



Københavns Universitet



Crossroads in European Union Studies

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Published in:
Research Methods in European Union Studies

Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):
Lynggaard, K., Löfgren, K., & Manners, I. J. (2015). Crossroads in European Union Studies. In K. Lynggaard, I. Manners, & K. Löfgren (Eds.), *Research Methods in European Union Studies* (pp. 3-17). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. *Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics*

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1

Crossroads in European Union Studies

Kennet Lynggaard, Karl Löfgren and Ian Manners

Aims and ambitions

EU studies is at a crossroads where the many disciplinary interests in Europe meet, as well as temporally where the past weaknesses of methodology meet the future challenges of a new research agenda on Europe. These weaknesses emanate from a number of traditional research design dichotomies in EU studies:

- *Research ontology*. Do we approach our research through rationalist or constructivist assumptions about EU affairs?
- *Research epistemology*. Is our ultimate knowledge ambition to formulate explanatory theories capturing EU affairs? Or is our research a process of conceptual (re)constructions aimed at understanding EU affairs?
- *Research methodology*. Do we best capture EU affairs through positivist and deductive research strategies, or through interpretative and inductive processes?
- *Research methods*. Do we prefer quantitative or qualitative research methods and data?

We need to deal with, and seek to overcome, such traditional dichotomies to meet the future challenges of a new research agenda on Europe. Scholars within EU studies have thus become increasingly preoccupied with epistemological issues when conducting research on EU affairs (for discussions, see Manners, 2003; Jupille, 2006). The increased prominence of research on Europeanisation since the 1990s and, though less visible in terms of impact, comparative regionalism perhaps since the mid-2000s, seems to have brought to the fore a scholarly interest in developing more explicit and systematic research strategies, designs and methods within EU studies. The renewed interest in research methodology is largely based on the assumption that research on EU affairs may gain further from drawing on analytical

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strategies and research methods derived from across the social sciences. The complexity of EU affairs calls for research methods known from a number of disciplines and for the further development of cross- or transdisciplinary research designs (e.g. Manners, 2009; McGowan, 2009; Warleigh, 2004). EU studies may in fact be considered as a research area which has been particularly prone to cross-disciplinary dialogue (Rosamond, 2006). And not least, the actual European integration process has now reached a point where more wide-ranging research strategies, designs and methods are needed. This gives reason for stressing the scientific ideal of holism – not necessarily opposed to, yet different from, emphasising, for instance, model building and parsimony.

The argument of this book is therefore that research strategies, designs and methods from across the social sciences can, and should, be applied in research directed at EU affairs. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this volume is threefold:

- to provide a state-of-the-art examination of social science research designs in EU studies;
- to provide innovative guidelines for the advancement of research designs in EU studies;
- to move the study of EU research beyond the dichotomies of the past towards a new agenda for research on Europe.

Research methodology is understood as a concern with research strategies, designs and methods. The focus is thus on the principles and procedures guiding research designs and on the research techniques used for specific research purposes. This volume essentially addresses the ‘how to study...’ questions in EU studies. The questions asked are: how do we conduct research into EU affairs? How can the broader social sciences contribute to the advancement of research designs in EU studies? And how can we move beyond the traditional research dichotomies in EU studies?

Characteristics and challenges in EU studies

EU studies has perhaps, more than any other sub-discipline, been acutely aware of the too-many-variables-too-few-cases, or the so-called ‘*n=1* problem’ (Hix, 2005). This awareness has been present right from the earliest and defining research addressing European integration, which was indeed very much aware of, on the one hand, the exceptionality, or *sui generis*, of the research object and, on the other hand, the academic desire for comparative cases.

It could be argued that the economic and political integration that took place in Europe during the 1950s, most notably within the European Coal and Steel Community, but also in the Nordic Council and the Council

of Europe, should be compared with integrative processes in the United Nations, the Americas, the Eastern Bloc, or even the Nasserian collaboration between the Arab states. Alternatively, it could be compared with historically remote eras such as the Carolingian Empire or the Ming Dynasty (Haas, 1961). With varying emphases, such comparisons demonstrate that the political and economic integration in Europe entails a number of unique economic, institutional and social characteristics, making comparisons extraordinarily challenging. This has, however, not prevented EU scholars from looking for more suitable comparative cases and conducting various types of comparisons.

