

ENCOUNTERS WITH EUROPE :

CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS, AND RESEARCH DESIGN

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Abstract

This article examines the issues of research design raised by research on Europeanization. Specifically, we briefly introduce the basic concepts and the classic approach of integration theorists, and move on to discuss two more recent proposals made by scholars working on Europeanization. We compare the baseline model and the bottom-up approach to research design. As the latter is less known than the former, we explain how it works and its advantages. We also show how Europeanization research can contribute to major questions at the core of comparative politics by taking a bottom-up perspective. However, we do not conclude that the choice is a dichotomy. Although in this article we make the case for bottom-up analysis, future research could usefully combine baseline and bottom-up designs to produce and compare empirical findings on Europeanization.

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY BOTHER ABOUT CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS?

In this article, we look at Europeanization from the point of view of research design. Instead of dealing with substantive dimensions of Europeanization, we discuss the main concepts underpinning this field of research. We then move from concepts to research design. In the final part of the article we briefly discuss the implications of research design for future work on Europeanization.

One limitation of this article is, therefore, that we do not address any substantive issue, such as whether European integration has changed the nature of the state in Western Europe or is affecting some policy areas more than others. Another is that we do not provide a literature review - this can be found in several publications, such as Olsen (2002) and Featherstone & Radaelli (2003: chapters 1 and 2). The third limitation is that we barely scratch the surface of research design. We illustrate how to organize research and establish causality in relation to some methodological problems of Europeanization research. This is a component of research design, but there are several other issues concerning how to draw causal inferences from empirical evidence (see Brady and Collier 2004) that are not addressed here.

Let us explain why we opt for a focus on concepts and research design. Definitions, conceptual analysis, theorization, and methodology occupy a prominent position in political science. They perform different roles in explanation, however, and should not be confused. Concepts need solid definitions to operate. But conceptual analysis, in addition, covers issues such as the relationship between concepts and measurement, the role of the ‘ladder of abstraction’ in classification, the function played by typologies in research designs and explanations, and the treatment of category mistakes and pitfalls (Brady and Collier 2004; Daly 2003, Majone 2005:24-25, Majone and Quade 1980; Sartori 1984). In turn, conceptual analysis is a pre-condition for measurement (Brady and Collier 2004). Concepts are also a component of the wider attempt to explain and understand politics via hypotheses and theories that are then confronted with empirical evidence. In order to use empirical evidence to assess causal hypotheses one needs an appropriate research design. Concepts, research methods and methodology are therefore connected but different.

In this vein, some scholars argue that the discussion of concepts is only an ‘attention-directing’ device in that, it directs academic attention towards a new set of questions and research puzzles (Olsen 2002). Others think that the literature has already shown too many cases of conceptual pitfalls. Consequently, they see more rigorous conceptual analysis as a priority (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003). Others argue for more systematic links between Europeanization and the classic concepts of political science, especially power, conflict, and ultimately politics (Mair 2004). Finally, one may well take a completely different perspective and submit that Europeanization is not an objective entity to be pigeonholed into one aseptic definition. Quite the opposite – the argument

runs - it is a set of contested discourses and narratives about the impact of European integration on domestic political change. In this perspective, Europeanization is ‘what political actors make of it’ and researchers may well wish to engage in the debate with their own accounts, but they must acknowledge that their definitions are only a component of a wider political discourse.

Concepts demarcate the territory of analytical inquiry. They chart the domain we want to examine. But what is the specific domain of Europeanization? Basically, there are two ways to proceed. They often overlap in empirical research, but they are informed by different analytical perspectives. One is to think about Europeanization as adaptation to Europe. This has obvious links with the analysis of implementation. Indeed, it is a pity that the lessons of implementation research are often neglected by scholars working within this conceptual approach to Europeanization (a remarkable exception is Zahariadis 2005). Another is to look at Europeanization as a set of processes altering the domestic opportunity structure. Here the issue is not only (and not so much) one of adaptation, but, rather, one of strategic and cognitive change at the level of the domestic political systems. Domestic actors have to respond to ‘Europe’, but this is only part of the story and does not go much further than implementation analysis. The other part of the story is concerned with domestic actors that encounter ‘Europe’ when pursuing domestic change – or resisting change. In these encounters, the EU can be either an adaptation requirement (in which case we go back to the first way of thinking) or a resource, a learning opportunity, a new venue for leadership, discourse and policy action. It can also be a minimal episode that does not alter what is at stake in domestic political and policy

arenas. The domestic system of interaction may encounter a directive, a national action plan to be sent to Brussels in the context of facilitated coordination, a Spring summit in which something has to be said about competitiveness and jobs, but all this may have minimal influence on how the domestic game is played, the resources that are used, and the final outcomes in terms of policy change (or lack of it) at home. So the second way of thinking is broader than the first.

