

## CHAPTER 5

# Elmer Recast: the Patchwork of EU Theories within the *Journal of Common Market Studies*

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### Introduction

“Several blind men approached an elephant and each touched the animal in an effort to discover what the beast looked like. Each blind man, however, touched a different part of the large animal and each concluded that the elephant had the appearance of the part he had touched. (...) The total result was that no man arrived at a very accurate depiction of the elephant. Yet, each man had gained enough evidence from his own experience to disbelieve his fellows and to maintain a lively debate” (Puchala 1971: 267).

The European Union (EU) is far from operating in a theoretical vacuum. The situation depicted over forty years ago regarding integration theories has not vanished. Similar situations have arguably arisen within as well as across various schools of thought, although they have had their critics (see for instance Risse 1996; Jupille and Caporaso 1999; Méndez et al. 2006). This is indeed problematic: it brings conceptual confusion, and this confusion has been worsened by the development and the complexity of the EU. Questioning the “nature of the beast” (Puchala 1971), many EU scholars have tried to assess the development of EU studies since their inception, not least because the novelty, originality and political significance of the EU integration project has been compelling. In doing so, they have recurrently shifted the debate toward normative considerations: questioning what the EU should be represents a dangerous pitfall for anyone who wants to assess what the EU in fact is.

Trying to explain the absence of a satisfactory conceptualization, one will undoubtedly be confronted with the compartmentalization of the field. Research is often assumed to remain centred on particular subjects in some national contexts, such as law in France (Bailleux 2012; Vauchez 2013), on specific networks, such as those of EU specialized journals (Popa 2008; Jensen and Kristensen 2012) or on

major figures (Cohen 1998; 2011). Research in fact lacks an interdisciplinary and continuous view of how the field has actually been constituted. This chapter aims to develop a systematic approach to the genesis and process of institutionalization of European studies in theoretical terms. Analysing how this theoretical pluralism has actually developed, I ask how the *Journal of Common Market Studies* has reflected and built upon the main theoretical orientations within EU studies. Based on the 889 original articles making up the core of the journal over the past thirty years, from 1983 to 2012, this chapter proposes to assess the EU's theoretical evolution by considering the journal as reflected by the existing literature. In particular, it aims to look beyond the so-called founders of the discipline, the theoretical antagonism often identified between them, such as Haas versus Hoffmann in political science (Mangenot 2013) or the theoretical breakthroughs their work has created<sup>1</sup>. In sum, it answers to the call for “more content-sensitive studies (...) to illuminate the constitutive features of the (...) theoretical divides in EU studies” (Jensen and Kristensen 2012).

Established as the very first journal devoted to European studies (first issued in 1962 – i.e. only four years after the founding of the European Economic Community), the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (*JCMS*) enables us to reconcile most of the above-mentioned aspects. On the one hand, pre-eminent articles have been published over the years. To name but a few, theoretical concepts which are very familiar to students of EU integration such as “normative power Europe”, “the capability-expectations gap”, or “liberal intergovernmentalism” all emerged as part of *JCMS* articles. On the other hand, and central to our concern, the *JCMS* as a whole has been and arguably remains one of the most influential journals and sources on European integration, both in its own depictions and according to citation indexes<sup>2</sup>, despite the massive increase in the number of publications related to its subject matter. Besides, Jensen and Kristensen find that “journal sources make up most of the top-cited sources” in EU studies, with the *JCMS* ranking second (Jensen and Kristensen 2012). Exploring the network structure arising from the citation practices of journals, they show that the *JCMS* also constitutes one of the main nodes of communication networks within EU studies<sup>3</sup>.

Conducting a longitudinal study focusing on a journal's theoretical aspects is relevant in several respects. Theories can be seen as “tools available to make sense of the event that is being witnessed, or at least to attribute meaning to that event”

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<sup>1</sup> While synthesising advances in the field, the literature has often come to depict developments based on these theoretical breakthroughs rather than long-term empirical evidence, as can be seen by the resounding response to books such as Ernst Haas' *The Uniting of Europe* (1958), Alan Milward's *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (1992), Andrew's Moravcsik's *The Choice for Europe* (1998).

<sup>2</sup> See: SJR SCImago Journal & Country Rank, Citation Indexes of the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, <http://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=19875&tip=sid>.