Since the 1990s, many EU scholars have abandoned the approach of studying the EU as an international organisation and instead turned to comparing EU affairs with national political, economic, social and legal processes and systems in both the EU member-states and states outside of the EU. Recently, perhaps since the mid-2000s, we have also seen a revived trend towards comparative regional integration studies, including comparisons of the European integration with other integrative projects such as North American Free Trade Agreement, Association of Southeast Asian Nations and *Mercado Común del Sur* (i.e. the Southern common market) in South America (Laursen, 2003; Warleigh, 2006).

One can argue that the uniqueness of European integration, or indeed EU studies, puts EU studies in an exclusive position to both carry research designs known from the social science disciplines into EU studies, but also to return the favour by inventing novel research approaches in the social sciences. Again, EU studies appears to be in a favourable position particularly regarding the development of more cross- and transdisciplinary research methods that may find use in other areas of study, such as comparative regional integration and international politics. In fact the rise of the Europeanisation research agenda seems, at least in part, to have involved a revival of the study of EU affairs among political scientists, legal scholars and economists otherwise mainly interested in national political systems, law and economics. To be sure, the point is not whether, or possibly to what extent, the research object of EU studies represents an $n=1$ problem. Our point is that the *acute awareness* of the $n=1$ problem makes EU studies a research area suitable for innovative research designs. If anything, the awareness of this defining characteristic of EU studies has become even more pronounced over time. At the same time, the advancement of more inclusive and empirically sensitive research designs directed at the study of EU affairs gives rise to a number of empirical, theoretical and methodological challenges.

Empirical challenges

One aim of this book is to contribute to the development of cross- and transdisciplinary research methodologies based on the acknowledgment that

such research approaches are needed in the undertaking of generating more ample knowledge of EU affairs. In that sense, the preference given to cross- and transdisciplinary research strategies, designs and methods is essentially based on an empirical argument.

Developments in EU affairs over the past 20–30 years have increased the need for cutting across disciplinary lines. European integration has proceeded in terms of legal, political, economic and social integration. For instance, in legal terms, several treaty revisions and, most recently, the Lisbon Treaty, have expanded the jurisdiction and the competence of EU institutions. New political institutions have seen the light of day including a wide range of independent agencies (Borrás *et al.*, 2007). EU institutional actors have also been subject to massive changes in terms of composition and competences – for example the European Parliament and the European Commission. Economic integration has taken place most notably through the establishment of the internal market and the European Monetary Union including the institutional innovation of the European Central Bank. Similarly Europe has also experienced integration in terms of the development of European societal identities. It would be wrong to claim that national loyalties and identities have been transferred to Europe in any all-embracing and straightforward manner as early theorisations of European integration would lead us to expect. However, multiple identities have developed among European citizens including ‘feelings of belonging’, not only to national and local communities, but also to Europe. This is particularly so among European elites (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009). On top of the ‘deepening’ of European integration, we have also seen a ‘widening’ of the EU since the early 1980s, where the number of EU member-states has grown from nine to 28, a growth we have almost certainly not seen the end of.

With European integration also follows two other significant real world developments pushing for a departure from research strategies, designs and methods derived from a single social science discipline. The EU has growing importance for both global and national political, social, economic and legal matters. The significant empirical insights gained on the implications of European integration in national political and economic systems have, since the end of the 1990s, provided us with two important lessons. First, European integration is rarely the sole source of change in national societies (Lynggaard, 2011). Second, the implications of European integration are not confined to any one societal arena and expand, for instance, into judicial systems, public policies and administration, economic policies and state–civil society relationships (Ladrech, 2010; Graziano and Vink, 2007). In the global arena, the implications of European integration also transcend academic disciplines. Think of the involvement of the EU in one of the most pressing global issues for the past ten years: climate change. The nature of EU’s involvement in global climate

change issues clearly transcends the classical disciplines of economics, legal studies, international politics, comparative politics, sociology and public policy.

This development does not mean that we suggest that European integration is a linear integration process towards an ever closer union. Our point is that integration has proceeded in Europe and none of the mentioned aspects of European integration have taken place independently of each other. And we need to cross and transcend disciplinary lines to appreciate these developments.

