their relations are to be conceived of as frictions. Functional differentiation as a means of reducing the probability of communication's rejection (Luhmann 1999) is a response to an increase of social complexity; by the other hand, this differentiation will itself lead to a specialization and a increase of complexity of every social function, endowed with a specific, autoreferential, autopoietic, fully autonomous system.

In other way, functional differentiation implies as many social “realities” as functional systems, each emerging and effectuating its autopoiesis thanks to a specific medium which orients its communications: society can only described or apprehended through one of its functions/subsystems, resulting in a plurality of different and equally valid descriptions of society. Modern society is a unitas multiplex, the unity of the plurality of its subsystems. Centreless, society then shows a deficit of rationality insofar as rationality takes place within each of its subsystems, and is thus multiple. The rationality of the societal system is then conceived as the contingent result of multiple functional rationalities and systems' interactions; in particular society will not be able to steer itself:

In modern societies, functional systems, above all, have the possibilities of self-steering. Society itself has delegated all the problems and therefore does not possess any agencies that could, as a superfunction of perception, perceive all the functions. Although all steering takes place within society and therefore always executes the autopoiesis of society (i.e. communicates), there is, in the strict sense of the word, no self-steering of society at the level of the entire system (Luhmann 1997:49-50).

Instead of a societal rationality or of a steering center, a dual logic of autonomy/interdependency is established among social subsystems. In Luhmann's view, every attempt to steer will collide with the unavoidable polycontextuality of modern society. Consequently, social order as the result of a decentralized process of co-evolution of social systems is nothing but highly contingent, and evolution does not necessarily mean progress. Regarding the skepticism of Luhmann towards a for the entirety of meaning. It is an ultimate reference point necessary for the purpose of the theory and as such is understood in a purely immanent fashion, without any reference to an "empirical reality”” (Albert & Hilkemeier 2004:183)

8 See for example, politics and power, economics and money (see Luhmann 1999).
steering of the social order, the interesting point is precisely that the author mainly argues about the limits of steering directly implied by the very concept of autopoiesis. Given the informational and operational closure of social systems, all steering is an internal operation of the system, and consequently can only be conceived of as self-steering (Luhmann 1997). Luhmann certainly does not deny the fact that self-steering of a functional system—in particular a political system—has effects on society and on other social systems,

But this effect is certainly not steering and it is not possible to steer it because it depends on the construction of differences in the context of other systems and because it falls under the steering programs operating in these systems. (Luhmann 1997:47-48, original emphasis).

Luhmann speaks of contingency from below (Luhmann 1992a:401) to express the fact that the steering constraint is in fact exercised by the “steered” system, in the sense that the latter decides whether or not to conform to it. Moreover, not only a functional system cannot be assured of the response to its steering attempt, but one of the strongest criticisms Luhmann made to defenders of an autopoietist approach to steering is the very inability of a functional system to escape from its medium and binary code and integrate this possible rejection of its code. If taking into account such a rejection in order to refines its attempts of steering, any functional systems would incur the risk of being re-paradoxified, de-determined, and thus of putting its own autopoiesis in jeopardy. Polycontextuality, Luhmann argues, cannot be integrated within a functional subsystem, but will only be reproduced through the bias of its own code (Luhmann 1992b); the autopoietic exclusiveness of the binary code banishes polycontextuality from every functional system.

In order to conclude this section and brief introduction to specific aspects of Luhmann's interpretation of modern society, one can underline that Luhmann's world society is by no means to be understood as unitary, which is perhaps his strongest—and most debated—contribution to a theory of society. As we mentioned, the sociology of differentiation upon which Luhmann based his conception of modernity implies a multi-level approach of social systems, in the sense that several types of social systems co-exist and differentiate. By multi-level differentiation, we would like to underline the fact that several types of social systems co-exist which are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, society cannot be identified with the totality of interactions or with the totality of organizations (Hayoz, 1991:35), and on the other hand, these interactions and organizations differentiate themselves in a way that largely affects society as a system9, insofar as a communication within an organization or an interaction is always a communication within a function system (Albert and Hilkermeier 2004:183) and is always a communication within society.

Mostly, a communication event will take on different meanings within different social systems, which is precisely the point of an irreducible polycontextuality of modern society; steering issues, due to the specificity of an autopoietist approach, seem to be consistently eclipsed by auto-reference and strict operational closure. The key issue is then undoubtedly the relations between social systems, which were accurately conceptualized through the notions of interpenetration and intersystemic structural coupling. The present work precisely aims at contributing to a clarification of these issues, by focusing on the co-evolution of functional, organizational, and territorial differentiation. Given Luhmann's view on world society, and its insistence on putting politics on the same level as other functional systems, this cannot be done unless these two crucial points in Luhmann's theoretical apparatus are more precisely discussed.

9 For example, in Luhmann's words: “the gap between interaction and society has become unbridgeably wide and deep (...). Society, although largely existing as interaction, has become inaccessible to interaction.” (Luhmann 1995:430).
II/ Shortcomings in Luhmann's conception of modernity: World Society and World Politics as autopoietic systems?

The view we intend to defend here takes his source within Modern System Theory (MST), although it relies on a criticism towards two central aspects of Luhmann's theoretical description of modern society. By extension, what becomes at stake is the questionable parting of Luhmann's theoretical apparatus from his specific interpretation and use of this apparatus. More precisely, the first criticism we wish to make ours here is mainly theoretical – namely it relates to the theoretical statute of world society - whereas the second one may concern this theory/interpretation issue – regarding the place of the political system within world society. As for us, a central link does exist between these two main criticisms, namely through the crucial matter of self-description.