<sup>3</sup> “The high betweenness centrality of *JEPP* and *JCMS* in particular indicates their general and integrating function as nodes that hold the various subfields of EU studies together”. “A few core journals, in particular *JEPP* and *JCMS*, constitute the key nodal points for EU communication practice. They hold the field together and give it a common language” (Jensen and Kristensen 2012: 9 and 16).

(Rosamond 2000: 4). In this context, the appeal is two-fold: it allows the theoretical orientations taken by EU studies to be empirically tested – in other words, as a mean of examining the broader discipline – while at the same time assessing the role played by a specific journal in driving or following trends in the domain. After all, articles published in its various journals largely constitute and articulate a field. Searching for patterns in a discipline, Ole Wæver includes scientific journals among the various possible sources (Wæver 1998: 696-697). Others have defended the methodological relevance of analysing journals, based on the regularity and availability of data (Breuning, Bredehoft and Walton 2005). In the same way, for Jensen and Kristensen, “journals are not only the largest component of EU studies as measured by the number of citations (...) they also make up the central part of the elephant” (Jensen and Kristensen 2012: 9).

This chapter subscribes to the book’s questioning of contemporary political science research, in particular regarding the evolution of theoretical approaches. The object of this study concerns the production of EU studies and the specificity of this research field. As such, it also relates to the epistemological question of the autonomy of the object of study as a discipline in its own right. This chapter therefore aims at understanding the theoretical evolution of EU studies as reflected in the *JCMS* over a thirty-year period. Section 1 establishes how political science research on the EU has evolved, identifying trends by means of a literature review. Section 2 sets out the methodology and provides details of the data set used. The main findings, detailing the contours, shifts and overlaps of the different approaches seen in the journal, are presented in Section 3, before I conclude.

### **1. One train may conceal another: a theoretical framework to the study of theories**

Focusing on the production of European Studies, I intend to examine here the theoretical specificity of this field of study within political science research, as well as its evolution.

The first question that almost automatically comes to mind is that of the meaning of the notion of “EU studies” itself and of its relationship to political science more broadly speaking. European integration, Europeanization and EU studies have sometimes been considered as part of the same process, if not confused (Howell 2002). This leads the debate to epistemological considerations regarding the autonomy or heteronomy of the subject matter. Indeed, the interest of political scientists in the EU is historically inseparable from a certain amount of rallying to the European project. This accompaniment to the process of integration has often been criticized as intrinsically normative (e.g. the concept of “integration” itself), with legal and political concepts playing a key role in the progressive objectification of the EU, its institutions and future. Europe has been thought to be the result of a politico-academic co-production (Robert and Vauchez 2010). This heteronomy has been challenged in many ways, with developments pointing toward a “normalization” of European studies. “Normalization” refers to scholarship on the EU having shifted away from a US-centred field of research underpinned by a few central theoretical premises toward an academic field marked by an increasing level of scholarship by

European academics, dealing with a broad range of topics. This evolution of the literature focused on the EU has been accounted for by the evolution of the EU polity itself, increasingly developing “state-like” characteristics (Kreppel 2012). The extent of this evolution is so great that some authors have come to consider EU studies as being not dissimilar to other state-based political science fields such as American or French politics.

While this debate on how to define EU studies in political science can be fed by a reflection on the diversity of geographical and disciplinary anchors of the researchers, as can be seen in Marie-Catherine Wavreille’s study of *American Political Science Review* in Chapter 8 of this book), it is also closely linked to a theoretical questioning of the nature of the EU itself. After all, the ontological positioning of the researcher as to what the EU is affects the above-mentioned epistemological considerations. Conceptualising the EU as a *sui generis* political system, a (regional) state, a (con)federation, an international organization or part of all of the above, may require the use of several different tools. Equally, the theories and conceptual frameworks thus applied are not without consequences for the way one thinks about the EU.

