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The European Union as an international donor: Perceptions from Latin America and the Caribbean

Abstract

In an era of doing development differently, it is highly important to analyse how priorities of partner countries around the world reinforce or contradict how donors conceive themselves. Based on an elite survey and fifty elite interviews, the current research analyses the connection between the agenda-setting and policy implementation stages in international development. In particular, by looking at the Latin American and Caribbean perceptions of the European Union as an international donor, the analysis finds misalignment between the stated objectives of the EU and the metrics of success that Latin American and Caribbean partners use to judge donors as influential and helpful. The paper shows that this misalignment can explain the limitations of EU potential entrepreneurship in international development through both agenda-setting and policy implementation. Moreover, the analysis finds that Nordic countries outrank the EU in terms of both perceived influence and perceived helpfulness in Latin America and the Caribbean, as do other non-European donors like the United States.

Keywords: European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, perceptions, international development, entrepreneurship

Introduction

The empirical grounds of the current article relate to recent evolutions in international development, which invite a reassessment of policy practices used in the interaction between donors and their partners around the world. Horizontal cooperation between developing countries has become their preferred policy practice for tackling a wide range of issues from institutional strengthening and combating poverty to achieving sustainable development and fighting inequality (Ayllón, 2012). In this context, *development in transition* and *doing development differently* (Bain *et al.*, 2016, OECD, 2019) are key metaphors for how traditional donors are reframing their efforts in terms of international development commitments, aiming for aid policies to be more flexible, more inclusive and better suited to horizontal cooperation between new and old donors.

Hence, we argue that these policy changes have redrawn global governance in international development, but, at the same time, have raised the importance of understanding how misconceptions continue to be an important impediment to aid effectiveness. While looking more concretely at the link between agenda-setting and policy implementation in the context of the European Union presence in Latin America and the Caribbean, we claim that these recent evolutions in the international development landscape have enabled the expression of a more critical vision from the actors in the Global South.

Turning to the case of the EU international development policy, we need to acknowledge that even if aid policy has been present in the EU institutional landscape since the 1960s, it has only been in the last few decades that EU

leadership in international development has become an important stake. EU Member States' ambitions and interests have marked the first decades of the European Union existence as an actor in international aid, and here we refer mainly to its biggest ex-colonial powers, i.e., France and the United Kingdom, but the start of the 21st century has meant more independently fledged policy objectives from the European Commission. These ambitions for leadership and independence have been manifested mainly through the publication of the first European Consensus on Development (European Commission, 2005) and the EU participation in global forums related to aid effectiveness (Carbone, 2007), recognising the importance of new donors and emerging forms of international development governance. Therefore, the emergence of the EU as an aspiring leader in international development has happened at the same time as trends on horizontal cooperation have been consolidated at a global level.

It is in this sense surprising that the literature on EU development policy has remained silent on whether the EU has been effective in including these international trends within its policy practices and, more importantly, how its counterparts in developing countries have perceived the EU while translating these new ambitions into concrete policy initiatives. Research on EU development policy has limited itself to highlighting the importance of policy coherence, related to the coordination mechanisms between the EU institutions and its Member States (the internal dimension), and the tensions and competition between the EU and other traditional donors (the external dimension of policy coherence) (Delputte and Orbie, 2014). We do agree that these dimensions of policy coherence are important for our understanding of EU development policy, but we highlight the need to account for them in relation to perceptions from the EU partners.

Thus, we find a theoretically fertile ground in the literature discussing how the EU is perceived by its partners around the world (Fioramonti and Poletti, 2008, Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2010). This strand of the literature has shown the importance of comprehending external perceptions of the EU, which ‘can help gauge the extent to which the Union is seen as a credible and consistent actor in global politics. [...] In a way perceptions can be seen as “early warning systems” for an actor such as the EU, which is still in the process of establishing itself as a credible international focal point’ (Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2010, p. 2). Yet, while this previous research has been successful in showing the importance of external perceptions in international politics, in general, and in the EU context, in particular, this literature strand has been much more limited in discussing the perceptions of the EU as an international aid actor.

The only research project which has specifically dealt with perceptions of the EU as a donor is the one by Chaban *et al.* (Chaban *et al.*, 2013). Even if comprehensive in terms of the geographical span, their research does not go as far as to account for how applying EU-centric concepts when conducting research on EU perceptions can translate into a limited understanding of non-EU actors’ perceptions. This is particularly important in the new international development context based on horizontal cooperation. Therefore, the current study aims to fill in this gap and proposes additional ways to question EU literature concepts. The use of these EU literature concepts without caution can produce misleading results, and, as a consequence, conclusions of little, if any, relevance for non-Western audiences. In addition, our geographical focus, Latin America and the Caribbean, is one which has been overlooked in the EU perceptions literature, with previous research only discussing the cases of Brazil (Sandrin and Ribeiro Hoffmann, 2019) and Mexico

(Dominguez, 2019), while other regions, such as Asia, Africa and Oceania have received much greater emphasis.

Conceptually, our paper states that EU efforts for being recognised as an influent and helpful donor need to be reassessed in a more inclusive framework, accounting for beneficiaries' perceptions of the agenda-setting influence and policy implementation helpfulness of international donors. The central argument is that in a context where recipients have become vary of vertical cooperation, the EU needs to pay closer attention to how its partners perceive its international aid presence.