The first criticism we would like to evoke here has been much discussed before within MST, and concerns the questionable autopoietic quality of world society as a system. Indeed, we have insisted on the fact that, in Luhmann's sense, society is to be understood as an extremely heterogeneous system, whose unity cannot be recognized insofar as “one can only meet functional systems” (Luhmann 1999:45). Whereas functional analysis is largely accepted as a basis for Modern System Theory analyses, the very idea of world society as an autopoietic system has been criticized even within this school of thought (Kerwer 2004:199). Luhmann himself insists on the functional differentiation as the source of modern society's attributes (see section 1), whereas when reading his works it can't be missed that functional systems are not cited as social systems next to interactions, organizations, and society. As said Luhmann takes society as a unitas multiplex, which in our sense quite simply means that society “is” the functional systems.

What is at stake is in fact the autopoietic attribute of society as a system. As we also mentioned, Rossbach (2004) underlines that world society is first perceived as the horizon for social events, because of Luhmann's focus on communication (section 1); in this author's view however, the argument becomes problematic when Luhmann tries to incorporate autopoiesis to this scheme: considering that all communication events can be connected, does not mean that they are. Luhmann explained that society was the autopoietic system par excellence because society produced communication and communication constituted society (…) The problem with this argument is that it has nothing to do with “autopoiesis”. Instead, it merely exploits the logical properties of a “totality”. (…) To say that the totality of communication is an autopoietic system means that every communication must be “connected”, possibly via a sequence or “chain” of intermediate communication, with every other communication. (Rossbach 2004:53)

Behind these formal criticisms, one can perceive stronger disagreements. This may undoubtedly the case with Willke, who underlines the problematic unity of world society and concludes that if society as a whole and a horizon actually relates to the world, it is doubtful that it would be a world society. The crucial dissonance here concerns the very nature of a society, insofar as Willke regards a society as being necessarily self-organizing. In other words, this author is clear as to his opposition to Luhmann on this precise point:

I conceive of modern society not as a world society, but still as a unit of social self-organization with territorial and normative boundaries. Only such territorial and normative delimited units are able to base their (self)-steering on structures which are autonomous. (…) As long as there is no authority, no procedures and no rules, which set norms for the self-steering of the world as a whole, the talk about world society makes no sense. (Willke, quoted by Kerwer, 2004:199).

As for us, we would rather not consider that a society is such if, and only if, self-steering and self-organization processes are involved. Our interpretation is in fact intermediary: on the one hand we believe that from an autopoietist perspective Luhmann's skepticism over self-steering of society
is to be duly taken in account, and that Willke's view may undermine the most central contribution of a modern system analysis to a theory of society, namely its fundamental contingency aspects. On the other hand, justified criticisms towards Luhmann's perception of world society as a system make it difficult to consider world society as something more that the horizon of all communications.

In particular, if in his view self-steering is clearly not a societal attribute, society when understood as a system should however show specific systemic processes; yet, self-descriptions and self-observations are limited to a functional level (see Luhmann 1995:430-32), and as Albert underlines the societal autopoietic closure does not work on the basis of a specific code (Albert 1999:254). One can thus hardly imagine how society as a system may differentiate from its -physical, biological, etc.- environment and re-entry this differentiation in order to achieve its very auto poiesis. In other words, society may indeed demonstrate an attribute of recursivity insofar as it reproduces its elements by means of its elements, whereas its reflexivity may be put to doubt given that the societal system cannot re-entry the difference from which it is constituted.

Finally, we agree on Luhmann's interpretation of a polycontextual, multi-valued society, without hierarchy between these values and without any means of operating specific distinctions: society is communication besides any meaning, insofar as meaning emerges within functional systems to which society delegated its main functions. Society is however the locus for inter-systemic coupling, interference, multi-contingency, which undoubtedly overtakes territorial boundaries. This does not mean that territorial boundaries do not play a crucial role towards these processes; nevertheless this means that society as a world system is put into doubt, and consequently that Luhmann's exclusive focus on worldwide phenomenon may be further discussed.

These conclusions lead us to a second criticism over Luhmann's interpretation of modern society, regarding his description of the political system. To put things straight, in spite of the fact that we may in part meet Willke's criticism, we do not disagree with Luhmann when he puts the political system at the same level than other functional subsystems of society: this is precisely what polycontextuality as a “logical” consequence of auto poiesis teaches us. Two points however may appeal for a refining of Luhmann's interpretation of politics: the first one is notably relative to his analysis of territorial boundaries, and the second one to a specific link we believe politics may develop to societal steering. As to Luhmann, politics has been emerging as a functional system via the semantics of statehood, which allows to fix the political medium, i.e. power, and thus to product collective binding decisions:

semantics focused on the concept of the state make self-description of the political system possible. The state is then neither a concrete object directly accessible, neither a fragmentation of the world, neither the people in shape, neither a multitude of men (…) The state can then be defined as the formula for self-description of the political subsystem of society. (Luhmann, 1999:87, my translation, original emphasis).