In an effort to classify theories about the European Union, Pollack distinguishes between: (a) theories of European integration associated with International Relations (IR), (b) comparative politics approaches and (c) a governance approach (Pollack 2005). This kind of classification appears particularly fruitful when trying to untie the various theoretical nodes, while acknowledging possible overlaps. From the 1950s to the 1990s, EU studies have mainly been envisaged, both in isolation and under the International Relations umbrella, as a regional integration or international organization model (Rosamond 2000; Pollack 2005). From the 1990s onwards, a shift has occurred, which is essentially three-fold: within the International Relations framework, the neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism debate has been replaced by a rationalism/constructivism debate. At the same time, two other streams have developed alongside these: a comparativist framework which tends to consider the EU as a normal political system and a governance framework building on both previous approaches to encapsulate an array of concepts depicting the uniqueness and novelty of the EU political system. The central claim of this study is borrowed from Ben Rosamond’s argument that “the processes of European integration are just too complex to be captured by a single theoretical prospectus” (2000: 7). This succession of approaches to studying the evolution of the discipline will now be detailed and explained.

### ***1.1. European integration theories and their internal shifts: the EU as an international organization***

Seeking to explain the process of European integration, and despite early schools of thought having turned to federalism, functionalism or transactionalism, most theorists have relied heavily on so-called Grand Theories of European integration. While the idea of “Grand Theory” refers to a form of highly abstract theorizing, in which the focus is on the formal organization and arrangement of concepts, “Grand Theories of European integration” more specifically refer in EU studies to intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism (see for instance: Dietz and Wiener

2004; Rosamond 2000). Despite their origins in the field of International Relations, they are based on different assumptions which are often seen as antagonistic and competitive. On the one hand, Ernst Haas' *The Uniting of Europe* is often associated with the launch of neo-functional theory, essentially explaining the process of integration through (functional) spillovers – which, simplifying slightly, constitutes a conceptualization of Monnet's *méthode des petits pas* – and elite socialization (Haas 1958). On the other hand, political events in the mid-1960s – most famously the “empty chair crisis” – and throughout the following decade, have led some scholars to postulate the inability of neo-functionalism to explain the reassertion of the nation-state (Hoffmann 1966), or even its obsolescence, as Haas himself recognized in 1976. Not only did member states resist any loss in sovereignty (Taylor 1983; Wallace 1983), but intergovernmentalism culminated in the idea that European integration is in fact synonymous with *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (Milward 1992). However, major steps in integration during the 1990s reinstated neo-functionalism, which was enriched by applying to the European integration process other types of spillover such as cultivated spillover (Nye 1971; Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991) and the notion of “spill-back” (Schmitter 1971: 240).

This debate has been further contributed to and ultimately taken over by Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism (LI), which was in fact introduced in a 1993 article in the *JCMS*. His three-fold model combines “a liberal theory of national preference formation, with an intergovernmental model of EU-level bargaining and a [rational choice theory of] institutional choice” (Pollack 2005). This model can be seen as pivotal to the major turn in IR theories of European integration; while new institutionalists under the rational choice (RCI) and historical (HI) labels acknowledged its theoretical assumptions, sociological institutionalists and by extension constructivists rejected the very basis of LI (*Ibid.*). Different conceptions of the rationality of action are in fact often deemed to constitute the red line between rationalists and constructivists (Sending 2002), allowing Pollack to encompass several theories under the “rationalist” denomination, although echoing different explanations of EU decision-making (Pollack 2001). First, LI can be traced back to neoliberal views concerning the centrality of domestic and economic factors. It eventually came to encompass Putnam's two-level game, drawing a link between domestic politics and European integration (Putnam 1988). Second, RCI builds on the principal-agent theory to encompass models in which member states calculate their interests mainly based on the reduction of transaction costs, while EU institutions (mostly the Commission) constitute the product of conscious MS design. While borrowing RCI's assumptions of endogenous preference formation, HI mainly revolves around the concept of path-dependence (Pierson 1996). Finally, realism can be applied to the EU, notably through interests derived from the perceptions of the EU executive of the constraints posed by the anarchic international system (Rosamond 2000: 135). In brief, a rationalist framework conceives political order as arising from bargaining among rational actors pursuing preferences or interests, where gains can be achieved through coordinated action: political integration would thus be seen as a sum of contracts. In an essentially different research direction, constructivism delineates unfixed national preferences, and points to the independent role of norms and ideas in affecting policy outcomes

(Wendt 1999; Checkel 2001). More precisely, in sociological institutionalism, actions are driven by a “logic of appropriateness” set in specific institutional arenas: “Rules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected, and legitimate. Actors seek to fulfil the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions” (March and Olsen 2004: 2).