Theoretical challenges

Theoretically, we wish to transcend the divides between frameworks directed at either international and domestic practices. Furthermore, we wish to go beyond the theoretical literatures often associated with particular social science disciplines such political science, economics, legal studies, sociology and history. Overall, we can identify a couple of important challenges in EU studies that surpass our standard disciplinary frameworks.

First, many of the political science approaches to EU studies, such as comparative politics, international relations and public policy, maintain sharp distinctions between their theoretical approaches, and there is a tendency within the monodisciplinary approaches to only include empirical problems which fit their own 'paradigms'. Consequently, the international relations tradition tends to emphasise the role of intergovernmental negotiations, the comparative politics tradition the 'state-like' characteristics of the EU (Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond, 2010), while traditional domestic public policy research tends to treat the EU as some vague external factor affecting national public administrations and policies.

Second, the exclusive character of the design of EU's institutions, including the rare checks-and-balance system between the actors, and the often technocratic decision-making processes challenge our traditional perceptions of a democratic system. While it is increasingly difficult to maintain a distinction, for example, between legal and political issues and between political and economic issues within national political systems, these distinctions are close to indivisible in the EU system.

Third, although there is always a tension between analytical, normative and prescriptive tensions in all fields of social science, this tension is possibly more present and explicit in the field of EU studies. The text-book distinction between policy analyst and policy advocate is quite blurred within EU studies. The academic analytical work is very close to the actual everyday practice of the policy actors, and vice versa; the community of EU policy analysts has to a large extent adopted the cognitive and normative discourse of the academic community.

Methodological challenges

A number of the well-known methodological divides within the social sciences can also be identified within EU studies. These divides are probably most clearly exposed in the rationalist/constructivist paradigmatic dispute, which was widely used to characterise two conflicting approaches to EU studies in the 1990s. What became clear, as the 1990s came to an end, was that rationalist and constructivist approaches were supplying complementary perceptions of EU affairs, rather than representing two fundamentally adversarial schools of thought. The 2000s have thus been characterised by reconciliation and bridge building attempts, often by means of collective research endeavours in the shape of edited collections (Schneider and Aspinwall, 2001; Checkel, 2007), special issues (Jupille *et al.*, 2003; Rittberger and Stacey, 2003) or ‘forum discussion’ (Checkel and Moravcsik, 2001). Yet, regardless of the good intentions, most often reconciliation meant a submission of selected constructivist research themes under a rationalist research paradigm.

A second divide appears between hypothetical-deductive (theoretically driven) and analytical-inductive (empirically driven) research purposes. On the one hand we find basic methodological set-ups which theoretically test derived hypotheses against a collection of empirical data. On the other hand there is the more open analytical-inductive set-up, which approaches empirical phenomena in order to observe common patterns and develop, for instance, concepts, categories, typologies and sometimes theoretical propositions. This divide is probably also most clearly exposed in the rationalist/constructivist distinction, wherein rationalists tend to employ hypothetical-deductive methodologies and constructivist lean towards more analytical-inductive set-ups. However, we have also witnessed how constructivists engage in developing and testing hypotheses. The development of testable hypotheses and theoretical causal claims is based on the scientific ideal that research should be reproducible and portable into other research areas. Undoubtedly, this ideal has the upper hand in social science and sometimes also imposes particular scientific requirements on the more interpretative research traditions. The development of testable hypotheses and theoretical causal claims is thus often – rightly or not – seen as a measurement of the maturity of a research area or the ‘normalisation’ of otherwise dispersed research efforts. Moreover, the editorial norms of social science journals also reflect this and seem to require, or at least prefer, a ‘presentation of research results’ along a certain template: research question, theoretical framework, (perhaps) method, (empirical) analysis and conclusion (Lynggaard, forthcoming). So even though the evolution of new social science research fields, transdisciplinary or not, are supposed to follow their own trajectories, they are in terms of assessment inevitably mirrored against the ‘normal’ social science (Manners, 2003: 71–3; 2007: 90–1).