Consequently, the political system of society is territorially segmented, constituted by means of the concept of the state, although Luhmann considers it a world system. Indeed, as to Kerwer (2004) the emergence of states presupposes the globalization of politics, and in this sense concepts like sovereignty, on which were based territorial differentiation, does relate to the world system of politics (Kerwer 2004:199, Esmark 2004:134). Politics requires territorial differentiation insofar as collective binding decisions require establishing a consensus, which “is only possible within regional limits” (Kerwer 2004:202).

Still, Luhmann's analysis of territorial boundaries focuses on their obsolescence in relation to functional differentiation as the primary form of differentiations: within stratified societies,

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10 We extend here Luhmann's double contingency, to a polycontextual society, namely a society in which numerous functional rationales co-exist.
terrestrial boundaries used to furnish a stark way of differentiation, allowing a society to define itself as such in opposition to its environment. Luhmann states that modernity and functional differentiation have complexified the “outside world” in a way that annihilated this ability of territorial boundaries to make system-environment and inter-systemic relations converge:

> Everything placed on the other side of the border became more complex (...). The significance of borders increased from the political point of view and, at the same time, decreased, when the question was of obtaining suggestions for handling matters being on the other side the border. (Luhmann 1982:239)

In other words, economic, scientific, legal, mass-medial, etc., communications increasingly cross territorial boundaries in a global trend of what Brock (2004) called a “de-bordering of the State”\(^{11}\), which can in a MST view be identified as an increasing disjunction between territorial and functional boundaries, and to our view expresses the co-existence of functional differentiation with a remainder of segmental differentiation, notably perpetuated by a semantics of sovereignty (see Esmark 2004:134). Going further, Kerwer underlines how globalization exacerbates the conflict Luhmann has identified between norm-oriented societal subsystems and innovation-oriented societal subsystems, namely politics/law and economics/science/technology (Kerwer 2004:201-2, quoting Luhmann).

To put it briefly, the political system in Luhmann's sense seem to be one and multiple, again. Moreover, Luhmann is really skeptical regarding the ability of inter-national relations to fulfill the political function (see Kerwer 2004:203-4, quoting Luhmann). Although the political system is oriented through the state, its autopoiesis and its driving force would have to be looked for at a world level, and certainly not at the organizational level which is necessarily implied by inter-state relations. Albert (1999) makes a valuable suggestion regarding these issues and the autopoiesis of the world political system:

> One could (...) reasonably assume that the political system of world society does not constitute a subsystem of world society differentiated functionally to such a degree that territorial differentiation has ceded 'primacy' entirely. The system of states may not yet have evolved from an agglomeration of interaction systems and organisations. (Albert 1999:262).

As to this author, the complexification of an international political system and regionalization processes may reinforce this hypothesis. This approach gives a new light to Kerwer's assumption of a conflict between societal subsystems, and may allow to explain how come the global political system could only be met through state self-description and/or through inter-national relations. One can then consider that the world political system, previously organized through the only semantics of the state, is transforming precisely due to increased trans-national irritations within its societal environment. This crisis of transformation may then culminate in the emergence of other types of political self-descriptions. Precisely, in the same way as world society does not reach a unitary self-description, the world system of politics may also be torn between several self-descriptions relative to several territorialities. Globalization, regionalization, and persistence of the state combine to bring about a complex imbrication of multiple self-descriptions within the global political system.

The last point we would like to analyze here is the issue of societal steering and governance, and its link to politics. As we underlined, we make ours the assumption of Luhmann considering the political system as one functional subsystem of society among other equally autonomous functional subsystems of society. However, we do believe one point is overestimated by Luhmann regarding societal steering, namely what Teubner calls “intervention claims” of the political system (Teubner 1993:113).

\(^{11}\) *i.e.* “the dissolution of the territorial congruence of state, economy and society”(Brock 2004:89).
In other words, we tend to believe that politics have a special affinity with societal steering. Let us be well understood: within our still-luhmannian perspective this certainly does not mean that politics are performing societal steering operations, but rather that politics develop a specific self-description oriented towards societal steering. Whereas (self)-steering and steering within society are available to every functional subsystem, politics' function implies the production of collective binding decisions, oriented towards society's integration (Brans & Rossbach 1997:426-427). The fact that “collectivity” is precisely a political construction and as such relates to the only political system does not change the fact that political operations are oriented towards societal steering. The latter can thus be understood as a necessary illusion for the self-description of politics as an action system, with view to perform its function towards the societal system. As Luhmann himself insists, whereas this is not so to speak societal steering, this has crucial effects on society:

The political system is thus only able to steer itself by a specific political construction of the difference between system and environment. That this happens and how it happens has without doubt tremendous effects on the society because the other functional systems must orient themselves along the differences thus produced. But this effect is certainly not steering (...) (Luhmann, 1997:47, original emphasis)

In other words, the former remarks and criticisms regarding Luhmann's conception of world society and world politics brings us to focus on a specific transnational self-description within the political system oriented towards societal steering, which we can refer to as governance. On the one hand, it appears to us that together the “world society problem” and the “world politics problem” give back legitimacy to more local, territorialized modern system analyses. On the other hand, reappraising societal steering on this basis and within a governance perspective may provide an interesting insight to study modernity. Indeed, despite our argument that societal governance as semantics is always political, its effects on society may be crucial. Before we can exemplify this through a European governance approach, a few points still need to be clarified, namely the specific way governance as political self-description may result in societal effects.

III/ Coupling, territoriality, organization.