Although March and Olsen (2010) analyse the reinstatement of institutions using different definitions, the rationalist/constructivist debate appears as much broader than an intra-neo-institutionalist one. Indeed, while Hall and Taylor (1996) compare the three new institutionalisms and argue for a rapprochement, Jupille, Caporaso and Checkel (2003) develop a framework for analysing the theoretical dialogue between constructivism and rationalism, bearing four different models. Taken together and originating from the American political science, these “approaches to social enquiry” (Jupille et al. 2003) have gained considerable ground in EU studies, aiming to grasp the dynamics and potential for a transformation of the EU, explaining EU decision-making and changes in the autonomy of supranational actors depending on the time, issues and institutions considered. In fact, rationalism and constructivism may be considered as second-order meta-theories. As stated by Wendt, this means that they are essentially dealing with ontological and epistemological questionings about “the nature of human agency and its relationship to social structures, the role of ideas and material forces in social life, [or] the proper form of social explanation” (Wendt 1999: 6). This stands in sharp contrast to domain-specific and more substantive first-order theories which make specific social systems, like the EU, the direct object under scrutiny, making assumptions and claims about them and their actors.

All in all, the EU retains a dual character (as international organization and international actor) and the International Relations literature has looked at how this influences EU policies, both internal and external (e.g. Rhodes 1998), especially including EU’s capacity in external negotiations (e.g. Meunier 2005).

### ***1.2. Comparative and governance approaches: the EU as an experiment in political science research***

Seeking to understand EU politics, comparative theories tend to consider the EU as a “normal” political system. Because comparativists rely on the theories and methods used in other political science domains, they have largely been associated with the “mainstream” (Hix 1999: 2). They argue that the EU displays characteristics of national political systems, such as stable institutions whose interactions are rule-driven; allocates norms and economic resources; and is based on strong output legitimacy (Hix 1999). In this view, attempts such as Clément Jadot’s in Chapter 1 to analyse the concepts used in the literature are revealing. In the same vein, if the EU retains state-like characteristics, then the theoretical perspectives employed to analyse it can be drawn from schools of thought that analyse nation-states: the so called “middle-range theories”. More precisely, two theoretical strands have drawn from this perspective; federalism, allowing comparisons between the EU and other federal systems (Capelletti et al. 1986; Scharpf 1988; Sbragia 1993), and systemism (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). This means that a possible internal distinction can be

made (Pollack 2005) between theoretical conceptions related to the vertical separation of power, explaining the functioning of the EU as a political system by focusing on the level of government, the careful alternation of national and EU levels, and the domination of the “regulatory state” (Majone 1996) and the horizontal separation of power, explaining legislative, executive and judicial behaviours. Nevertheless some authors, most notably Jupille et al. (2003), have argued that the divide between International Relations and comparative studies is irrelevant given the “in-between” nature of the EU. Although it is not the aim of this chapter to detail the grounds for such criticism, if we look at theoretical developments, a possible overlap between IR and comparative frameworks is a case in point. Besides, the comparative framework also has rather diffuse roots, some of which encompass rationalist assumptions:

“In other subfields of political science, researchers may commonly work with general research programs that provide base-level assumptions for formulating testable theories. For example, scholarship in the field of international relations is often organized around research programs such as neo-realism, liberalism, and constructivism (Bennett and Elman, 2007; see also Elman and Elman, 2003). But in comparative politics, analysts usually do not draw on such encompassing research programs. Instead, they find theoretical inspiration in a wide variety of orienting approaches – strategic choice models, state-centric approaches, patron-client models, theories of internal dependency, and many more –” (Mahoney 2007: 124).