Specifically, the two proposed dimensions, perceived influence and perceived helpfulness, relate to both the normative dimension of the EU international presence and the perceived policymaking impact of such influence. The first one, concerning influence, is defined as the EU ability to contribute to agenda-setting, its influence on establishing regional and national agendas, close to the way in which the EU has been defined as a normative power. Yet, contrary to the traditional (and overused) idea of the EU normative power being reinforced simply by placing agenda topics in accordance with the EU identity (March and Olsen, 1989, March and Olsen, 1998), the current paper proposes a framework in which the EU entrepreneurship is consolidated or challenged through the perceptions of its partners, in this case, Latin American and Caribbean actors. This is achieved by considering how these third actors define 'influence', adding nuances and challenging EU traditional visions on the concept.

The second dimension, helpfulness, is thought as the perceived ability of EU actors to implement policy initiatives once the agenda has been established. This links the paper to the literature on EU policy entrepreneurship (Ackrill and Kay, 2011,

Ackrill *et al.*, 2013, Copeland and James, 2014, Herweg, 2017) and accounts for how the EU is perceived as an effective implementer of development objectives. We understand helpfulness only in relation to third actors' perceptions of the EU ability to help them implementing concrete policy proposals. While interesting in itself, the actual achievement of specific policy goals goes beyond the stake of our research which deals with perceptions rather than measuring policy success.¹

In order to measure helpfulness and influence, the paper builds on different strands of literature, such as the literature on EU actorness, EU policymaking and development studies (EU aid effectiveness and EU aid policy coherence). It does so while questioning two theoretical concepts (normative power and policy entrepreneurship) that have been largely used in EU-centric studies. This helps us to unpack our central argument and understand if EU aid assistance receives recognition and how this recognition is built at the intersection between perceived influence on agenda-setting and perceived helpfulness for policy implementation. In this sense, our argument builds on recent research showing the importance of looking at entrepreneurship at the intersection between agenda-setting and policy implementation (Mukherjee and Giest, 2019). While this link has been predominantly used for understanding the evolution of EU internal policies, our article goes one step further by showing the relevance of such link for EU external policies and discussing its relevance from the perspective of perceptions.

Moreover, our paper is a timely contribution with concrete policy implications. Easily observable output and outcome measures, such as the amount of generated

¹ Different from measuring perceptions of helpfulness during the implementation stage, measuring policy success involves different indicators, dealing with the final results of a specific programme, such as the number of approved legislative initiatives, number of schools or kilometres of road that were constructed.

economic output, the number of vaccinated children or the number of kilometres of constructed roads, are useful for measuring the success of direct service delivery activities. However, most donors lack credible ways of measuring their influence on the priorities of partner countries (Kremer and Clemens, 2016), as well as their helpfulness in such contexts. This paper attempts to provide an original methodology and source of empirical data that can be used for addressing such a challenge. Our sources include a recent elite survey and fifty elite interviews.

The next section discusses the regional focus of the article and argues why Latin America and the Caribbean is a particularly useful case study for the EU international development policy. The third section explains the methodology, while the fourth and the fifth present the findings related to EU perceived influence and helpfulness. The sixth and final section revisits the conceptual link between perceived influence and perceived helpfulness in light of the empirical data, and analyses the implications of the findings for the EU specifically and international donors more generally. It also highlights possible future avenues for research in development studies.

Setting the stage

The geographical focus of this study is Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). LAC is a particularly useful case for analysing the EU development policy due to the complexity of the EU presence in the region. Different levels of interaction have been established, focusing efforts and funds on developing an interregional approach. The

complexity of this network of interregional programmes has been justified by similar values (Selleslaghs, 2016), which, in addition to democracy, include the rule of law and multilateralism, the importance given to regionalism and to developing regional organisations able to deal with common challenges (Botto, 2015, Riggiozzi, 2010). Last but not least, the EU is one of the most prominent donors in the region in terms of funds, with a budgetary allocation of 925 million EUR for the 2014-2020 EU Regional Programme in LAC.

The article does not aim to argue that LAC can or should be seen as a unified actor. Indeed, LAC has a diversity of national visions on development together with a complex framework of regional institutions. Yet, the choice to study the whole region instead of focusing on specific countries or specific regional organisations is justified by the fact that many of the development programmes that the EU has financed in the region have aimed for regional purposes and have had a regional or continental span. It is in this sense that we acknowledge the common challenges that LAC as a whole has faced in the last few decades, as well as the predominance of regional and continental dialogues that LAC actors have initiated with the EU. Moreover, there is general agreement within LAC concerning the importance of horizontal cooperation in both bigger countries such as Argentina and Brazil (Lechini, 2014) and smaller countries like the ones in Central America. Adding to that, the dedication and involvement of all actors across the continent in these new forms of international development governance justifies our decision to analyse the perceptions of the EU as a development actor from a general LAC perspective. We have indeed used the main features of horizontal cooperation to inform our operationalization of both influence and helpfulness, and the relevance of this initial methodological approach has been reconfirmed during the different fieldwork stages. Even when the EU

attempts to work through horizontal cooperation have been perceived as having only minimal success, this common benchmark has helped us to conclude on the challenges ahead for the EU as an influent and helpful international donor in LAC.