No matter how one defines the domain of Europeanization, when one tries to draw causal inferences from empirical evidence, the thorny issue is how to avoid pre-judging the role of the EU. The problem is one of assessing the impact of the EU on the domestic level, knowing that we have to control for obvious rival hypotheses for domestic change, such as ‘globalization’ or ‘domestic politics’ (in turn, these two hypotheses lead to a rich set of operationalizations). This is where research design enters the scene.

2. DEFINITIONS AND DOMESTIC IMPACTS

Before we talk about research design, however, it is useful to re-visit some definitions of Europeanization. This brief presentation will lead us to show how the two conceptual approaches to the specific domain of Europeanization crop up and intersect with different notions of impact. Clarification on what is meant by ‘impact’ is crucial, as one common way to introduce students to Europeanization is to start with the proposition that ‘it is all about the domestic impact of the EU’.

There are several ways in which one can approach Europeanization. Patterns of Europeanization pre-date the EU. Even in the post World War II period, the European Communities first and the EU later represent only one of the integration paths – as shown by the examples of the Council of Europe and the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Majone 2005:2-3). In a broad, encyclopedic sense, to reduce Europeanization to the ‘Europe of Brussels’ is misleading. Yet it is useful to make a distinction between background concepts and systematized concepts (Adcock and Collier 2001). As a background concept, Europeanization refers to all the possible meanings we may want to include in an encyclopedia. But communities of specialists work with systematized concepts where definitions are explicitly formulated to address the core questions of a research field. It is in this systematized sense that Europeanization – in political science scholarly work - has started to denote the range of studies dedicated to the effects of European integration on domestic polity, politics and policy.

Risse et al. (2001: 3) define Europeanization ‘as the emergence and the development at the European level of distinct structures of governance.’ Although the whole volume from which this definition is drawn (Cowles et al. 2001) is clearly dedicated to domestic policy adjustment and not to European integration per se, this approach seems to point to the origins of European governance (as shown by the term ‘emergence’) rather than towards the domestic consequences of integration. This slight gap between the conceptual definition and the research design maintains an ambiguity between Europeanization and European integration.

Drawing on early conceptual analysis by Robert Ladrech (1994), another definition looks at Europeanization as processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of norms, beliefs, formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ that are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy processes and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub-national) discourse, political structures, and public policies (Radaelli 2003). There are two possible misunderstandings of this definition. One is to reduce it to the analysis of how EU decisions (policies, common positions of the Council, legislation, etc.) impact on domestic political systems. Another is to extend it to the point that everything that goes on in Brussels can be seen as a manifestation of Europeanization when analyzed from the point of view of domestic politics.

The ‘EU policy processes’ mentioned in the definition should not be equated with the adoption of policies or law. They may lead to policies and legislation, but in some circumstances they may be highly conflictual and may not end up with the adoption of any EU policy. However, they can still produce effects on member states’ politics. Repeated negotiations are often necessary to finalize complex policy packages. For many years there may be just a flurry of working groups, white papers, and bargaining without final decisions, but nevertheless interaction in Brussels can change policy paradigms at the domestic level (Radaelli 1997 shows how these mechanisms played out in corporate taxation).

Thus, the concept of ‘EU policy process’ designates a political space with a distinct EU dimension wherein social interaction among elites (and in some cases public opinion) takes place. Of course, this does not mean that any political space where there are interactions produces effects – the second misunderstanding. Indeed, as mentioned, the classic problem in this area of research is to devise research designs that avoid pre-judging the role of the EU in domestic politics. In order to produce effects, these interactions at the EU level must become a reference point in domestic political action, either via socialization effects or the production of policies that modify the logic of political interaction at home. Scholars working on the notion of *référentiel* (Muller 1995; 2000) would say that there is Europeanization when the EU becomes the *référentiel* of domestic political action.

Both definitions mentioned above are grounded in an understanding of Europeanization as institutionalization (Stone Sweet and Fligstein 2001) and interactive process, not a mechanism of uni-directional reaction to ‘Europe’ (Salgado and Woll, 2004, 4). As such, they go beyond a narrow notion of ‘impact’ (of the EU on domestic systems), and allow for the analysis of feedback effects. It is reasonable to hypothesize that a political system under continuous pressure from the EU will try to organize its EU-level political activity to reduce this pressure.