“Governance” can be presented as an encompassing macro-theory (and hence an approach), essentially made up of meso- and micro-elements or even concepts as working tools of the literature. In the words of Jachtenfuchs (2001), if the shape of the Euro-polity is elsewhere considered as the dependent variable, governance considers it to be the independent one. Thus, governance seeks to analyse how the EU works as a *sui generis* system (Marks 1993; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Jachtenfuchs 2001; Kohler-Koch and Eising 2004). It often depicts the flexibility and room for manoeuvre of the EU’s decision-making. Theoretical insights into the “governance turn” include: multi-level governance (Marks and Hooghe 2001), policy networks, Europeanization (Börzel and Risse 2000; Cowles et al. 2001; Radaelli 2003), literature dealing with effectiveness and democratic legitimacy – including a normative critique of the EU – (Scharpf 1999; Schmitter 2000), and the “deliberation turn” and the “logic of arguing” (see in particular: Habermas 1998; Risse 2000: 7-11). An array of tools is thus encompassed, showing that the micro-physics of governance does in fact matter.

In sum, the relationship between EU studies and traditional political science fields is a rather complicated one (Jupille et al. 2003). This chapter only indicates the major trends. Ontological debates are maybe best summarized in the portrayal of the EU as “less than a federation, more than a regime” (Wallace 1983), acknowledging scholars’ possible use of analytical tools borrowed from international relations, policy analysis, or those of their own devising. This largely reflects considerations regarding the EU’s (non-)need for its own grammar (Bartolini 2005). Trying to develop the theoretical storyline behind these claims, which are often presented as contradictory, two major shifts have been delineated: from IR to comparative and governance approaches, and within IR theories, from a neo-functional/intergovernmentalist toward a constructivist/rationalist framework, which itself entails several variations. Still,

overlaps have been postulated by the literature. On the one hand, the comparative perspective is likely to entail rational choice and other IR-related elements (Jupille and Caporaso 1999). On the other hand, “governance draws from both international relations and comparative politics” (Pollack 2005). In any case, the general trends forming this research agenda deserve further empirical evidence. This chapter contributes to filling this gap by analysing the evolution of the theoretical approaches used in the *JCMS* over the last thirty years. It asks whether their evolution is marked by continuity, progressive change or sudden breakthroughs; in other words, it questions the existence and nature of the theoretical shifts and overlaps discussed above. Although a more in-depth delineation of the theoretical developments would have allowed for a refined use of the data set, the publication format and other restrictions have circumscribed the analysis to core developments.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research question and hypotheses

This chapter asks how EU theories have developed in concrete terms in relation to the storyline depicted above. How has the *Journal of Common Market Studies* reflected and built upon the main theoretical orientations within EU studies? Despite the journal’s self-depiction as “multi-disciplinary”, I investigate the ways in which EU studies in the journal are associated with political science and its subfields and study the role of theories therein. The chapter thus assumes that the *JCMS* is a relevant, indeed crucial test-bed for assessing the evolution of political science theories related to the EU.

Discussions on how knowledge moves forward are an epistemological prerequisite when we attempt to unravel the evolution of political science. In particular, while Popper saw science as progressing through falsification (with theories whose predictions conflict with experimental observation being discarded), Kuhn viewed science as alternating between periods of normality (experiment and theory being performed within a particular paradigm) and occasional shifts. Taking a stance somewhere in between, Lakatos advanced the concept of “research programmes” to suggest a succession of only slightly different theories and experimental techniques which have developed over time but share a similar backbone. My research here builds on these epistemological considerations to analyse the progressive nature of political science in general and EU studies in particular. It separates out the growth, shifts and overlaps of theories in this field of study. We have seen that the literature has relied upon diverse and sometimes fiercely-debated theoretical frameworks which are often linked to specific authors and presented in an antagonistic manner. Nevertheless, Pollack rather vaguely traces back the appearance of comparative approaches to around the mid-1990s (Pollack 2005: 368), while governance approaches appear to be extremely heterogeneous. The first hypothesis thus challenges claims of sudden theoretical breakthroughs made by individual authors.

H1: The *JCMS* has witnessed a gradual emergence of comparative and governance approaches, rather than clear-cut theoretical breakthroughs.

Arguably, a single rationalist model based on fixed preference and the rational behaviour of actors can encompass liberal intergovernmentalism, rational choice



institutionalism and historical institutionalism as well as realist approaches to the EU (Pollack, 2001). In addition, a number of studies have contributed towards filling the gap between rationalism and constructivism (e.g. Beyers and Dierckx 1998; Lewis 1998; 2003), postulating that the rationalist/constructivist debate is marked by dialogue rather than cleavage. Jupille, Caporaso and Checkel have in particular put forward a framework for such a theoretical dialogue composed of four models: competitive testing, “domain of application” approach, sequencing approach, “incorporation” (Jupille et al. 2003).