Research questions and methods

With these conceptual elements in mind, the current section details the research questions and the methods used to answer them. The research aims to address two types of issues. First, we have a set of empirical questions:

1. How do LAC partners perceive influence and helpfulness? Are these perceptions aligned or misaligned with how the EU defines its influence and helpfulness in international development?
2. How do EU perceived agenda-setting influence and perceived policy implementation helpfulness relate in the context of EU development policy in LAC? (EU entrepreneurship)
3. How does the EU compare to its Member States in terms of perceived influence and helpfulness in LAC? Are there any contradictions, and, if yes, which are the challenges ahead for the EU as an international donor? (internal coherence of the EU as an international donor)
4. How does the EU compare to non-EU donors in LAC in terms of perceived influence and helpfulness? Which are its main competitors? (external coherence of the EU as an international donor)

Based on the answer to these empirical questions, we aim to conclude on *how perceived influence and perceived helpfulness contribute to a better understanding of the EU as an international donor and of its potential entrepreneurship while connecting the agenda-setting and the policy implementation stages in international development policy.*

To address these questions, the article uses two sources of primary data. The first one is the *Listening to Leaders* Survey (AidData, 2018). The survey follows our epistemological stakes; it aims to understand better the challenges of international donors through the perceptions of their beneficiaries. It provides a unique source of micro-level survey data on the policy influence of nearly 43 multilateral banks and bilateral agencies, as observed and experienced by the local counterparts of these institutions in 126 low-income and middle-income countries.² For the purposes of this study, we are interested in a specific subsample of respondents: the 124 respondents from 17 LAC countries who (a) participated in the survey, (b) reported having direct interactions with the European Union, and (c) subsequently evaluated the agenda-setting influence and helpfulness of policy implementation of the European Union. Respondents included development partners, government representatives, NGOs and private sector representatives, working in finance, environment, governance, infrastructure, rural development and social topics. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents across LAC countries, as well as across stakeholder groups and policy sectors. Through a wide representation, the sample covers an important range of projects and programmes developed by the EU in the region. Given that our sample may not be representative of the population of interest

² *Listening to Leaders* Survey data has previously been used to evaluate the influence of many other donors, including the World Bank (see Knack *et al.*, 2020).

(i.e., the sampling frame), we employ inverse probability weights to adjust for sample selection (i.e., non-response) bias.³

The second source of primary data includes interviews conducted between 2015 and 2018 with LAC policymakers and diplomats, representatives from NGOs and academics (50 interviews in Brussels, Madrid and New York). A first set of in-depth interviews (25) was conducted in Brussels, with LAC policymakers and diplomats working in the Missions to the EU, between June 2015 and June 2017. Brussels was chosen as a primary place for the fieldwork because of the advantages it offers as an environment in which the EU interacts and negotiates with LAC, and a place where several crucial meetings were held (including the second EU-CELAC Summit in June 2015). The second set of interviews (15) was carried out in Madrid (between January and April 2018) in LAC embassies and interregional forums. This is because several LAC diplomats that were directly involved in the negotiations with the EU moved meanwhile to Madrid, and because of the strategic place that Spain holds in the EU dialogue with LAC. A third and smaller set of interviews (5 interviews) was conducted in New York, with LAC Embassies, close to two main events, the climate change negotiations for the Paris Agreement and the negotiations for the 2030 Agenda for Development that concluded with the Sustainable Development Goals.

All these interviews were conducted face-to-face. Some additional interviews (5) were carried out by telephone with representatives from regional foundations, LAC NGOs and academics. We aimed for a balanced approach by getting input from both

³ Unlike traditional elite surveys that are based on convenience sampling (where a population of interest is not identified, and sample representativeness cannot be evaluated), the *Listening to Leaders* Survey first identified the populations of interest in 126 low-income and middle-income countries and carefully constructed sampling frames for each of these countries in a consistent and comparable manner. The population of interest includes those individuals with direct knowledge of how government policies and programs were prioritised, designed, and implemented in low and lower-middle income countries.

governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as actors working in different positions in a wide range of geographical locations.

Through the triangulation of the survey data with the information from the interviews, we managed to incorporate views from a broad range of actors and to contribute to comprehensive research. Giving voice to the actors from the South means also bridging policy and scholar research in terms of *doing development differently* (Wild *et al.*, 2016), and accounting for the agency of the beneficiaries of international development programmes. While the survey has been used as a first stage in answering our research questions, the interviews have completed the process of tracing the perceptions of the EU as an international donor in LAC and its experience, perceived achievements and limitations in developing approaches closer to horizontal cooperation. Using these two sources has helped us to conclude on the constraints faced by the EU on the ground, and to talk about challenges ahead for the European Union as an international actor, in general, and as an international development player, in particular.

Perceived influence of the EU as an international donor in LAC

EU influence through its international development programmes can be analysed as part of the broader concept of the EU as a normative power (Manners, 2002). Building on concepts of civilian power from Duchêne and power of ideas from Galtung (Galtung, 1973), Manners (2002) argues that the European Union is building its international identity based on its norms. In Manner's vision, the importance given

to treaties and the European Union's historical background provide the rationale for using norms at the core of the EU relations with third actors. Thus, the EU normative behaviour is seen as the source of the EU power of attraction (Manners, 2002). Using the words of Romano Prodi, Manners says that the EU 'must aim to become a global civil power at the service of sustainable global development' (Prodi, 2000, 3 in Manners, 2002). In addition, according to this conceptual perspective on EU normative power, the EU has the ability 'to shape conceptions of what the *normal* is' in international relations (Manners, 2002, 239-40).

While acknowledging the explanatory power of the concept, visions that are significantly different from Manners' theoretical framework include those of Onar and Nicolaïdis (2013). They argue that Europe should rethink its agency in the non-European world using a decentring agenda in order to acknowledge the influence of colonialism in the EU discourse and adapt its normative power to the coming century (Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013). Building on these ideas, the current paper aims to bring more clarity on how LAC actors perceive the EU influence, i.e., to show how and if the beneficiaries of EU programmes perceive the EU as being influent in terms of agenda-setting in a predominantly horizontal cooperation context.

