

ECPR Summer School in Methods and Techniques

25 July –10 August 2013

Course Description Form (*1 week courses – week 2 -- 5 – 9 August*)

Course title

D12. Methodological pluralism and problem-focused research

Instructor details

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Short Bio:

Michael Keating (BA Oxon, 1971; PhD Glasgow College, 1975) is Professor of Politics at the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh. He is fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Academician of the Social Sciences. He has worked at the University of Essex, North Staffordshire Polytechnic, the University of Strathclyde, the University of Western Ontario and the European University Institute. His latest book *Rescaling the European State* is published by Oxford University Press in 2013.

Short outline:

The course will focus on the use of multiple and mixed methods in social science research. It will review different approaches and ask how far they are compatible, at the level of ontology, epistemology and methods. Issues covered include positivism, constructivism, concept formation, ethnographic approaches, quantification, case studies and historical approaches. It will explore possibilities for combining approaches and methods within individual projects. An emphasis will be placed on research design and tailoring methods to the question being asked. Opportunity will be provided to discuss participants' own research projects.

Long outline:

The social sciences have long been wracked by methodological conflicts, with a tendency for academics to divide themselves into rival schools. Often this pitches 'positivists' against 'constructivists' or 'quantitative' against 'qualitative' methods. The result is the existence of rival pillars, going all the way from ontology (what we know) and epistemology (how we know it) at the base up to methodologies and research tools. The premise of our book

Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective is that these present simplified and misleading accounts of the issues at stake. Many scholars in practice take a middle position on these issues; and it is possible to cross over and combine approaches all the way up.

Each day we will examine one of the debates or one general approach, focusing on what is distinctive in it and how it may be applied in practice. The final hour will be given to discussions of the research of members of the group, and the methodological challenges involved.

On the first day, we will review the main issues at stake, at the level of ontology, epistemology and approaches. We will examine the scope for combining approaches and the limits and discuss the idea of methodological pluralism and mixed-methods.

The second day will start with a discussion of the meaning and implications of positivism in the social sciences and of the debate on constructivism. Positivism is sometimes defined as a form of ontological realism, in which the 'real world' is examined in a direct way, but its original meaning is rather as a form of reasoning that allows us to generate laws of behaviour, without necessarily knowing the world directly. Constructivism starts from the premise that we cannot know the world directly but work with concepts, as do political and social actors; it does not entail a denial of the real world. Positivism and constructivism are not therefore necessarily incompatible but intersect in many ways. The key issue is how concepts are constructed, operationalized and used and we will give attention to this, comparing the classic Sartorian approach with others. Finally, we will examine the issue of causation in social science.

Modernist social science has often sought to exclude normative issues from its scope, assigning these to philosophy. Philosophers in turn have frequently used hypothetical rather than real cases to illustrate their arguments. Yet many social science concepts do have a normative charge. In recent years, normativity has come back into social sciences in two ways. First, there is interest in the role of norms in the behaviour of political and social actors. Second, there is more willingness to explore normative issues in the contemporary world – examples are debates about democratizing the European Union, multiculturalism, migration and self-determination. We will examine how normative reasoning can be combined with empirical social science and what methods might be appropriate.

Social sciences have been heavily dependent on strategies of comparison in order to make inferences and attribute effects to causes. Often this has meant taking properties of cases (variables) as the unit of analysis. Comparison can also, however, be made using cases as the unit of analysis, bearing mind that neither cases nor variables 'exist' in the world but are products of conceptualization and definition. We will look at strategies of comparison, the value of variable-based and case-based approaches and at qualitative comparative analysis. We will also assess the value and use of case studies.

Debates about social science methodology have often pitted 'quantitative' against 'qualitative' methods. We have argued that this is extremely misleading. Qualitative and quantitative methods are both means of generating data and their ontological status is not dependent on whether they have numbers attached to them. Both are reliant on prior conceptualization and both require rigorous ways of appraising the results. We will not enter into the mechanics of quantitative methods, as that is a large topic, covered in other courses, but on the fourth day we will consider some basic rules about definition, measurement and

inference. We will then examine ethnographic approaches, which differ in focusing on case studies, contextualization and deep immersion, where quantitative approaches emphasise decontextualization.