H2: Among the theories of EU integration, Grand Theories (neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism) have been largely replaced by a meta-theoretical debate (rationalism/constructivism), which is increasingly marked by specific forms of dialogue.

## **2.2. Data collection**

This chapter aims to chart the theoretical evolution of the *JCMS* arising from the various EU theoretical frameworks in political science research used in all 889 articles of the 135 issues published between 1983 and 2012. In doing so, frameworks were coded through a careful examination of the theoretical nuances<sup>4</sup> in the articles rather than merely relying upon the titles and abstract, which are often misleading (either not encompassing any theoretical orientation or focusing solely on the overarching framework). The study only considers so-called “original articles”<sup>5</sup>.

For each of the 889 articles from 1983 to 2012, the first item to be coded was the presence or absence of a clear theoretical framework (absent or irrelevant; diffuse or latent; clear/present; purely or mainly theoretical). The latter two respectively concern on the one hand what has been qualified elsewhere as full-testing (Franchino 2005) – whereby hypotheses are derived from a comprehensive literature review and empirically tested – and on the other hand articles engaging in theory formulation or description, hence containing a purely theoretical stance. It should further be noted that these categories are mutually exclusive. Purely economic articles have been discarded. Second, when the article is informed by a particular framework, the approach used was detailed: international relations – comparative – governance. The use of concomitant approaches was also acknowledged, and the theoretical framework not considered to be limited to one single approach, but to possibly encompass several, provided

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<sup>4</sup> Since coding is essentially based on qualitative elements and because it has been carried out by the author, it does not claim to be entirely free of bias. Undoubtedly, there is an element of subjectivity in the classifications used and applied, the more so as I cannot claim to be an expert in all the theories being tracked.

<sup>5</sup> Although book reviews would provide an interesting means of measuring any evolution in that they highlight the standing and topicality of certain issues, they often lack a theoretical focus properly speaking (other than that of the book reviewed). To the same extent, “European agendas”, research notes, “*JCMS* lectures”, “annual reviews” and “supplements” do not fall within the scope of this research. Although “special issues” are incorporated, some of their introductions or editorials are excluded as they repeat the focus already present in the articles, summarising them or establishing a state of the art in a given domain – and in this sense would constitute double-coding.

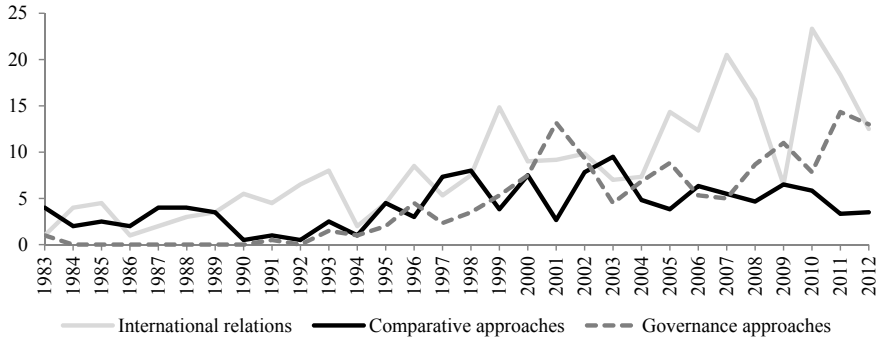
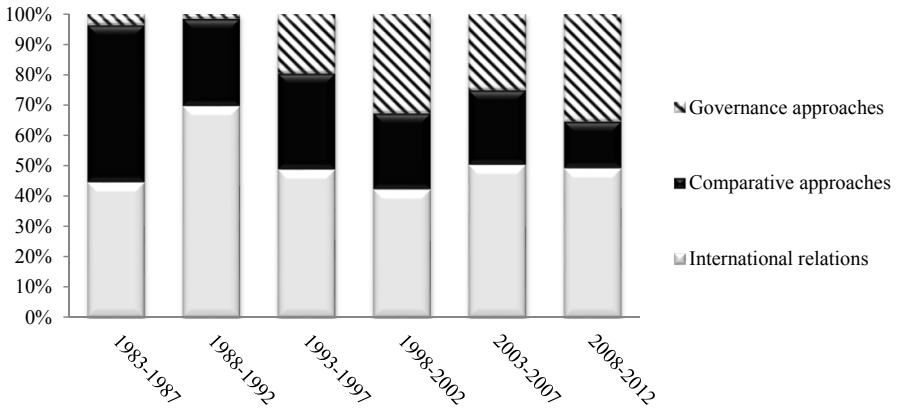
that these were explicitly presented (e.g. international relations + comparative), and unless one framework was over-dominant. Nevertheless, this research does not seek to evaluate the nature of the relationship of the three fields toward each other, but much more simply any concomitant use (whether alternation or dialogue). Third, within international relations approaches, a distinction was made between articles encompassing Grand Theories (neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism) and those building on meta-theories (rationalism/constructivism). Again, overlaps were coded as well. Within rationalist frameworks, a distinction was made between liberal intergovernmentalism (LI), realism (R), rational choice and historical institutionalism (respectively RCI and HI). In the presence of rationalist and/or constructivist approaches the absence of the opposing framework (delineating a cleavage) was coded, as was the concomitant presence of both frameworks (dialogue). Moreover, based on the above-mentioned typology, the dialogue models used were delineated (competitive testing; domain of application; sequencing approach; incorporation). Fourth, within comparative approaches, a distinction was made between articles drawing on the vertical and horizontal separation of powers. Finally, within the governance approach, main theories and concepts present in the corresponding articles were reproduced. In sum, this chapter sets out the time span and scope of the theoretical evolution of EU scholarship within the pages of the *JCMS*.