With the objective to analyse the different nuances of the EU perceived influence in LAC, the results of our research will be detailed by firstly looking at the data coming from the survey, and secondly at the responses from the interviewees, adding more nuanced reflections to our quantitative results. From the data collected through the survey, the current section analyses both the perceived influence of the EU and its Member States, helping us to understand the contradictions and challenges of the EU external presence. In addition, a comparison is made with other

international donors in the region, covering in this way both the internal and external coherence of the EU as an international donor.

Our first step in making sense of the perceptions of the EU international development presence is looking at how LAC actors operationalize influence when defining it as the ability to contribute to regional and national agendas. This means analysing the top reasons that LAC actors invoke for looking at international donors as being influential. At this stage, we consider all donors together since the objective is to understand how LAC actors define influence in general. Two types of factors are highlighted: material and ideational ones. The first type of factors, material factors, is assessed through the financial resources that international donors provided to their beneficiaries. Ideational factors are considered by asking respondents to evaluate the importance of international donors' ability to use the opportunity of advising when a change was expected and favoured by their partners, as well as cases of involvement in policy and programmatic discussions. Other dimensions mixing material and ideational factors are included, referring to cases of providing the government with access to international experts and providing advice or assistance aligned with the government's national development strategy. The first and third type of factors were hypothesised to have greater importance in a context of horizontal cooperation, while the second category of factors (ideational ones) was proposed as a set of indicators used to operationalize the manner in which the EU has traditionally understood its normative power.

Figure 1 illustrates the top 10 reasons for considering donors as being influential. Results show that the top reason is that donors provided the government with significant financial or material resources (48% of the respondents), followed by the fact that donors provided the government with access to international experts (32%)

and provided advice or assistance aligned with the government's national development strategy (27%). Fewer participants relate international donors' influence to the fact that they provided the government with high-quality advice or assistance (23%), they respected the government's authority on final decisions (19%), provided advice or assistance at a time when there was an opportunity for change (18%) and worked closely with a significant number of government staff and officials (18%). The dimension concerning international donors being able to advise when their partners expected change is the closest to the traditional way of understanding normative power Europe, aiming to 'export' its vision, ideas and policy solutions to other actors around the world. However, it is not among the top reasons that LAC actors invoke when talking about how they perceive agenda-setting influence.

This shows an important misalignment between the way in which the EU influence has been conceived in EU studies and the way EU international development beneficiaries, in this case, LAC policymakers and stakeholders think about influence in international development. It also unveils an important policy consequence: the EU influence is limited when it does not consider the perceptions of its beneficiaries. Furthermore, we see that when preferences matched, EU policy initiatives were successful. The countries that agreed 100% with the fact that an important source of EU influence was through its heavy involvement in existing policy discussions are Colombia and Peru, which signed an Association Agreement with the EU, leaving behind their regional partners, Ecuador and Bolivia, and showing their desire for a closer and privileged cooperation with the European Union.

Thus, our survey helps us to understand that ideational factors may indeed continue to be important for the influence on agenda-setting, but only when they go

together with important financial commitments and support for the national development strategies. With this clearer image on how LAC actors define influence, we can now turn to the survey results showing how influential the EU is perceived by its LAC counterparts.

The respondents rated the donors they had worked with as 'not at all', 'only slightly', 'quite', 'very' influential. Figure 2 shows the ranking of the top 10 most influential donors in LAC based on the percentage of respondents evaluating a given donor as 'quite' or 'very' influential. In this analysis, we only include a donor if it was rated by at least 9 respondents.

The EU is evaluated as influential by 70% of the respondents, while 90% of the respondents consider Denmark as influential and 82% think that Sweden has influence on their national and regional agendas. These results confirm previous findings in the literature about the relevance of *like-mindedness* in international development, showing that progressive donors (mainly Nordic countries) are the source of change and influence in other regions of the world (Orbie and Carbone, 2015). In addition, these previous studies have shown that like-minded countries 'compete with the construction of an EU identity' (Delputte and Orbie, 2014). Our survey confirms this potential competition and adds more clarity on why this might be the case. It does so by offering the conceptual space for unpacking the concept of *like-mindedness*. In this context, *like-mindedness* appears as linked to financial resources, giving access to international experts and providing advice or assistance aligned with the government's national development strategy, with Nordic countries being able to capitalise more and better their influence through these three elements.

Compared to other international donors in the LAC region, the European Union influence is ranked lower than the IMF (85% of the respondents consider it as influential), Norway (84%), USA (81%), China (79%) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (73%), but higher than actors such as the World Bank (68%) and the United Nations Development Programme (66%). This unveils a much more complex landscape when comparing the EU influence in the region to both EU Member States and other international donors, showing that material resources are important, but that additional dimensions such as a dialogue aligned with the government's national development strategy are to be considered in order to understand the EU influence as an international donor.

We will now turn to the in-depth interviews and add more nuances on how we can make sense of the EU perceived influence. The European Union has expressed its desire to adapt its international aid initiatives and has tried to connect its programmes and the associated policy vision to new forms of governance in the LAC region. One revealing example is the case of horizontal cooperation and the EU desire to participate in triangular cooperation networks working together with emerging donors (European Union, 2017, Schulz, 2010). Creating and consolidating regional institutions have been important dimensions of the EU normative presence in LAC. However, what has become relevant in a LAC context dominated by new forms of regionalism and cooperation between peers has been the horizontality of the dialogue, as well as the importance of regional initiatives in solving the most pressing issues that have been seen as priorities by the different LAC actors.