The link with the concept of time and its role in politics is evident. To chart the interactions between the domestic and the EU levels, one needs research designs that use time to control for sophisticated processes of causation and, in some cases, it may be

necessary to dig out the ‘slow and big movements’ that cannot be captured by one-shot interactions between Brussels and the member states (as shown by Pierson 2003; 2004).

What is the relevance of this discussion for the two notions of ‘adaptation to Europe’ versus ‘encounters with Europe’? In a sense, it is true that Europeanization research is eminently interested in the domestic impact of the EU. In turn, this lends itself quite naturally to the first way of demarcating Europeanization mentioned above - adaptation. This is one possible option, but there is a second way of identifying the territory of Europeanization research. True, there are impacts that can be described as ‘responses to pressures coming down from Brussels’. But there are other types of impact. To begin with, the decline of the Community method (Majone 2005: Chp.3) shows that some areas of EU policy are moving away from vertical policy-making in the sense of laws created in Brussels and then ‘imposed’ onto member states via transposition and implementation. There are also horizontal processes based on cooperation among the member states’ governments in the context of the EU but outside the Community method, as shown by the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the components of Justice and Home Affairs that so far have not been taken into the Community framework. In the context of the policies for a more competitive knowledge-society in Europe, the open method of coordination alters the opportunity structure in several ways, and pressure is not the most important one. In some areas, the open method does not produce a clear EU template, because discourses are contested as a consequence of the clash between paradigms (think of the ‘social market economy’ versus ‘competitiveness first). In these circumstances, the impact of open coordination cannot be examined in terms of pressure. Yet the domestic

system of interaction can encounter open coordination processes as alterations of the domestic opportunity structure. Whether these alterations are profound or ephemeral is an empirical matter.

Of course, facilitated coordination can work and produce impact or it may not work at all – this is a question that empirical research is looking at (Borras and Jacobsson 2004). But when it works, the open method of coordination draws on the logic of benchmarking, networking, and ultimately cognitive effects and policy learning. Open coordination refers to a mode of governance based on cooperation among member states facilitated by EU institutions (especially the Council and the Commission). It does not lead to the formulation of EU legislation but to EU-level guidelines (and in some cases indicators) to be implemented by the national parliaments. Under these circumstances, the notion of ‘impact’ does not denote adaptation to vertical pressures, but more subtle impacts of socialization processes, ideational convergence, learning, and re-definitions of policy paradigms and ideas. What is important is to assess the role played by these mechanisms not by looking at how ideas, socialization, definitions originate in Brussels and ‘go down’ to the member states, but by considering how the domestic policy systems encounters them (as an opportunity, a shock, minimal turbulence, rhetorical arenas, and so on).

Further, we must account for creative usages of Europe and thus for the political construction of impacts. Domestic actors are at the same time filters and users of European norms, policies, and ideas. They often have discretion to use the EU in many different ways. They can re-appropriate European norms and policy paradigms to

implement their own policies (Pasquier 2005). They can draw on the EU as a resource without specific pressure from Brussels (Thatcher 2004). Europeanization looks at how domestic change is processed, and patterns of adaptation can be more complex and creative than reactions to ‘Brussels’ (Jacquot and Woll 2003). Indeed, complex adaptation patterns and interactive logics are common (Megie and Ravinet, 2004), especially if one adds the sub-national dimension and explores impacts at the local level (Pasquier and Weisbein 2004).

Finally, impacts can be discursively created – and consequently we must refer to the notion of Europeanization as discourse (Hay and Rosamond 2002; Kallestrup 2002). In turn, discourse is cast in different forms, from rhetoric (Schimmelfennig, 2001) to policy narratives (Radaelli, 1999). Yet discourse is not just language. It is also an interactive process (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). Indeed, it is a set of ideas *and* an interactive process. The ideational dimension itself divides into two activities: a cognitive activity which enables actors to make sense of reality (drawing on knowledge, policy analysis, information about problems, actors, and resources) and a more normative activity wherein reality is judged. The interactive dimension of discourse shows that impacts should be examined in the context of the interaction among policy-makers – at the stage of policy formulation – and in the arenas of political communication to the public.