The one concept we take as fundamental regarding steering issues is definitely Luhmann's version of structural coupling, and even more precisely inter-systemic structural coupling or interpenetration. As we indeed mentioned, from a theoretical point of view steering issues consistently seem to be reduced to the claim that an autopoietic system is closed, implying that none of its operations can take place outside its boundaries, which in turn implies that steering can only be self-steering and that intersystemic relations are to be thought in terms of disturbance. Structural coupling in a broad sense thus quite simply relates to the perception by the system of the disturbances originating from its environment. This raises the crucial issue of inter-systemic relations: despite Luhmann's well-known argument that no guarantee exits as to the developments of functional subsystems of society will remain compatible or not (Luhmann 1997b:76), this author conceives of inter-systemic relations as fundamental regarding autopoiesis itself and societal evolution. Luhmann even claims that what is outside a system's boundaries is certainly more important than what is inside (Luhmann 1995:212). Within a steering perspective the emergence of a specific social order is at stake, and undoubtedly relates to these inter-systemic relations. Intersystemic structural coupling in Luhmann's sense implies that systems, as part of their mutual environment, may interact and jointly contribute to the emergence of autonomous couplings.

12 Or, in Luhmann's terms, to “the specific way the system presupposes states or specific changes within its environment, and to rely on them.” (Luhmann 1993c:86, my translation)
The reciprocal contribution to the selective constitution of elements that leads to such an intersection (...) interpenetrating systems converge in individual elements - that is, they use the same ones – but they give each of them a different selectivity and connectivity, different pasts and futures. (Luhmann 1995:215, my emphasis)

One may argue that within this specific perspective inter-systemic relations may contribute to the emergence of a upper level of determination. Even if structural coupling does not elude the steering limits we just evoked, this is where societal steering and “reflexive governance” may reappear. We have indeed mentioned that Luhmann takes double-contingency, i.e. the confrontation of self-referential systems, as the source of the emergence of determinacy from uncertainty. This determinacy precisely resides in a connective value emerging from every selection made by the systems interacting (Luhmann 1995:116): every social system is built upon a de-paradoxification which occurs by creating determinacy, every selection within the emerging (meta)system reinforcing other selections by creating more connective value. Within a strict autopoietist perspective, this connective value may in fact be Luhmann's truncated version of a lebenswelt; as to us, we firstly argue that structural coupling is a source of inter-systemic connective value.

As we mentioned within the introduction, our point here is to underline that functional differentiation interferes with territorial and organizational differentiations. The steering perspective, and more precisely the specific governance perspective we adopt here, furnishes a well-delimited angle of attack for such a broad question. We will now see how on the one hand organization may have a peculiar role regarding intersystemic coupling, and on the other hand how territoriality may in a correlated way be understood as a specific connective value.

Let us first take a closer look to organizations. Organizations in Luhmann's sense are social systems and as such are self-referential, they reproduce communication on the basis of their communications, and are constituted on the basis of a difference between system and environment. More precisely, their autopoiesis implies several distinctions, namely membership, program, position, and decisions (Jönhill 2003). Shortly, decision is thus the basic element of an organisational system, an ephemeral communicative event constantly reproduced through the autopoietic closure of the system. Decision will be an element of the system if and only if it emerges from the system and the roles and functions the organization defines, notably if it is communicated through persons that are members of the organization, taking part to communication following the role and/or function which is their.

Organised social systems can be understood as systems made up of decisions, and capable of completing the decisions that make them up, through the decisions that make them up. (Luhmann 2003a:32, original emphasis).

Decisions may be confined to a recursive, self-referential system if they mutually define contingency space for each other, what their possibilities are, what they may draw upon, and above all what they refer to in order to occur as a decision, derived from other decisions made by the very system. (Luhmann 2003a:37)

Luhmann thus develops a precise conceptualization of the organisational system, and his interest in organisation is very early and may give light to his whole theory of modern society (Brans & Rosbach 1997:421). The crucial point we would like to insist on here concerns the existing developmental link between organizations and functional systems: the emergence of functional systems comes with specific organizational systems. We can indeed start by underlining that the development of organizational systems is subsequent to functional differentiation and more importantly, to the fact that functional systems “do not constitute unities capable of action” (Teubner 1993:131, my translation) “as such, the large societal subsystems of law, politics, economics or science are not capable of collective action” (ibid.151). In other words, functional
systems need organizations insofar as only organizational systems can communicate (Albert & Hilkermeier 2004a) and be addressed with communication (Drepper 2005). Organization is the only system whose development can be influenced via decisions, contrary to functional systems which remain ungraspable rationales of communication reproduction.

Moreover, Luhmann underlines how functional systems develop themselves on the basis of both one medium and a multitude of organisations (Luhmann 1999): whereas the flexibility of the medium furnishes great variety to the functional system, organizations tend towards redundancy, both are necessary for the functional system to form expectations (Luhmann, 1999:59). The medium thus provides a loose way to connect the system's operations, while organizations rely on strict rules and give form to the medium (see Andersen 2003). In addition, regarding the somehow problematic link between multiplicity and redundancy of organizations, and unity and variety of the medium, functional systems will rely on a huge organization, namely a macro-organization, for example the banking system for economics, the administration for politics.

Consequently, not only organizations and functional systems are not mutually exclusive, but they are strictly complementary; in particular, Luhmann insists on the fact that an organization – and by extension a macro-organization- cannot perform a function in the place of a functional system. Whereas organizations concur to a reduction of complexity, they are not complex enough to replace functional systems (Albert & Hilkermeier 2004a:186).