In this sense, our interviewees have pointed out that the official aid assistance coming from the European side is on its way to becoming 'a financial *add-on* to the horizontal institutional cooperation and not the other way around as it is often argued

at the EU official level' (Interviewee 1, LAC Diplomat from a Mercosur country, interview held in Brussels). Horizontal cooperation holds a central normative role in the LAC imaginary, conditioning and limiting attempts by third actors, in this case, the European Union, to develop cooperation programmes following a vertical approach. 'A monologue in which the EU proposes a model of regional integration that LAC actors need to adopt or adapt is no longer an attempt able to achieve its intended results' (Interviewee 2, LAC Diplomat from a Mercosur country, interview held in New York). Thus, LAC actors' own ability to create new norms aiming to guide regional efforts in international development proves to be an important challenger for the European Union attempts to diffuse its own norms and policy solutions.

These ideas reinforce the results from the survey and the fact that a top reason for LAC actors in order to consider the European Union as influential is related to providing advice or assistance aligned with the government's national development strategy. Horizontal cooperation has created the premises of independent and better-adapted solutions in the South (Interviewee 3, LAC Diplomat from a CAN country, interview held in Madrid), and not fully considering this can limit the European Union perceived influence in the region. An illustrative episode showcasing differences in the political agenda is the one related to the Euro-Latin American Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (Eurolat) from 2015. In preparation for the last Summit which was held between the two regional actors, Eurolat did not manage to issue a common message, and, instead, two different Declarations were issued: one by the European Parliament President and a second one by the LAC President of Eurolat. This was mainly caused by the antagonistic positions of the European Parliament and LAC parliamentarians on Venezuela. The European Parliament

wanted to highlight the importance of holding democratic elections and releasing political prisoners, but LAC parliamentarians saw this approach as a proof of EU interventionism. The two declarations show a significantly different landscape, with limited EU influence on the LAC agenda. In this context, 'the European Parliament and the LAC priorities appear to be different, if not conflicting' (Interviewee 4, LAC NGO representative, interview held by telephone).

These examples of limited EU influence on the LAC agenda, motivated by the perceptions of LAC partners of the EU way of developing partnerships, help in understanding why the EU might not be seen as a like-minded actor in the region. Thus, perceptions of the EU place it closer to traditional international donors rather than to the new wave of (horizontal and triangular) international cooperation (Interviewee 5, LAC NGO Representative, interview held by telephone). While the results presented in the current section have analysed the limitations related to perceiving the EU as an influential actor, we need to get back to the link between agenda-setting and policy implementation and relate these findings to EU perceived helpfulness. This constitutes the focus of the next section, in which we look closer at how helpful the EU actors are perceived during the project implementation stage.

Perceived helpfulness of the EU as an international donor in LAC

When dealing with EU perceived helpfulness in international development, we are building on the policy entrepreneurship literature (Ackrill and Kay, 2011, Ackrill *et al.*, 2013, Alimi, 2015, Beeson and Stone, 2013, Child *et al.*, 2007, David, 2015,

Mintrom, 1997, Mintrom, 2000, Mintrom and Norman, 2009, Mintrom *et al.*, 2014). A policy entrepreneur is understood as an actor whose role is that of initiating 'dynamic policy change [...] through attempting to win support for [...] policy innovation' (Mintrom, 1997, 739). Ackrill, Kay and Zahariadis consider that in the 'presence of ambiguity of information and issue complexity, entrepreneurs craft contestable meaning, which they, in turn, disseminate to policymakers in order to activate attention and mobilise support or opposition' (Ackrill *et al.*, 2013, 873). In this sense, entrepreneurs are expected to play a more critical role in contexts of increased uncertainty and complexity of issues and to be those actors that can promote solutions to different dilemmas. International development is an excellent example of a broad range of complex issues and of how ambiguity can be a barrier to making decisions and choosing solutions. Entrepreneurs can help in this context to find appropriate ways of dealing with problems and build coherent narratives around how particular policies (related to specific norms) can be the response to pressing political problems. Thus, they promote shifts and redesign the political landscape.

By bringing in this second dimension, helpfulness, which is focused on policymaking, the paper aims at conceptual bridging between normative and policy entrepreneurship. The purpose is to shed light on the interaction between these two levels in the case of the EU as an international donor. It means, in this case, looking at how and if perceived influence translates in perceived helpfulness.

In order to develop such an argument, we need once again to question the EU definitions of policy entrepreneurship. Thus, similar to the way of approaching perceived influence, we have accounted for the LAC way to think about international donors' helpfulness. We have made a distinction between a hands-on vision on policy entrepreneurship as defined by the EU public policy studies, and a horizontal

vision as suggested by the importance of horizontal cooperation in the LAC region. In the first category, we have included the importance of providing the beneficiaries with specific implementation strategies, building support among local stakeholders and communities, and identifying practical approaches to overcoming barriers to success. In the second category, we have used dimensions such as providing implementers with financial resources, working in close collaboration with government counterparts, and providing implementers with access to highly qualified international experts, suggesting higher importance for local participation in policy entrepreneurship processes. We created this second category to operationalize policy helpfulness in a horizontal cooperation context.