### **3. Analysis and findings**

Looking at the presence or absence of the above-mentioned theories, I find that a majority of all the articles published over the period under analysis do indeed possess a clear framework. The number of articles for which further analysis on the nature of the theoretical shifts and overlaps can be conducted amounts to 523 – a figure amounting to 765 if we include articles presenting a diffuse or latent framework, representing 86% of all articles. This overwhelming occurrence of a framework of some kind, whether latent or explicit, perhaps argues against a separation between theory and policy-driven articles.

#### **3.1. Patchwork or mosaic?**

Having assessed the importance of theories within the journal, the question naturally arises as to which theory dominates, when, and how. Schematically, a theoretical change can be described in terms of a sudden shift and neat delineations (the overall theoretical picture thus being formed by a mosaic of disjointed frameworks) or a porosity of the theoretical borders marked by overlaps (with concomitant uses making up a patchwork). Indeed, the study of the main theoretical approaches over time reveals not only the evolution of the theoretical orientation of the journal, but also the time span and extent of this evolution.

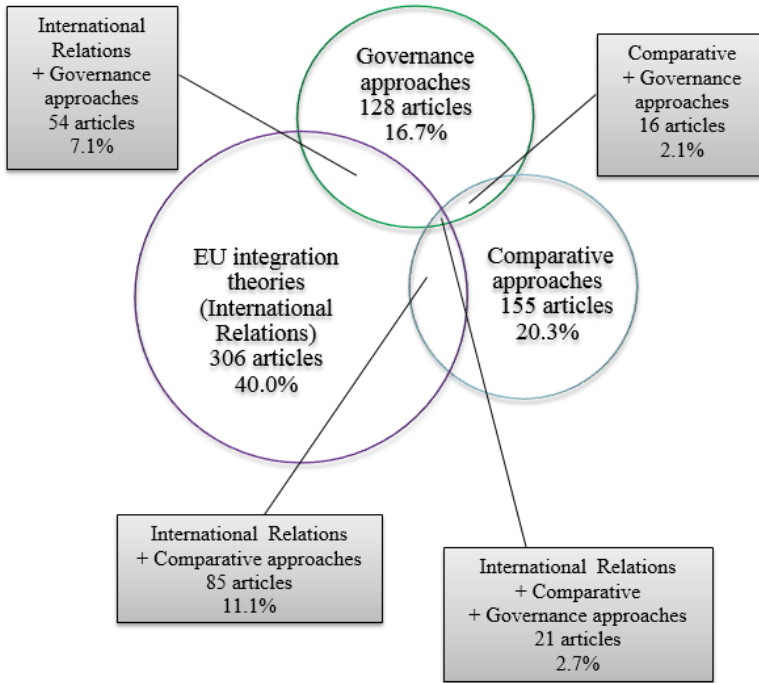
**Figure 5.1:** Evolution of the theoretical approaches (number of articles per year) (N=523)**Figure 5.2:** Relative evolution of the different theoretical approaches (percentage of articles per 5-year period) (N=523)