Decisive is the fact that neither the possibilities of the development of the societal system and its functional differentiation nor the possibilities of a technical rationalization of organizations can be fully exhausted if both system types are fused into one. (Luhmann 1990b:90)

Organisations and functional systems being both autonomous systems, their interrelations still are to be thought of in terms of mutual perturbation. If functional differentiation is the primary differentiation within modern society, other forms of differentiation may perdurate; precisely, our point here is to make clear how organizational differentiation may have a great impact on society's development. In Luhmann's own terms:

*Only the communication media of law and money enable the establishment of large organizations and (...) at the same time, they also contribute to the differentiation of organizational levels vis-à-vis those of which the society as a whole already exists. The conditions for the differentiation of an organization are at the same time the conditions for the differentiation of organizations and society.* (Luhmann 1990b:89-90, my emphasis)

To go further, however autonomous may organizations be, they won't exist without functional systems insofar as organizational communication can only acquire societal relevance through a functional echo: they can communicate if and only if their communication provokes communication within a functional system (Andersen 2003:161). In other words, the organizational system, however strictly autonomous, cannot effectuate its own autopoiesis without a specific link with a functional system. The major link that would exist between a functional system and an organization is thus the use of a specific medium. In Albert & Hilkermeier terms:

*Organizations need to be viewed in the context of the specific function system whose basal code they employ. Only the operation within a function system provides organization with a social "identity", so to speak.* (Albert & Hilkermeier 2004a:192).

The crucial point regarding organization and coupling may reside in this medium issue. Whereas organizations usually rely on a primary medium (Andersen 2003) in order to produce decisions, they are in fact multilingual (Teubner 1996c) in the sense that they can use several functional mediums: the medium of the organizational system is the decision (Jonhill, 2003:28), which is however always coded into a functional medium in order to obtain a crucial societal pertinence; a primary link exists with 'its' functional system and code, but the organization is able to handle other
functional codes. As an example, a firm as an economic organization won't limit itself to economic communications, insofar as it has to conform to legal procedures, it may have to orient its decisions regarding political issues, it may dispose of a communication department to cope with mass-media, etc. Teubner advances here an interesting argument as to this multilingual characteristic, which would put the organization at a central place for inter-systemic linking. As multilingual systems, they could represent the first link within a functionally differentiated society (…) they constraint [functional systems, J.B.] to handle in parallel the specific information they produce form the same events. (Teubner, 1996:160, my translation).

This happens to be the exact definition we have been using for inter-systemic structural coupling, namely the mutual contribution to elements to which each part of the coupling gives different meanings. Andersen (2003) seems to further the argument, considering that whereas all organizations are multilingual the development of the differentiation of organizational systems of society results in the emergence of polyphonic organizations, namely organizations that don't have a primary functional code anymore, and for which no hierarchy remains between the values/codes/voices within the organization. This author argues:

the polyphonic organization emerges as a result of the way that the function systems explode beyond their organizational forms. In this context explosion means that the function systems expand their themes without leaving their operational closure (…) what happens is that the symbolically generalized communication media become available to a much greater number of communication forms than originally employed by the functionally related forms. (Andersen, 2003:167, original emphasis)

In other words, the ability of organizational systems we just evoked, namely using several functional codes and favoring the coupling of functional systems, comes with an expansion of these very functional subsystems of society. As a conclusion, we can repeat that organizational communication is subjected to a societal resonance or connectivity, which precisely makes organizational systems an inter-systemic link: the nature of organizational autopoiesis will urge it to meet a societal echo which may ease the coupling of functional systems. More importantly, organization then appears as a potential means to access a polycontextuality which functional systems won't be able to meet.

The discussion finally leads us back to territoriality, now that things may be clearer regarding coupling and organization. Within our specific governance perspective, several remarks come out at the light of what precedes. First, despite territoriality is always a political artifact, one can witness a territorialization of other social systems: social systems are territorialized as a result of their coupling with a political system which has based its very autopoiesis on a territorial differentiation. Consequently, functional systems may incorporate a territorial aspect, not because of political constraint so to speak, but because territory as a connective value may have became essential to their own autopoietic reproduction. In Luhmann's own terms:

Territorial borders are quite meaningless for science, and economic interdependence crosses political borders not occasionally, but as a general rule. Borders affect those functional sectors only to the extent to which politics can affect them and to which they cannot organize their own ways-out. (Luhmann 1982:241, my emphasis)

Moreover, we would like to add that functional systems may give themselves a territorial component via their organization and mostly, via their macro-organization. In other words, we mentioned how functional systems have to rely on organizations: precisely organizational systems are historically territorialized, due to their essential coupling with the political system; even more, territoriality is in fact always an organizational attribute, as Esmark (2004) underlines:
the internal differentiation of the system of politics takes place through organization-building and the semantics of sovereignty underlines this internal differentiation as territorial segmentation. In other words, territorial segmentation always takes the form of territorial organization. (Esmark 2004:136, my emphasis).