To conclude, definitions lead to conceptual analysis by highlighting the two understandings of Europeanization research - to repeat one more time, they are the simple but narrow understanding of adaptation to the EU versus the broader but more difficult to

measure notion of strategic and-or cognitive effects triggered by modifications of the opportunity structure. For the sake of simplification, we have called this second understanding ‘encounters with Europe’. The discussion of research design we are about to commence will shed light on what we mean by encounters.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

It is not easy to devise a suitable research design for drawing causal inferences about Europeanization. There are two problems that have to be sorted out before one attends to research design. We will briefly illustrate these problems and then introduce three different research designs.

The first problem is that it is not clear how far the territory covered by the concept goes. Having established that we consider only the systematized concept of Europeanization, does it cover exclusively EU effects, or inter-governmental relations in Europe (but not necessarily in the institutional context of the EU)? Does it stretch as far as enlargement, candidate countries, and even countries that cannot possibly be interested in EU membership (think of the possible impact of the EU on democratic regimes in Latin America)? It is impossible to pin down precisely the territory covered by the concept. Different researchers interested in different problems will continue to draw on different notions – the issue becoming one of being clear each time about the properties of the concept (Sartori 1984).

The second issue is whether Europeanization is a black and white concept that can be measured. Can we look at a member state and measure whether it is Europeanized or not, possibly with objective indicators? The answer is yes, but it is very difficult. Europeanization is more a process than an end-state (Goetz 2002). Consequently, it cannot be measured until the criteria used to track down the process and its outcomes are spelled out (see Giuliani 2003 for a valuable attempt). Getting old is also a process but can be measured. The question is where does one find the unit of measurement? Europeanization is sometimes measured according to a scale comprising transformation, adaptation, inertia, retrenchment (Heritier et al. 2001), and, perhaps, hostile reactions to Europe. *Prima facie*, these categories seem to make sense. However, it is difficult to specify objective indicators of what makes adaptation different from transformation. More often than not, we have to rely on the intuition and the interpretative skills of the researcher – not the most solid tracks to produce valid causal inferences from empirical evidence. What a researcher may classify as ‘adaptation’ may look like ‘transformation’ to another – it depends on the standards and time horizon they are using (implicitly or, hopefully, explicitly). So much so that some authors prefer to avoid this set of outcomes and re-define the dependent variable as implementation, and then discuss types of implementation that have already been classified by policy theory (Zahariadis 2005). In any case, it is indispensable to control for change over relatively long periods of time. Some changes apparently linked to the implementation of EU policies may have been cultivated and prepared for years by domestic coalitions (Bull and Baudner 2004). Over a

fairly long period of time, the domestication of Europe can appear more important than top-down pressure and adaptation.

Given this complexity, research designs are crucial. To repeat, a possible pitfall of Europeanization research consists of pre-judging the impact of the EU on domestic politics and policy. For example, there is the risk of assuming that if some domestic changes look similar to what Brussels wants, this must be an instance of Europeanization. One way to avoid this is to specify rival alternative hypotheses (such as globalization, or domestic politics). So far, however, there has been more debate on how to specify mechanisms of Europeanization than on the mechanisms at work in rival alternative hypotheses. The risk of assuming that ‘if they do something similar to what Brussels want, they must be doing it because of Brussels’ must be handled – we submit – by using research designs sensitive to time (so that one can check where there was something moving on before Brussels entered the scene) and to the system of interaction at the domestic level.

Basically, there are three ways to go about research design. The first path follows integration theorists (first arrow in fig.1). It consists of making hypotheses on how member states pool sovereignty – this is the normal way in which integration theories are used - and investigating the consequences for domestic politics of the propositions about the ontology of European integration – this is the value added in terms of Europeanization. Thus, it is wrong to argue that Europeanization is absent from theories of European integration such as neo-functionalism and liberal inter-governmentalism. As

shown by Bulmer (2006), one can derive from these theories causal propositions about the impact of European integration on the state. Although Europeanization is not the main focus of integration theories, these theories are not silent about the winners and losers of European integration. Integration theories contain some propositions about how the state and pressure groups will be affected by integration. The issue is one of focus and mechanisms: integration theories are not focused on Europeanization and are not very specific on the mechanisms that produce domestic impacts. The reason for that is that these theories are ontological, whilst most of the phenomena under the lens of Europeanization research are post-ontological (Caporaso 2006).

The second option is the baseline mode presented by Caporaso (second arrow in fig.1). It moves from the EU to the domestic level, whereas theories of integration go from the domestic to the supra-national level. Caporaso's standard design is based on a chain where EU 'pressure', mediated by intervening variables, leads to reactions and change at the domestic level, including resistance and inertial responses. Domestic change has a feed-back effect on the EU, thus closing the loop (see fig.2).