However, regardless of scholarly preferences and norms of conveying research results, research practice still tends to cut across this divide. Even when research is presented as a test of a clearly formulated hypothesis, the preceding research process will almost certainly have involved several attempts of formulating alternative research questions, hypotheses and interpretations of data. Equally, the actual analytical-inductive and interpretative research processes may in fact not be explicated at all in the final publications, but rather be presented as the research results of a more straightforward, linear method. Sometimes hypothetical-deductive methodologies are seen as having their strengths in more well-developed and theorised research areas, whereas analytical-inductive methodologies may be appraised for their ability to develop new concepts, research questions and indeed research areas.

The central claim of this book is, however, that in practical research work these dichotomies are often either artificial or should be conceived as continuums that research activities may be placed along, just as researchers may move back and forth on these continuums during the research process.

Why a problem-solving approach?

Rather than taking a point of departure in theoretical or methodological approaches we have chosen a ‘how-to-study’ angle. By this we mean how scholars go about studying empirically some of the most urgent research question in EU studies. We have in this volume sought to do this by focusing on what we perceive as some of the most predominant research questions in EU studies. Research questions tend to cut across one, or more, of the above-mentioned artificial empirical, theoretical and methodological divides. Any single study within a certain research area may confine itself to a particular disciplinary approach and research methodology. Still, the vast majority of single studies, at least those with some empirical concern, cut across the divides. Equally, any literature grouped around a central research question will be characterised by some level of research plurality, and indeed a fairly high level of plurality. This also means that we suggest that research pluralism tends to favour more holistic and inclusive research. It is, of course, possible that different research designs generate competing findings and conclusions. However, we propose that most often dissimilar research designs, directed at a common research question, enable us to produce complementary findings and conclusions (see Tarrow, 2004). And even so when research results are presented antagonistically.

Outline of the book

The remainder of this chapter sets out how the book is organised. In our selection of analytical strategies we were concerned with a number of issues. First, we wished to include studies from the micro-, meso- and macro-levels

of European integration, and not to reduce EU politics to one single level of analysis (see Kalekin-Fishman, 1991). Micro-level analysis, aimed at the study of individual people, policies or discourses, is the subject of Part II. The focus in this section is on identities, people and their social groups, single policy studies, and European discourses.

Meso-level analysis, examined in Part III, is centred on the study of groups of people, institutions or states. The focus of this section is on agenda setting, bargaining, implementation, networks, visual primes and Europeanisation. In Part IV we look at macro-level approaches: systemic analysis of the EU as a political system within a global context. The focus of this section is on the EU as a global actor, European integration and globalisation, hard and soft governance, elections and party groups, attitude formation and new regionalism. Thus, while this variety of analytical strategies does not claim to be comprehensive, it is illustrative of some of the challenges facing EU scholars. This survey of micro-analysis of individual actions, meso-analysis of groups and macro-analysis of system trends suggests that more comprehensive programmes of EU research would need to understand the synergies between these levels in order to advance holistic scholarship.

Second, based on our experience with the field, and for the benefit of early-career researchers, we have also sought to include some of the more 'classical' research problems within EU studies. In this context, the edited collection can also be read as a research review of an existing body of analytical strategies. Finally, and perhaps in contrast to the above, we have also tried to include novel and innovative analytical perspectives on how to go about research in EU studies.

Each contribution will be organised along the following lines: the first section will introduce the research theme in focus. After that section two reviews central research questions and types of theoretical and analytical approaches within the research domain. The third section will discuss the most pressing research design concerns and address how research strategies may be advanced. In doing so, the third section will draw on insights from empirical research in EU affairs, as well as seek further inspiration from research designs in the broader field of social science. The fourth and final section will conclude by outlining directions for innovative research designs. Each chapter will consider both state-of-the-art research designs in terms of efforts to cut across the divides in the literature – including interpretivist/positivist, constructivist/rationalist and qualitative/quantitative – and outline guidelines on how to develop further inclusive and empirical sensitive research designs.

The first contribution, in Chapter 2, by Ben Rosamond contains a meta-reflection on the history and state of academic methodology discussions within the multidisciplinary remit of EU studies. The message this chapter conveys is that although methodological (which concerns more than just research methods) debates are not easily visible within EU studies, there are

a number of methodological strands as well as implicit understandings for what should guide empirical research within this academic community. The chapter is also written as a defence of methodological pluralism in order to avoid the tragedy of, for example, American political science with one dominant research paradigm.

