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**The unintended consequences of simulating the EU in a transatlantic context:
the case of the SUNY Model EU simulation**

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Abstract:

Over the last few years, the Model EU simulations have developed into an effective learning method to teach students about the evolving European Union (EU) system of governance. While these simulations always have stated intents, they invariably produce an array of unforeseen consequences. Instead of focusing on the intended outcomes of simulating the EU and assessing whether and to which extent these types of simulations help students in reaching the traditional objectives set for simulation, this paper will centre on the unintended effects of EU simulations in a transatlantic context and on how the involved actors (referring to both students and faculty advisors) have acknowledged and reacted to these unforeseen outcomes. The paper will draw from the experience of the Annual Model EU Simulation, organized by the State University of New York, in which European and American students simulate a EU Council summit.

Set-up:

The interactive presentation will allow participants to reflect upon the issue of unintended consequences in simulation. After reflecting on which are the expected outcomes in a simulation broadly understood, participants will be invited to reflect on the case of EU simulation in a transatlantic context. In addition, unintended consequences for both students and faculty advisors will be proposed and discussed with the audience.

Keywords:

EU, Simulation, Transatlantic relations, Unintended Consequences

[PLEASE NOTE THIS IS A DRAFT OF A WORK IN PROGRESS, COMMENTS ARE WELCOMED]

Introduction

Learning is a process that implies change and transformation. Although the literature on learning often focuses on the outcomes of these processes of transformation, discussed in terms of success or failure to achieve the intended learning objectives, this paper is an attempt to shed light on the unintended consequences of EU simulations as a learning process. Unintended consequences refers to *'the outcomes of a purposive action(s) which are not directly intended by an actor'* (Burlyuk 2017, 1012). Following the conceptualization provided by Burlyuk, unintended consequences are not necessarily negative, but can produce positive effects, they can be unanticipated, as well as anticipated, they can still fulfil the initial intention of the actor or can produce frustrations and, finally, they can have impacts on both the actor or on the target of the action. Based on this understanding it is fundamental to first clarify the objective of the learning process analysed.

The paper will focus on simulation games as a raising popular innovative method to teach the European Union within and beyond European borders. EU simulations founds EU's teachers and scholars almost unanimously agree that simulation are beneficial to students as they facilitate process of learning, de-facto enriching the traditional teaching approaches (guasti, muno, and niemann 2015). The paper looks at the SUNY Model European Union (SUNY Model EU) as a case study to reflect on the issue of unintended consequences in a transatlantic simulation of the EU.

The paper proceeds as follows. The following section introduces the SUNY Model EU, the EU Council summit simulation annually involving European and American students, as the transatlantic simulation exercise that will be used as a case-study in the paper. The subsequent section builds on Raiser, Schneider and Warkalla (raiser, schneider, and warkalla 2015) to set the intended outcomes of an EU transatlantic simulation. After that, the concept of unintended consequences is presented. The final section reflects on a series of unintended consequences that will be further explored.

The (draft) paper is based on few preliminary empirical observations of the author and it is a work in progress intended to organize author's thoughts. The paper will be further developed in the next months and primary data will be gathered during the next SUNY Model EU simulation (March 2019). Comments and suggestions are welcomed and appreciated.

The SUNY Model EU transatlantic simulation

The SUNY Model EU is an annual simulation of the European Union organized by the Institute for European Union Studies at State University New York (SUNY IEUSS) in

cooperation with Vesalius College Brussels (VUB). SUNY Model EU was created in 1988, as an inter-American program called “Model European Community” (MEC). During SUNY Model EU participants act as EU country’s delegation in a simulated European Council Summit. SUNY Model EU simulations involved around 130 students each year coming from both the US and Europe.

Typically, delegations are comprised of four person teams, with each team member playing the country’s real position of Head of Government (Prime Minister or President), the Foreign Minister, the country’s ambassador to the EU (COREPER II), and a Finance Minister. Larger teams can add representative roles, such as the deputy minister for Europe or deputy Prime Minister. Host teams chair the Head of Government and Foreign Minister meetings, playing the roles of Council President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs. Additional delegations can have representatives simulate the European Commission and Secretariat, as well as the SUNY Model EU Press corps. Each country’s team has to prepare a single-page proposal for an item to be discussed at the summit, which must be sent to the presidency team a month before the simulation. Based on these proposals the presidency team and the secretariat prepare an agenda of topics. Participants debate on these topics in small functional groups (of just their pairs) before putting the final conclusions of the presidency to a vote of the whole.

The intended purposes of simulating the EU in a transatlantic context

The relevance of simulation games as an active learning method in the field of European studies goes beyond the sole teaching of the European Union’s structures. As Raiser, Schneider and Warkalla (raiser, schneider, and warkalla 2015) clarified, the intended outcomes of an EU simulation involve the polity (structure), the policy (content) and the politics (integration processes) of the European Union. In addition to the specific knowledge related to the European Union, simulations are also a useful to further strengthen an all set of other soft skills. First, students’ capacity to interact and communicate, their negotiation skills and their capacity to work in a team are part of the teaching objectives of a simulation. Second, during simulation the students’ capacity to listen to different perspectives and go beyond stereotypes is also tested. Finally, during simulations students learn the capacity to take responsibility and to make decisions under pressure.

Which are the main learning objectives of a transatlantic simulation?
 Do the learning objectives differ between US and EU faculty advisors? And between US and EU students?

