

Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences

A revolutionary new textbook introducing masters and doctoral students to the major research approaches and methodologies in the social sciences. Written by an outstanding set of scholars, and derived from successful course teaching, this volume will empower students to choose their own approach to research, to justify this approach and to situate it within the discipline. It addresses questions of ontology, epistemology and philosophy of social science, and proceeds to issues of methodology and research design essential for producing a good research proposal. It also introduces researchers to the main issues of debate and contention in the methodology of social sciences, identifying commonalities, historic continuities and genuine differences.

Donatella della Porta is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute, Florence, and Professor of Political Science at the University of Florence.

Michael Keating is Professor of Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Aberdeen.

Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences

A Pluralist Perspective

Edited by

Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88322-1 — Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences
Edited by Donatella Della Porta, Michael Keating
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521883221

© Cambridge University Press 2008

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2008

5th printing 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-88322-1 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-70966-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

I have lived among people of letters, who have written history without being involved in practical affairs, and among politicians, who have spent all their time making things happen, without thinking about describing them. I have always noticed that the former see general causes everywhere while the latter, living among the unconnected facts of everyday life, believe that everything must be attributed to specific incidents and that the little forces that they play in their hands must be the same as those that move the world. It is to be believed that both are mistaken.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*

Contents

	<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
	<i>List of tables</i>	x
	<i>Contributors</i>	xi
	<i>Preface</i>	xiii
1	Introduction <i>Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating</i>	1
	Part I Epistemology and philosophy of the social sciences	17
2	How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction <i>Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating</i>	19
3	Normative political theory and empirical research <i>Rainer Bauböck</i>	40
4	Causal explanation <i>Adrienne Héritier</i>	61
5	Constructivism: what it is (not) and how it matters <i>Friedrich Kratochwil</i>	80
6	Culture and social science <i>Michael Keating</i>	99
7	Historical institutionalism <i>Sven Steinmo</i>	118
8	Game theory <i>Christine Chwaszcza</i>	139
9	Rationality and recognition <i>Alessandro Pizzorno</i>	162
	Part II Research design	175
10	Concepts and concept formation <i>Peter Mair</i>	177

11	Comparative analysis: case-oriented versus variable-oriented research <i>Donatella della Porta</i>	198
12	Case studies and process tracing: theories and practices <i>Pascal Vennesson</i>	223
13	Quantitative analysis <i>Mark Franklin</i>	240
14	The design of social and political research <i>Philippe Schmitter</i>	263
15	Ethnographic approaches <i>Zoe Bray</i>	296
16	Comparing approaches, methodologies and methods. Some concluding remarks <i>Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating</i>	316
	<i>References</i>	323
	<i>Glossary</i>	348
	<i>Index</i>	357

Figures

10.1	The trade-off between cases and properties	<i>page</i> 188
13.1	Chances of a Conservative electoral victory	252
14.1	The cycle of social and political research	264
14.2	A schematic for the selection of cases	276
14.3	The cycle of social and political research and its four logics	294

Tables

2.1	How many ontologies and epistemologies in the social sciences?	<i>page</i> 23
2.2	How many methodologies in the social sciences?	32
8.1	Game 1: Prisoners' dilemma (1)	146
8.2	Game 1: Prisoners' dilemma (2)	147
8.3	Game 2: Traffic	149
8.4	Game 3: Social trap	149
8.5	Game 4: Battle of the sexes	150
8.6	Game 5: Stag hunt (assurance)	155
10.1	Sartori's ladder of abstraction	184
11.1	Durkheim versus Weber: the 'logics'	203
11.2	Research design in variable-based versus case-based comparisons	208
13.1	Governance and social networks	241
13.2	Governance and social networks (after additional studies)	241
13.3	Entrepreneurship and networks	242
13.4	Territorial policy communities	242
13.5	European Election turnout (1)	246
13.6	Types of variable	247
13.7	Strength of correlation	254
13.8	European Election turnout (2)	258
13.9	European Election turnout (3)	259

Contributors

Rainer Bauböck Professor of Social and Political Theory at the European University Institute

Zoe Bray Freelance artist and researcher and former doctoral and post-doctoral researcher at the European University Institute

Christine Chwaszcza Professor of Social and Political Theory at the European University Institute

Donatella della Porta Professor of Sociology at the European University Institute, and Professor of Political Science at the University of Florence

Mark Franklin Professor of Comparative Politics at the European University Institute

Adrienne Héritier Professor of Public Policy at the European University Institute

Michael Keating Professor of Politics at the University of Aberdeen

Friedrich Kratochwil Professor of International Relations at the European University Institute

Peter Mair Professor of Comparative Politics at the European University Institute

Alessandro Pizzorno Emeritus Professor and Professorial Fellow in Sociology at the European University Institute

Philippe Schmitter Emeritus Professor and Professorial Fellow in Comparative Politics at the European University Institute