The top three reasons for considering international actors as helpful donors are very similar to the reasons mentioned when evaluating donors' influence. Supplying implementers with the much needed financial or material resources is the most stated factor (48%), followed by working in close collaboration with government counterparts (36%) and providing implementers with access to highly qualified international experts (22%). This places perceived helpfulness close to *doing development differently* (Wild *et al.*, 2016), similar to the EU's ambitions in the last European Consensus on Development (European Commission, 2017) of 'fostering stronger, more inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships' (p. 42). It is also closer to the second operationalization of policy entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of horizontal cooperation and local participation if traditional donors are to be perceived as helpful. Figure 3 summarises the top 10 reasons for perceiving international donors as being helpful.

Subsequently and similar to the survey question on the influence on agenda-setting, the respondents rated the donors they had worked with as 'not at all', 'only

slightly', 'quite', 'very' helpful. Figure 4 shows an overview of the top 10 most helpful donors in LAC. The ranking is based on the percentage of respondents evaluating a given donor as 'quite' or 'very' helpful.

The results concerning perceived helpfulness are along similar lines to those on perceived influence, showcasing a potential competition between the EU and its Member States. However, in the case of perceived helpfulness, the survey places the European Union only on the fifth position, with 75% of the respondents considering that the EU participation has been helpful for the implementation of international development programmes in their region and their country. EU countries with a higher level of perceived helpfulness are Denmark (91%), Sweden (86%), Spain (81%) and Germany (76%).

Compared to other international donors in LAC and their perceived helpfulness, the EU is placed after the IDB (83% of the respondents consider it as helpful), the United States (80%), Australia (80%) and the World Bank (76%), but at the same level as the IMF (75%) and before China (65%). These results show how the perception of international donors working in close cooperation with their government counterparts determines the differences in the ranking, given that all these donors have been important financial contributors in the region.

Turning to the interview data, we can unpack the EU helpfulness and add nuances to the reasons why the European Union is seen as a helpful donor, but also to its limitations in the programmes developed in the LAC region. While the survey data would lead us to conclude that, going beyond material factors, the EU loses in perceived helpfulness in comparison to Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Germany mainly because of a less consolidated way of collaborating with its beneficiaries, the

interviews unveil additional insights to these preliminary conclusions. In the framework of the new forms of cooperation (horizontal and triangular), the European Union has proved to be a flexible actor which has bet on new types of programmes such as demand-driven ones (examples in LAC include EUROsociAL, Copolad, Euroclima). Yet, it has been ‘timid, soft and shy in showing a coherent discourse and long-term vision on demand-based aid cooperation’ (Interviewee 6, LAC diplomat from a CAN country, interview held in Brussels).

Main issues refer to regional institutions, such as SEGIB (the Ibero-American Secretariat), seen by LAC actors as legitimate and successful in creating open and effective forums of dialogue and exchange of expertise (Interviewee 7, LAC diplomat from a Mercosur country, interview held in Brussels). The problem resides in the fact that these institutions have not been included until recently on the list of EU delegated entities (Interviewee 8, LAC Policy Officer in a Regional Forum, interview held in Madrid). EU delegated entities are the ones accredited to develop programmes on EU behalf. Not having key regional actors included among these organisations has proved to be an important limitation in considering the European Union ‘ready to commit to a real partnership with LAC, based on its partners’ needs and their development objectives’ (Interviewee 9, LAC scholar, interview held by telephone). The idea of delegated cooperation can be seen as an innovative policy solution and can place the EU on a policy entrepreneur position, yet it is still to achieve its maximum potential by making the initiative a more inclusive way of providing EU aid.

The European Union as an international donor still needs to consolidate the image of an actor whose ability to work with its partners is based on a real partnership, evolving from a hands-on to a horizontal approach. Its capacity to do so

appears as not only important, but also urgent to develop and reinforce due to the increasing number of relevant actors in the international development landscape, including besides the EU Member States and other traditional donors, emerging actors such as LAC countries and their South-South partners like China. Having presented the data from the survey, as well as the interviews, analysing both EU perceived influence (on the LAC agenda) and EU perceived helpfulness (in implementing policy solutions once the agenda has been established), the next section relates the two concepts by answering the different empirical questions formulated in the methodology section. It also advances the concluding remarks.

Concluding remarks. Relating European Union influence and helpfulness

The first empirical question that the paper has asked is on how LAC actors define influence and helpfulness. A gap was observed between the stated objectives of the EU and the metrics of success that LAC partners use to judge donors as influential and helpful. For LAC actors, influence does not seem to relate to ideational factors that the EU literature and EU policymakers have considered as crucial for the European Union as a normative power, but rather to financial resources, access to international experts and providing advice or assistance aligned with national governments' development strategy. This appears as the alternative in the new context of horizontal cooperation in LAC. While clearly different from how the EU literature has defined the EU influence, it provides a better tuned conceptual understanding of the EU influence in LAC. Moreover, LAC policymakers and stakeholders use similar factors to define the helpfulness of international donors.

This means that perceived influence and perceived helpfulness work in similar ways and condition each other in leading to entrepreneurship in international development.

The second question concerns how perceptions of EU agenda-setting influence and policy implementation helpfulness relate in the context of EU development policy in LAC. This question builds on the two elements, the normative and the policy dimensions of the EU entrepreneurship. Through this, it connects the agenda-setting and policy implementation stages in international development. The survey suggests that EU perceived policy entrepreneurship, while ranked lower than the EU perceived influence, is undergoing some significant changes that might play an important role in increasing the EU perceived helpfulness in the region. Some anticipated moves, such as including SEGIB on the list of the EU delegated entities, able to lead programmes on behalf of the EU in LAC, appear as particularly enabling in terms of improving the EU perceived ability to work horizontally with its partners in the region.