In fact, territoriality as a political construct has gained societal resonance because of specific structural couplings between the state-oriented political system and other functional systems of society: territorial differentiation has been validated at a societal level every-when this specific territorial distinction has been used by other social systems. In this sense we believe that territory has a specific societal relevance or connective capacity for social relationships (Luhmann's terms, see Luhmann 1995:392-393). From a steering perspective, this territorial connectivity is valuable, and as to Esmark

may not have provided political control in the sense that functional differentiation still “trumped” territorial segmentation, but it made a certain control possible in the form of structural and operative couplings between the functional subsystems by way of territorial organization (...) In this view, the condition for political control, even though in a limited sense, is a matching territorial organization in the different functional subsystems of world society. The current lack of political control is consequently to be understood as a lack of symmetry. (Esmark 2004:138-9).

To conclude this section, we believe that in a steering perspective one has to focus not only on functional differentiation, but also on the organizational level of society, and on the territorial aspects of inter-systemic coupling. Steering should indeed rely upon organizations, and territorialized structural couplings. We will now try to exemplify the preceding arguments by briefly studying the European governance issue.

**IV/ “European governance” and Modern Systems Theory: polycontextual organizational design and societal filtering of a political impulse.**

Theoretical milestones are now in place for us to define a more precise concept of governance, before we can strat to probe it by studying the case of European governance. Governance and steering issues have been the source of a rich Modern System Theory literature already, in particular in the 1990's when MST premises may have benefited from a wider broadcasting due to a peculiar academic echo of governance issues (for a review, see notably Brans & Rossbach 1997). We will here briefly present what we take as the central feature of a MST view of governance: what is there at stake is always some kind of societal reflexivity where miscellaneous structural couplings earn themselves an inter-coupling connective value. As author more optimistic than Luhmann may have underlined, steering relies on coupling with a view to create societal connectivity: we can cite different analyses in terms of “collibration” (Dunsire 1996), “reflexive law” (Teubner 1983, 1993, 1996), “meta-governance” (Jessop 1998, 2003), “de-centralized context steering” (Willke 1992). As we have however already underlined, if governance is of course related to steering, we argue here that it has to be understood as a peculiar case of steering insofar as it relates to the self-steering of the political system. As long as it is a societal reflexivity that is at stake, this peculiar link to the political system has not always been strictly enunciated. We nevertheless believe that a modern systemic analysis has to keep in mind the polycontextuality of modern society and the subsequent limits of steering Luhmann has exposed.

We have seen that organizations have a peculiar role regarding inter-systemic coupling, which implies that various self-steerings within society may interact notably through organizational systems. We thus argue that steering as a contingent attempt to affect the environment is made through and towards organizational systems. In particular, polycontextuality may be accessible only through organizations and coupling, and may never be accessed directly by an all-
encompassing structure. As an example, Jessop’s claim for governance as “a revaluation of different modes of co-ordination not just in terms of their economic efficiency or their effectiveness in collective goal attainment but also in terms of their associated values” (Jessop, 2003:104) can only be understood as an organizational or inter-organizational process.

We believe that governance precisely relies on that very idea that polycontextuality can only be accessed through organizations, and more precisely through multiple organizations. Indeed, if governance implies increasingly taking into account private actors, hybrid regulation networks, multiple and divergent rationales of autonomous social systems (see notably Mayntz 2003), it still follows from a political process of regulation and societal integration. Governance indeed supposes acknowledging the limits of unilateral action by a regulator (see notably Jessop 2003, and his idea of “requisite irony”), but still presupposes a regulator. Governance quite simply relates to the observation that governing a polycontextual society implies a polycontextual way of governing. Governance within a modern systemic perspective then focuses on self-limitation of “regulating” systems – mainly political or legal- and on societal reflexivity of steering processes – i.e. making self-regulation of social systems easier.

Within this conceptualization, ‘societal steering’ is thought of as social systems’ co-evolution, precisely the co-evolution of functional subsystems and of their institutional manifestations: societal steering is the contingent result of autonomous and interdependent functional systems’ self-steerings, and in particular of their interdependency through organizational systems. The expression ‘co-evolution’ traduces here the highly contingent character of self-referential systems’ confrontation, and the illusory character of governance (see previous section) originates precisely in this contingency. However, societal co-evolution is partly the result of political self-description, political intervention’s claims, self-steering of other social systems reacting to this political impulse, and a pool of strong structural coupling -notably territorialized ones.

Our point here is that once the problematic issue of the exclusively worldwide character of society -and the subsequent exclusive focus on worldwide systemic processes-, European processes emerge as a huge laboratory for modern systemic observation of modernity. Several crucial points among which the heterogeneity of functional processes, the re-composition of structural coupling and macro-organizations, the processes of functional, organizational and political mutations, etc. appeal for a modern systemic analysis. Such an analysis has been initiated already (see in particular Albert 2002, Jachtenfuchs 1995, 1997, 2001, Sand 1998a, 1998b, 2002), we would like here to further a more specific analysis in terms of governance as we just have defined. Moreover, we argue that the few remarks we have made here find a great echo within European processes of governance.

Let us first define what can be a modern systemic view on European Union. The key idea may be the heterogeneity of European processes: European Union (EU) is neither society, neither a functional system, neither an interaction or an organization: EU is not a social system, it is crossed by functional rationales, organizations and multiple political self-descriptions. In Jachtenfuchs terms:

One possibility to deal with the present state of the EU without loosing its particular features out of sight is to regard it as a ‘dynamic multi-level system’ (Jachtenfuchs/Kohler-Koch 1996). ‘Dynamic’ refers to the permanent process of institutional change, ‘multi-level system’ indicates that the EU includes its member states in an encompassing system while at the same time, national political, economic or legal system continue to exist. (Jachtenfuchs 1997:2).