	EU Faculty Advisors	US Faculty Advisors	EU Students	US Students
Structure Knowledge				
Content Knowledge				
Processes Knowledge				

Interaction/Communication				
Dealing with complexity				
Decision-making competence				

Unintended consequences in EU transatlantic simulation

Going beyond the intended learning objective of an EU simulations this paper argues that there is an all set of unintended consequences to EU simulations that is important to keep in mind when thinking about using simulation as an innovative teaching tool. Although these issues are often discussed when talking about simulations, they are not systematically analysed.

In a recent article authored by Olga Burlyuk, unintended consequences, as *‘the outcomes of a purposive action(s) which are not directly intended by an actor’* (Burlyuk 2017, 1012) are systematically analysed in a framework that can be used beyond the analysis of the European External Action. In the analytical framework proposed by Burlyuk, unintended consequences can be of different types. First they can differ in the modes of knowledgeability: they can be unanticipated, or anticipated. If anticipated they can be unexpected by the actor, or even expected but yet the actor decides to continue its actions despite being aware of the unintended consequences its action will produce. Second, unintended consequences can be desirable or undesirable for the actor or for the target of the action. Third, by looking at the effects of unintended consequences, they may fulfil, frustrate or have no effect upon the initial intention of the actor. Fourth, unintended consequences can be the result of organised or un-organised action. Fifth, the causal link between the action and the unintended consequences can have different levels of strength (stronger if the UC can be solely attributed to the action, less strong if there are other contingent variable that can explain the UC). Sixth, Unintended consequences can have an impact on the actor responsible for the action or on then target of the actions. Seventh, the actor can be aware of the unintended consequences produced by his action, or not. Eighth, unintended consequences can occur at the same time of the action (synchronic) or sometimes later (diachronic). Finally, discussing about the possible causes of unintended consequences Burlyuk identifies ...possible causes. Ignorance, it is when the actor fails to see the wider picture and his knowledge is limited and/or incomplete. Error, it is when unintended consequences are the result of a miscalculation based on the wrong assumptions on the issue or on the counter-part’s position on the issue. Willingness to risk, it is when the actor although possessing all relevant information decide to act despite the risk of producing unintended consequences or despite the possibility to harm the target of the action or third parties. Rushed actions also produced unintended consequences, what Burlyuk calls imperious immediacy of interest. The actor is so much looking at the outcome that decides to ignore the potential unintended consequences of its action. On the other hand, the case in which the actor’s anticipation of an unintended consequence drives the decision to openly address this prediction, de-facto influencing the production of unintended consequences (self-defeating prediction/self-fulfilling prophecy). A difference in the basic values between the actor and the target can also

produce unintended consequences. Similarly, the change of the context in which the action was conceptualized can also produce unintended consequences.

In the context of a simulation on the European Union that involves students from the two sides of the Atlantic, there are several unintended consequences that emerged. Some of them are unintended consequences that can be identified also in non-transatlantic simulations; others are more specific to the case.

[the following list is preliminary, the author aim is to further explore the issue by collecting questionnaires and by conducting a series of interview in March 2019 during the next SUNY Model EU simulation]

1. Heavy Workload

Simulations required a lot of preparation from both students and faculty advisors. This amount of work is often done outside a specific course and it requires the faculty, advisors, as well as participating students to devolve extra-time to the simulation preparation. This extra-time is often 'unpaid' as students do not receive credits and simulations are not considered as a course per se. Even if credits are recognised and if the simulation's preparation is part of the course, the amount of time spend preparing is often more then in other traditional classes.

2. Learning 'the wrong' practices

The extra time students devote to preparation is often perceived as a positive element, as it shows 'students' engagement'. Yet, this often results in encouraging unhealthy practices that goes against the idea of having a proper work-life balance.

3. Teaching 'the wrong' skills

Simulations are also used to help students developing a set of skills that goes beyond the knowledge of the EU (see before). Yet, faculty advisors are often political scientist specialised on the EU. The knowledge they have on issues such as communication and negotiation skills is often the result of personal interest or experiences. Nevertheless, they are asked not only to evaluate students on these aspects of the simulation, but they are also expected to guide students in the process of learning these soft-skills. Even more striking is the idea that simulation can help students to learn 'how to deal with stress' when their faculty advisors have often absolutely no training in providing psychological support.

4. Development and challenges of new ways of communication

In order to facilitate discussions and negotiations students tend to explore all sorts of communications instruments, from social media (facebook groups) to instant messaging apps (whatsapp or messenger). These new ways of communication tend to exclude who is using different (older?) ways of communication. This includes students which are not using the same instruments, as well as faculty advisors, which tend to 'loose control' of the simulation as they are not included in the on-going 'under the scene' negotiations.

5. From innovative method to innovative tools

The use of innovative tools to facilitate group work is more and more present. Starting with a shared Google document or facebook group, to more sophisticated tools, students tend to find ways to make their work more efficient. The need to be part of the discussion encourage also those students who are not familiar with the used tool to practice these new ways of sharing information.

6. Polarization between EU and US students

From some preliminary observations it seems that EU students have a different understanding of the aim of the simulation compared to their US counterparts (is this the result of a different understanding of Faculty advisors?). This often results in the negotiating positions being influenced by the nationality of the students playing (EU or US) more then by the country they are representing.

7. Replication of EU's promotion

Building a successful image of the EU seems a priority for EU's students. Beyond the position of the country they represent, EU students tend to picture the EU as a successful story, undermining the persisting challenges as if they feel they have to 'sell the EU project' to their American counter-parts.

8. Creation of Permanent transatlantic networks

The experience of spending one intense week together negotiating, reinforce the link between EU and US students. This shared time is at the bases for the creation of a permanent network (not foreseen by organizers) of like-minded people.