The third empirical question refers to the internal coherence of the EU as an international donor and looks at how the EU compares to its Member States in terms of perceived influence and helpfulness in LAC. The survey data suggests that competition exists between the EU and its Member States in terms of both influence and helpfulness, with mainly Nordic countries outranking the European Union. In addition, the European Union is expected to delegate more of its cooperation programmes in order to be seen as a helpful international donor, with some of these programmes being delegated also to its Member States, in addition to regional entities like SEGIB. While this shows an increased EU commitment to aid effectiveness, it can also cause further downgrading in terms of both influence and helpfulness due to less EU visibility in the region.

The fourth empirical question concerns the external coherence of the EU as an international donor, and asks how does the EU compare to non-EU donors in LAC in terms of perceived influence and helpfulness? Which are its main competitors? Few traditional donors, i.e. the United States and the IDB, outrank the EU in terms of both perceived influence and perceived helpfulness. The EU is seen as less influential, but more helpful than emerging donors such as China, and receives similar scores to the World Bank and the IMF in terms of helpfulness.

EU external coherence follows similar patterns to its internal cohesion. Some actors are better-ranked for both perceived influence and perceived helpfulness. External and internal cohesion are stable and can be resistant to change, having Denmark and Sweden as better placed internal actors in terms of perceived influence and perceived helpfulness, and the USA and the IDB being perceived as more influential and more helpful external actors. However, internal EU actors can also be a source of strength rather than weakness for the EU as an international donor, depending on how effective Brussels will be in deepening the EU international development policy, bringing more topics at the community level, and reinforcing its Delegations in partner countries. The same can happen, even though in more indirect ways, if international partnerships are established with non-EU actors.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, answering the empirical questions has the aim to help us to understand better the EU as an international donor. This is done here by linking the agenda-setting and the policy implementation stages. The analysis has scrutinised conceptual definitions through a closer look at how aid beneficiaries define influence (in terms of agenda-setting) and helpfulness (in terms of policy implementation) different from traditional donors like the EU.

The first dimension, related to influence and normative power, has aimed to connect concepts from the EU literature and policy objectives stated by EU policymakers with the way in which LAC actors perceive EU influence. A significant misalignment was depicted between the EU way of understanding its normative power and the way in which its LAC partners define influence on agenda-setting. If the EU is to consolidate its perceived influence in the LAC region, economic factors will play a crucial role together with the EU ability to follow the priorities of local governments, with normative dimensions related to the diffusion of EU norms becoming less relevant and being placed on a lower rank by local partners. This means that if the EU is to understand its international development influence, it needs to start by sensing and incorporating the feedback of its aid beneficiaries, their priorities and perceptions.

Concerning policy entrepreneurship and its connection with the idea of the EU perceived helpfulness (a proxy for measuring and better understanding EU perceived policy entrepreneurship), the results show a complex landscape. As in the case of the EU perceived influence, definitions of EU policy entrepreneurship are challenged by the empirical results, which add additional elements that have not been taken into account sufficiently by EU policymakers and the EU studies literature. A close EU cooperation with its counterparts is a *sine qua non* condition leading to perceived helpfulness and consequently to agenda-setting influence being translated into concrete policy changes.

Further research should analyse perceptions of EU entrepreneurship in other parts of the world, and at the same time should pay more attention to local alternative definitions given to EU concepts. By including EU development policy as a crucial dimension of the EU external presence, while accounting for perceptions

from EU counterparts, we can have a better understanding of EU international actorness as defined and perceived by both EU internal actors and the EU partners around the world. Building on this paper results and conducting further research in different other regions and on other donors, a better tuned and more adapted understanding of the link between agenda-setting and policy implementation in international development will emerge. The elements invoked by EU partners for perceiving the European Union as influential, on one hand, and helpful, on the other hand, are very similar. This shows that an influential actor is most likely perceived as a helpful donor. This conclusion needs to be further tested in the context of the EU international development presence in other parts of the world, as well as for other donors and their aid partners worldwide.

Conflicts of interest: On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

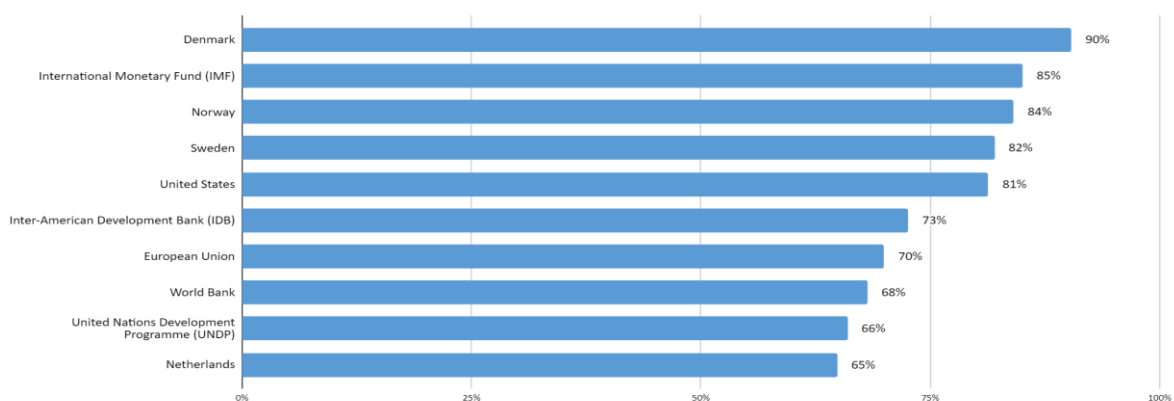
<u>Respondents by country</u>		<u>Respondents by policy sectors</u>		<u>Respondents by stakeholder group</u>	
Belize	6	Economic	20	Development Partner	25
Bolivia	11	Environment	13	Government	53
Brazil	3	Governance	27	Non-Governmental Organisation or Civil Society	38
Colombia	8	Infrastructure	5	Private Sector	8
Cuba	1	Other	29		
Dominican Republic	9	Rural Development	8		
Ecuador	5	Social	22		
El Salvador	11				
Guatemala	9				
Guyana	3				
Haiti	8				
Honduras	14				
Jamaica	9				
Nicaragua	9				
Paraguay	7				
Peru	10				
Suriname	1				