Back to the remarks we have made, we tend to believe that this view implies a political bias, and that the dynamic multilevel system is to be understood as a form of political system. We claim for a
more frankly polycontextual approach, and in particular we distance ourselves from the author
when he qualifies EU as a system, a fortiori a political one. Consequently, we tend to believe that a
more polycontextual and organization-oriented view may be more fruitful, and to this extent we
approach Albert's view on the one hand, and Sand's on the other:

a systems-theoretically inspired viewpoint remains open for the development of the
European Union as an agglomerate of dynamic multi-level-systems. (Albert 2002:305)

[The] tendency, legally as well politically, to treat and to conceptualize the EU as one Entity,
one organization, may contribute to a failure to see the real complexities and the
incoherences of the organization and the way it changes. (...) [I]t will enhance the analytical
and critical quality of our studies if we consistently analyse the organization as ongoing
process which are functionally and communicatively differentiated. (Sand 1998a:96).

Nevertheless, Jachtenfuchs introduces crucial ideas regarding the European construction process,
and in particular concerning the “uneven europeanization of social systems” Jachtenfuchs 1997:3.
Europeanization is here to be understood in a very specific sense, namely the uneven
territorialization of social systems at the level of European Union. In Albert's terms:

the latter question is conceptually embedded in the issue of, on the one hand, how various
territorially differentiated subsystems of world society's function systems are differentiated
against each other and, on the other hand, how they are coupled with each other as well as
other function systems (and possibly subsystems of those respectively) (Albert 2002:301).

Europeanization thus refers to institutional manifestations of functional systems, namely and
firstly European organizations which concur to functional self-reinforcements by emerging as solid
macro-organiznations. The key issue here, regarding our preceding remarks, is that europeanization
first traduces a political impulse, when major societal transformations are guided by inter-national
negotiations and treaties; however, this political impulse is filtered by other social systems and then
mostly obeys functional rationales and/or organizational self-reinforcement. A closer look on these
issues may fruitfully start with legal, economical and political systems.

The europeanization of the legal system 'materialized' through self-referential processes (Weiler
2005:31), developing constitutional legal doctrines within a federal European legal structure (Ibid.),
gradually widening community's very competences. The European Court of Justice is to that extent
of crucial importance, side by side with self-reinforcement of a doctrinal logic which crossed
national boundaries, and mostly national and community's courts:

The history of this court-based constitutionalization fascinates lawyers since it seems to
confirm the existence of a legal culture of argumentation that is accepted over and above
national legal systems. (Joerges & Emerson 2004:164).

Courts are charged with upholding the law. The constitutional interpretations given to the
Treaty of Rome by the European Court carried legitimacy derived from two sources: first,
from the composition of the Court, which had as members senior jurists from all Member
States; and, second, from the legal reasoning of the judgements themselves. (Weiler

Secondly, the europeanization of the economic system, maybe the most advanced (Jachtenfuchs
1997:3) is also related to a political impulse, but mainly obeys a self-referential rationale: the
success of the single market thus traduces both the constitution of an “internal environment” for the
economic system and the constitution of specific expectations within a “self-referential circle”
(Luhmann 1989, 2001:48). Fundamental here is the territorial character of such an accomplishment:
markets are territorialized insofar as they rely on a set of rules which are not developed within
economics but within legal and political systems and/or through specific structural couplings:

the functioning of market is (...) predicated on the existence of a meta-set of rules (...) - what
can be called property rights, governance structures, rules of exchange, and conceptions of control. (Fligstein & Merand 2001:7-8).

In other ways, the European Single Act has been relying upon structural coupling and as such was still quite a polycontextual project. Most importantly regarding a money-centered conception of economics, the launching of the Euro as a territorial manifestation of the money medium, relying on a very independent European Central Bank and a restrictive Stability and Growth Pact are even more crucial. Money is indeed not anymore related to a sovereign state (or here, to sovereign states), but within a monetarist perspective to a mainly to an economic functional rationale. In this sense the single currency bears a more mono-contextual approach, where economic/political differentiation is furthered, which can be seen in the statutes of the economic macro-organization. De jure states are deprived of various instruments but the ECB is moreover de facto strengthened and able to capture competences that are not planned by the treaties (as an example, euro-zone change policy, Créel et Al. 2007): from a general point of view, the ECB is widely sheltered from social pressures that remain diffuse thanks to a widely state-centred political system (CAE 2002:29).

Precisely, political europeanization assumes an ambiguous character: on the one hand, it mobilizes both a self-description as 'multi-level' or network governance (Kohler-Koch 1999) and state-centered self-description (not to mention a public opinion whose strongest transnational feature may be euro-skepticism), and on the other hand it is highly departmentalized (Boyer & Dehove 2001) and power thus diluted. The central point may be the lack of a State semantics at the level of Europe, but one has to keep himself from simply transferring a national model to a transnational entity: this is precisely what governance theories teach us. Regarding Luhmann's description of political international differentiation though (see Luhmann 1990b), for lack of a strict supra-national logic, administration (Governments & European Commission) has to a large extent been internationalised whereas politics (Parliaments) is still divided between a European parliament with limited powers and isolated national parliaments (Magnette 2004), and that public (electorate) is still widely national (Weiler 2005:84). Political inclusion is then mainly a national process despite a transnational mode of governance, and the “self-referential circle” we have evoked as to the europeanization of economics is here non-existant.