The baseline design chimes with the notion of Europeanization as adaptation of Europe mentioned above. Pressure is clarified in terms of 'goodness of fit', which is not just the fit or lack of between EU and domestic policies, but covers structural-institutional fits as well (Caporaso 2006). In addition, the intervening variables are made explicit and, instead of being generated by *ad hoc* explanations based on the peculiarity of the political

systems of the member states, are grounded in either social constructivism or rational choice institutionalist frameworks (Börzel and Risse 2003).

The bottom-up approach provides the third option (third arrow in fig.1 and fig.3). Whereas the baseline model is recursive (there are no exogenous variables), bottom-up research designs exogenize EU-level variables. Instead of starting from EU policy/politics as independent variable and tracking down the consequences for domestic institutions, policies, and politics, the bottom-up research design starts at time 0 and finishes at time n with empirical observations at the level of domestic actors. In consequence, the design has the (apparently) paradoxical property of tracking down processes from the domestic to the domestic level.

What can a domestic-domestic design (with the EU variables treated as exogenous) say on ‘the impact of the EU’? The idea is to start from actors, problems, resources, policy style, and discourses at the domestic level (that is, the system of interaction at the domestic level). This is shown in fig.3 where the bottom-up design is contrasted with the baseline model. By using time and temporal causal sequences at the domestic level, a bottom-up approach checks if, when, and how exogenous variables (the EU and global arenas can be accounted for in the same design, because they are two sources of exogenous variables) provide a change in any of the main components of the system of interaction.

In this research design, there is no a-priori idea about the impact of EU (or ‘global’) variables. The analyst tracks down the political dynamics of the domestic system of interaction. If and when the actors in this system encounter ‘Europe’, evidence is collected on variables such as the salience of EU policies, their role as constraints or opportunities, their potential for learning effects, and more generally any alteration of the domestic opportunity structure. If there is alteration, it is important to establish if there are actors that have the willingness and capability of exploiting the changes, or whether brokers or policy entrepreneurs facilitate the exploitation. These empirical checks on the encounters with ‘Europe’ are the same performed for encounters with globalization or other exogenous shocks, such as national elections and changes in government. By doing so, the bottom-up research design does not pre-judge the impact of EU-level variables. It can also establish if the encounter with ‘Europe’ is one of the critical junctures of the policy process under examination or a less important encounter. To illustrate, national policy makers encounter the EU in the preparation of national action plans required by the Lisbon strategy (the so-called National Reform Plans) but the issue is whether this encounter is really crucial for domestic policy or, instead, there is de-coupling between what is done in Brussels and for Brussels and what really matters at home.

As mentioned, the bottom-up design controls for rival alternative hypotheses. This is typically done via process-tracing and time-sensitive political analysis. Note that this is a choice in terms of design. It does not reflect any assumption in terms of the nature of Europeanization – that is, whether the latter is more a process driven by society and local actors or a top-down steering mechanism. The term ‘bottom-up model’ is well-known in

the literature on policy implementation and hence we borrow from this terminology, but we are not talking about implementation.

To conclude with the comparison between the baseline and the bottom-up designs, let us look at the conditions for Europeanization. To begin with, a distinctive EU-level system of interaction (the ‘space’ mentioned above) is a necessary condition for Europeanization to occur in all designs. Further, both ‘baseline’ analysts and ‘bottom-uppers’ agree that socialization is not a sufficient condition. However, adaptational pressure is a necessary condition in the baseline model but not in the bottom-up design. The bottom-up approach is also clear on the fact that the establishment of EU policies is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for Europeanization. The baseline model is less interested in this question, as the key variable is the presence or absence of adaptational pressure – whether it comes from agreement on policies in Brussels or other types of reaction is less important.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have examined Europeanization through the lenses of research design. Conceptual analysis and the formulation of research designs are pre-conditions for measurement and more generally empirical research. Specifically, we have examined different approaches to research designs, such as the baseline model and the bottom-up research design. The bottom up research design has potential. By analyzing

Europeanization from the point of view of domestic political systems, ‘bottom uppers’ can avoid the problem of pre-judging EU effects. EU-level variables are examined as possible sources of alterations of the domestic opportunity structure. As such, they are treated in the same exogenous way as other alternative hypotheses (for domestic change), such as ‘globalization’.