Figure 1: Top 10 reasons for considering donors as influential on agenda-setting (multiple-choice question)



Source: The calculations are based on the AidData (2018) survey data

Figure 2: Top 10 most influential donors in Latin America



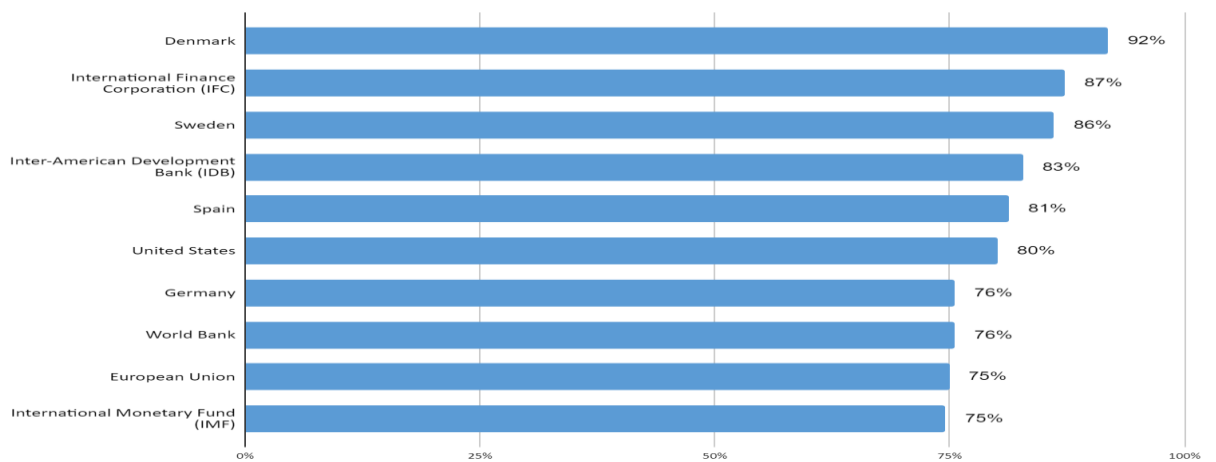
Source: Donors are ranked according to their scores in the AidData (2018) survey data

Figure 3: Top 10 reasons for perceiving international donors as helpful donors in Latin America



Source: The calculations are based on the AidData (2018) survey data

Figure 4: Top 10 most helpful donors in Latin America



Source: Donors are ranked according to their scores in the AidData (2018) survey data

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Appendix

Interviews to which the text makes direct reference (selection from the 50 interviews)

Interviewee 1, LAC Diplomat from a Mercosur country, interview held in Brussels
Interviewee 2, LAC Diplomat from a Mercosur country, interview held in New York
Interviewee 3, LAC Diplomat from a CAN country, interview held in Madrid
Interviewee 4, LAC NGO representative, interview held by telephone
Interviewee 5, LAC NGO Representative, interview held by telephone
Interviewee 6, LAC diplomat from a CAN country, interview held in Brussels
Interviewee 7, LAC diplomat from a Mercosur country, interview held in Brussels
Interviewee 8, LAC Policy Officer in a Regional Forum, interview held in Madrid
Interviewee 9, LAC scholar, interview held by telephone

The 2017 *Listening to Leaders Survey* (AidData, 2018)

Please, see Appendix B, C, D, and E in Custer *et al.* (2018) for an overview of the survey methodology and implementation, key attributes of the sampling frame construction, and the full questionnaire.

Survey questions analysed in the article:

- Before we continue, please take a moment to think about all of the foreign or international organizations that provided your team with advice or assistance to support this initiative. After you have thought of as many organizations as you can, click “Next” to continue to the next section of the survey questionnaire.
- Of the following foreign and international organizations, which, if any, provided your team with advice or assistance to support this initiative? (Please select all that apply.)
- You indicated that the foreign and international organizations below provided your team with advice or assistance. How influential were they on your team's decision to pursue this initiative? For the purposes of this survey, we define influential as the power to change or affect the policy agenda.
- In your opinion, what made the organization influential? For the purposes of this survey, we define influential as the power to change or affect the policy agenda. (You may select up to three statements.)
- You indicated that the foreign and international organizations below provided your team with advice or assistance. In your opinion, how helpful were each of the following organizations to the implementation of this initiative? For the purposes of this survey, we define helpful as being of assistance in implementing policy changes.
- In your opinion, what made them helpful? For the purposes of this survey, we define helpful as being of assistance in implementing policy changes. (You may select up to three statements.)