That's where political governance reappear, and Jachtenfuchs' work are again extremely valuable at this point, regarding this concept of network governance:

it is not only an analytical concept but also a political ideology, a kind of micro-constitutionalism of the European Union, because it starts from the assumption developed in modern systems theory (Luhmann 1995) that society is constituted by a number of sub-systems which largely function according to their own autonomous logic. For efficiency as well as for normative reasons, the autonomy of these sub-systems should be respected. Hierarchical governance in such a setting is not a very promising endeavor. If one adds territorial sub-systems to this perspective, one has an exact image of the European Union. (Jachtenfuchs 2001:254-255)

In other words, governance and in particular European governance may be understood as the political acknowledgment of politics' societal environment's autonomy, and the re-entry of this very idea within political self-description, in view of a more efficient “steering”: governance is polycontextuality taken seriously. To this extent governance tries to rely on other social system whose complexity and operations are not accessible. Following Willke (1986) or Harste (2000) we may emphasize the fact that these processes are not recent trends, but in fact proceed from the very differentiation of the political system: the means to effectuate the welfare state already relied on functional systems of law and economics (Luhmann 1990c), and on organization and structural coupling. Governance seems to further this rationale where the wider political use of power implies
In Luhmann's theory of organised power, power is constructed through delegation of power, i.e. as power to control the renounce of power. (...) Organisational power always implies deconcentration of power. (Harste 2000)

Any societal institution produces secondary and eventually recursive effects; and so did the State. It gave rise to powerful societal actors, specialized agencies, so to speak, which intermingle and intermediate in collective bargaining, collective decision-making and collective communication. (...) The grounds for giving the State a special status have crumbled (...) ; it is one societal actor among others and, at best, *primus inter pares.* (Willke 1986:467)

In others words, the departmentalized state has accessed polycontextuality through the development of various organizations which, by their very emergence as autonomous systems, and moreover as autonomous systems related to other functional subsystems of society, escaped from its influence: this is what Willke (1986) called called the “tragedy of the state”, expressing the idea that “even if the State wanted to guide, it would necessarily rely heavily on the professional judgment of the very subsystems that supposedly were to be guided” (Willke 1986:465). Governance furthers this departmentalization logic, and thus raises the question of the evolution of the political system of society regarding its own function of producing collective binding decisions.

As to the European version of governance, it is specifically “multi-level” (see Scharpf 1997), with a double movement of sectorization (echoing functional differentiation) and territorial differentiation of governance among member-states and Community. European materialization of the political system has to that extent interesting aspects, prefiguring a kind of “functional federalism” (Boyer & Dehove 2001:180, Jachtenfuchs 1997:5), notably when functional interdependencies replace hierarchy (Sand 1998b:271). This “functional differentiation of governance” (Sand 1998b:280) then expresses itself through “sectoral governments” (Boyer & Dehove 2001), through an exploded institutional order where miscellaneous highly interdependent institutions enter in competition (Sand 1998b). European governance is thus torn apart between functional logics relying on independent institutions (ECI, CEB), independent agencies of regulation, committees, open methods of coordination, multilateral surveillance, etc.: governance then aims at easing the interrelations between autonomous organizations and favoring the emergence of a reflexive transnational, trans-organizational logic.

**V/ concluding remarks**

This paper aimed at deepening the dialogue between governance and Modern Systems Theory, which firstly implied numerous theoretical clarifications in order to remain consistent regarding the precise theoretical field chosen, namely MST. Our main concern was thus to re-appraise territory and organization at the stake of a still evolving modernity. We thus argued that territorial, organizational, and functional differentiations interfere with each other within a complex societal environment.

We also mentioned that the place of the political system within modern society may also have to be re-evaluated. We did not question the theoretical place of politics towards other autonomous functional systems, but by focusing on historically strong structural couplings and specific organizations we concluded that politics may benefit of a peculiar echo to its impulse, whereas this very trend of extension of power contains a logic of dilution of power. Briefly, we concluded that governance in this sense may be of interest as specific case of steering, namely a political impulse subject to a societal filtering whose results, whereas it relies on strong structural couplings and in particular territorialized structural couplings, are always subjected to other functional logics and as
such, highly contingent.

We argued that European governance is a great field of research for such a conceptualization, insofar as it expresses a territorial re-configuration which implies both a specific organizational design following a political impulse, and multiple self-reinforcing functional logics that enter in competition. To this extent, European processes remain the contingent results of intersystemic co-evolution, which we believe is of great interest for a MST analyses. Moreover, the issue of European Governance allows to further already existing theoretical debates regarding the relationship between politics, society, and organization.

From this point of view, the most challenging question recent trends may raise leads us back to Niklas Luhmann's lesson: how could an organization or a network of organizations, however polycontextual, concur to the accomplishment of a political function without politics? As Brans & Rossbach put it:

> the internal differentiation of the political system must not correspond to the external differentiation of its environment. For if internal and external differentiation did correspond, cross-boundary alliances would dissolve the political system (1982b, p. 144). In this case, politics would just mirror the division of society into economics, law, science and other functional subsystems, and hence reproduce controversial issues rather than decide them. (Brans & Rossbach 1997:427).

This undoubtedly are the words one would use to describe the current uneasiness of the political system in Europe.
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