The bottom-up design provides accuracy in the specification of causal sequences. Indeed, Europeanization is only one of the factors of change. Change may also draw on domestic channels or be led by other supranational dynamics (globalization for instance). In the future, these designs could be usefully extended from policy analysis to long-term investigations of comparative politics, by addressing the crucial issue of the reshaping of the nation-state in Europe. In turn, this has potential for a thicker approach to the concept of time and the relationship between time and change. Change operates in the time-sequence of implementation of public policy, but more importantly it can be examined in relation to the formation and stabilization of long term political equilibria in nation-states (following an approach informed by Stein Rokkan 1999, Mair 2004).

Having made the case for one type of research design, we do not jump to the conclusion that there is a fundamental contrast between this design and the baseline model. The two designs provide different lenses that, under certain circumstances, can be usefully combined to provide a comprehensive picture (see Quaglia and Radaelli 2007 for an example). Hence one direction in which future research could usefully make progress is

to measure Europeanization both from a bottom-up and a top-down perspective, and compare the findings.

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Figure 1- Three research designs

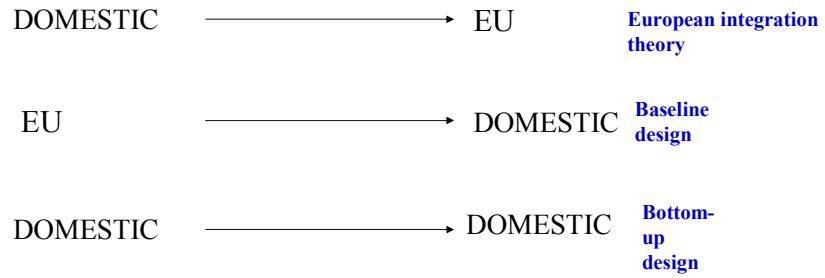
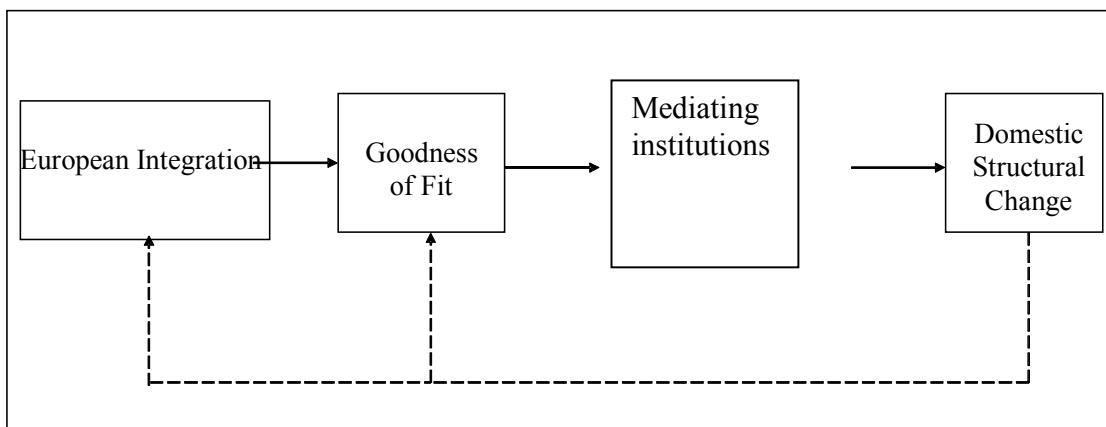
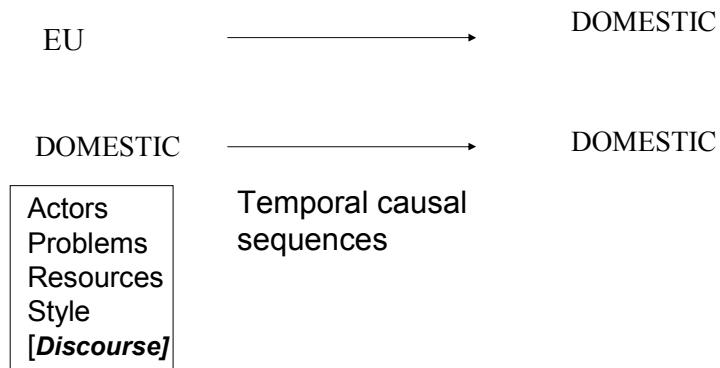


Figure 2 – The baseline research design



Source: Caporaso (2006) Adapted from Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001: 6).

Figure 3- From the baseline to the bottom-up design



Note: Discourse is bracketed because it is a variable of a different type. It has transformative effects on problems, styles, the balance of resources, and the participation of actors. For more details see Schmidt and Radaelli (2004).