In Chapter 3, Ann-Christina L. Knudsen is concerned with how historians research the EU's past. She provides an overview of the field of scholarship on the EU's history, and discusses how historians wrestle with issues of narrativity, generalisations and conceptualisations. Overall, the chapter explores key dimensions of historical research design by discussing what the knowledge ambition of historical research is, how archives and sources are used for writing the EU's history, and also showing how historical research methods can be applied for example to the making of the common agricultural policy in the 1960s.

Angela Bourne focuses in Chapter 4 on methods employed to address research questions examining the relationship between identification – whether at mass or elite, member-state or substate levels – and processes of European integration. The chapter examines key themes and research designs employed in both quantitative approaches that are mostly focused on the impact of identities on support for the EU and qualitative methods employed in studies addressing the impact of the EU on identification patterns in Europe. Comparative and case study research designs are discussed and illustrated with examples from territorial politics within member-states with important identity dimensions.

In Chapter 5, Michael Strange presents some thoughts around analytical strategies for studying people and social groups in the EU. This includes the construction and implementation of EU citizenship rights; the quest for an EU demos; and the emergence of an EU society. Overall, the chapter makes clear that the types of research questions related to people and social groups enable researchers to see the EU as not only a top-down *political project* but also draw attention to the underlying social *processes* and *practices* through which European integration is made possible (and challenged) on an everyday basis.

Single policy studies are used to understand the role of the EU in a wide variety of sectors, together with policy development over time, and often offer public policy prescriptions. Chapter 6, written by Annica Kronsell and Ian Manners, discusses the relevance of single policy studies in EU research and gives examples of how such research can be designed and carried out. The chapter reviews three examples illustrative of how single policy studies can be designed using different approaches in the analysis: multiple streams approach to policy making; comparative hypothesis testing; and feminist institutional theory.

Discourse analysis in European studies can touch upon a large number of issues ranging from the EU as a polity or a global actor, to the constitution

of a European public sphere, or the role of discourse in the Europeanisation of public policy. Moreover, the study of discourses involves a plurality of methodological and theoretical approaches. Amandine Crespy presents in Chapter 7 four main approaches – content analysis, framing, narratives and critical discourse analysis – as well as typical and possible combinations of various methods and theoretical underpinnings. Throughout, the chapter provides illustrations through research dealing with political debates on the socio-economic dimension of EU integration.

Analytical strategies for agenda setting in the EU are presented by Sebastiaan Princen in Chapter 8. The central question in agenda-setting studies is why some issues receive attention while others do not. Agenda-setting studies may focus on individual issues, or on the composition of the EU agenda as a whole. While most studies look at issues that have made it to the agenda, it is equally important to understand why some issues have not made it to the agenda. The chapter presents a number of research strategies that can be used to study these types of questions, using different types of sources (documents, participants) and approaches (interpretative and quantitative), and discusses their strengths and weaknesses.

Sara Hagemann presents in Chapter 9 some thoughts on how to address bargaining within and between EU institutions by reflecting on recent advancements in both qualitative and quantitative empirical studies of negotiation situations and processes. It also draws on more formal political science approaches to EU actors' decision 'games'. The chapter makes it clear that studies of negotiation games between individual and collective actors are essential to improve our understanding of the political system of the EU. At the same time, the EU is a highly interesting laboratory to test and improve political science bargaining theories in general.

In Chapter 10 Karl Löfgren reviews and discusses the status and future of implementation studies among students of the EU. In the past, this field of research was largely driven by a search for the 'golden independent variable' by means of legalist and top-down compliance approaches. Not only was this search anything but fruitful (with no clear indications of what affects successful domestic implementation of EU law), it also overlooked enforcement and mechanisms at the micro-level of the EU polity. In contrast this chapter presents a few examples of micro cases in order to demonstrate alternatives to the dominant top-down compliance perspective of the past.

Jenny Lewis and Sevasti Chatzopoulou demonstrate in Chapter 11 how social network analysis can be done. Analysing networks is a research method for systematically examining actors' interactions, making it very useful for analysing the EU's multilevel decision- and policy-making arenas. The network method identifies, visualises and renders actors' interactions and power more transparent. Governance networks within the Common Agricultural Policy and national agricultural policy networks are used to

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