On the fifth day, we will look at historical approaches. Historical institutionalism has become very influential in political science, but does not always follow the methods used by historians. The latter emphasise interpretation, the existence of rival historical accounts and the uses of history in political argument. We will consider how far objective history is possible and how historical and social sciences approaches can be combined. We will then examine the uses and limits of case studies.

Finally, we will ask about the role of the social scientist in practical and policy debates and the demand that social science be ‘relevant’.

Day-to-day schedule

- Week 2

	Topic(s)	Details [NB : incl. timing of lecture v/s lab or fieldwork etc. hours]
Day 1	Main approaches in social science	
Day 2	Constructivism and Positivism Concept formation Causation	
Day 3	Strategies of comparison Dealing with normative questions	
Day 4	Quantification Ethnography	
Day 5	Historical approaches Case studies Academia and practice	

Course Book:

Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (eds), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Day-to-day reading list

	Readings (please read at least the compulsory reading for the scheduled day)
Day 1	Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, ‘Introduction’ (Chapter 1) and ‘How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction’ (Chapter 2) in Della Porta and Keating (eds.). Michael Keating and Donatella della Porta, ‘In Defence of Pluralism. Combining approaches in the social sciences’ (this is the English version of ‘In difesa del pluralismo. Combinare gli approcci nelle scienze sociali’, <i>Quaderni di Scienza Politica</i> (2010)1: 575-98.
Day 2	Adrienne Héritier ‘Causal explanation’ (Chapter 4) in Della Porta and Keating

	<p>(eds). Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Constructivism: what it is (not) and how it matters' (Chapter 5) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Peter Mair 'Concepts and concept formation' (Chapter 10) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Alessandro Pizzorno , 'Rationality and recognition' Rationality and recognition' (Chapter 9) in Della Porta and Keating (eds).</p>
Day 3	<p>Rainer Bauböck, 'Normative political theory and empirical research'(Chapter 9) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Bent Flyvbjerg, <i>Making Social Science Matter</i> (Cambridge, 2001), Chapter 5, 'Values in Social and Political Inquiry'. Max Weber, 'The objectivity of social science'.</p>
Day 4	<p>Donatella della Porta' 'Comparative analysis: case-oriented versus variable-oriented research' (Chapter 11) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Wagemann, Claudius and Carsten Q. Schneider, 'Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Fuzzy Sets: the Agenda for a Research Approach and a Data Analysis Technique', <i>Comparative Sociology</i>, 9, 3: 376-396 (2010). Pascal Vennesson, 'Case studies and process tracing: theories and practices' (Chapter 12) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Mark Franklin, 'Quantitative analysis' (Chapter 12) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Philippe Schmitter, 'The design of social and political research ' (Chapter 14) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Zoe Bray. 'Ethnographic approaches' (Chapter 15) in Della Porta and Keating (eds).</p>
Day 5	<p>Pascal Vennesson, 'Case Studies and Process Tracing: theories and practice' (Chapter 13) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Sven Steinmo, 'Historical institutionalism' (Chapter 7) in Della Porta and Keating (eds). Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer 'Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas, in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds). <i>Comparative Historical Research</i>, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 Mary Fulbrook, 'Why historical accounts are inevitably theoretical; but why some accounts are preferable to others', in A.L. Macfie (ed.), <i>The Philosophy of History</i>, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006. Michael Keating, 'Political Science and Public Policy', in B. Guy Peters and Gerry Stoker (eds), <i>The Relevance of Political Science</i> (Palgrave: forthcoming).</p>

Requested prior knowledge

There is no precise prior knowledge required.

Software used

None

Literature

- Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research. Methods and Practical Skills*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Brian Caterino and Sanford F. Schram, *Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method*, New York University Press, 2006.
- Henry Brady and David Collier (eds), *Rethinking Social Inquiry. Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.
- John Geering, *Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Colin Hay, *Political Analysis. A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave, 2002.
- James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, University of California Press, 1987.
- Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (eds), *Comparative Politics. Rationality, Culture and Structure*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Russell Sage Foundation, 1984.
- Luk van Langenhove, *Innovating the Social Sciences: Towards More Useful Knowledge for Society*, Passagen, 2007.
- Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Free Press, 1949.

Lecture room requirement

Seminar-style arrangement is best.