Sven Steinmo Professor of Public Policy at the European University Institute

Pascal Vennesson Professor of International Relations and Security Policy at the European University Institute

Preface

The genesis of this book lies in the early 2000s, at the European University Institute (EUI), where a number of PhD researchers started to complain about the neglect of ‘qualitative methods’. As only a minority of the faculty worked principally with quantitative methods, we had assumed that the rest were qualitative in the way that Molière’s M. Jourdain was a speaker of prose. A series of discussions and debates revealed that in most cases they were talking about something else, a specific form of epistemology rather than a method, and one whose meaning was being continually stretched across the discipline. While it was difficult to tie down exactly what was meant by ‘qualitative’, it seemed to be defined in opposition to ‘positivist’, another description that most professors found difficult to accept for themselves and which was also subject to considerable stretching.

The EUI was not alone here, for this was merely the latest expression of a Manicheanism in which social scientists seem to be driven to define themselves into opposing camps. The fact that we could never find a shared name or vocabulary for the two approaches suggested that the question was altogether more complicated. It was also apparent that most of the issues at stake were not new but echoed debates in philosophy, sociology and political science going back to classical times. Rather than succumb to the culture wars that have wracked too many social science faculties, especially in the United States, we decided to launch a debate among various schools and approaches and an exploration of the issues at stake. A minimum requirement for PhD students in the social sciences, we believe, is a familiarity with current debates and an ability to read critically a piece of work and understand its perspective, whatever its provenance. They should also be conscious of, and able to defend, the perspective they have chosen in their own work. If they criticize other perspectives, it should be from a position of knowledge. Finally, they should know how, and how far, it is possible to combine different perspectives in a coherent research design.

The result was a common first-year seminar for doctoral students in political science, sociology, international relations and political and social theory.

These students have been our most demanding critics, insisting on clarity and coherence and urging the faculty to debate with each other. If the immediate effect of the seminar was to confuse and complicate their ideas about research, we hope that at the end they have a clearer idea of where they stand, as well as an understanding that the issues at stake are perhaps fewer than first appeared. The tendency of academics to invent new concepts, to stretch old ones, to relabel others and to divide themselves into warring factions has only increased over time, and the present generation of graduate students are perhaps the victims.

It was at the suggestion of Helen Wallace, then director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the EUI, that we converted a course into a book. This forced us to think much more carefully about content and coherence, but we believe that the experience of the authors working together for two years has helped us to clarify the issues. We do not offer a single approach to social sciences, or even attempt to synthesize existing ones into a whole. The enterprise is a pluralistic one, informed by a belief that there is no single ‘best way’, and by a commitment to diversity and tolerance of different approaches. We do believe, however, that a debate among these approaches, using common standards of argumentation, is possible; and we have sought to present such a debate in these pages.

Some characteristics of the European University Institute made this debate, if not unique, more challenging. Not only is the Department of Political and Social Sciences deeply interdisciplinary, with political science, sociology, international relations and political and social theory as essential components; it is also a European institution, with PhD students coming from all EU member-states and beyond. They bring with them rich and various backgrounds, with knowledge not only of their own countries, but also of the specific contributions to the various disciplines in those countries. As a result, they constantly stimulate and challenge us to go not only beyond our own individual backgrounds, but also beyond the mainstream Anglophone social science literature. They push us to learn other languages, to read other languages and to link ideas coming from the various national traditions; and they help build, in everyday interactions, a truly transnational approach to the social sciences.

This makes our enterprise a quintessentially European one. This is not to say that there is a single European way of doing social science that might be contrasted with an American one. Exponents of rational choice, of constructivism or of historical institutionalism are much the same on both sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, however, there is a greater plurality of approaches.

National intellectual traditions are multiple, and there is less of a tendency for one approach to dominate at any time or in any institution. As with the European project itself, different perspectives and expectations must live together in greater or lesser harmony.

To press the analogy further, we can identify three broad attitudes to difference. There are those who are wedded to a specific approach and think that everyone should conform to it. Others have their preferred approach and would like it to prevail, but realize that this is not practical and that if there were a single approach it would perhaps not be their own; these are the pragmatic pluralists. Finally, there are those who see pluralism as positive in itself, since intellectual pluralism can enrich the experience of research by encouraging us to learn and borrow from each other. It is this last perspective that motivated us to bring together this collection. We believe that social science must never become prisoner of any orthodoxy and must continually renew itself by learning from other disciplines and from new developments, and by revisiting its own past. This is not to say that we believe that ‘anything goes’ or that researchers can mix and match any idea, approach, theory or method according to whim. Methodology is important, intellectual rigour is essential within all approaches, and clarity and consistency are vital.

We are grateful to Yves Mény, president of the EUI, for support in this project, to Sarah Tarrow for editing the contributions and to our PhD researchers for inspiration and criticism.