The first remark to be made is clearly that IR theories of European integration dominate overall in the journal during the period considered. Nevertheless, the take-off of comparative and governance approaches can be observed, although this occurs in the early rather than the mid-1990s, as identified by Pollack (2005). In fact, despite the relatively late recognition of the “governance” concept, micro-theories that can be associated with it were present beforehand. Nonetheless, the use of a governance framework in a 1983 article can be considered an outlier (with its explicit focus on “policy networks”, as well as further notes on the fragmentation and diversity of policy processes or the multilevel nature of the system)<sup>6</sup>. Articles with a comparative perspective can however be identified since the beginning of the period, perhaps not least because of the diffuse nature of this framework, as pointed out by Mahoney (2007: 124). Their proportion is steady overall, but with a downward trend. Their

<sup>6</sup> Laffan, Brigid (1983). “Policy Implementation in the European Community: The European Social Fund as a Case Study”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 21: 389-408.

focus is almost equally split between a vertical and horizontal separation of power (85 *versus* 74 articles over the period considered, with 15 presenting both).

**Figure 5.3:** Distribution of articles according to their theoretical framework (N=765)



Note : Includes articles with a diffuse or latent theoretical framework (1), a clear theoretical framework (2) as well as purely or mainly theoretical (3), in order to better grasp the entirety of the frameworks present.

Although any exploration of the mechanisms bridging international relations and comparative approaches falls beyond the scope of this study, questioning the occurrence of such a link appears to be promising:

“Converging empirical and intellectual trends (...) increasingly undermined the distinction between comparative and international. (...) These developments rendered subfield distinctions increasingly anachronistic and potentially counterproductive. Institutionalism especially seemed to provide an intellectual bridge, promising, according to its advocates, a general theory applicable to comparative, international, and American politics” (Jupille et al. 2003: 10).

Despite evidence of overlaps between all approaches, as reported in Figure 5.3, I find in line with Jupille and Caporaso (1999: 431) that the international relations and comparative combination is by far the most frequently represented (74 articles if one considers only articles with a clear theoretical framework or which are purely or mainly theoretical, or 85 including those with a latent framework, i.e. 11.1% of the 765 articles considered). Thus, “the comparative politics approach to the study of the

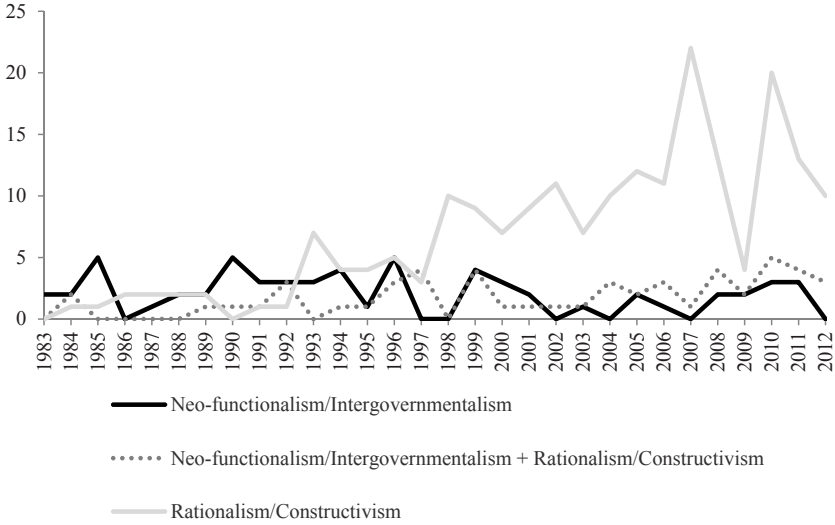
EU has not replaced the international relations study of regional integration, but now exists alongside it” (Pollack 2005: 380). Pollack (2005) seems to (rightly) suggest that this link between international relations and comparative approaches revolves around rational choice approaches – partly confirmed by the presence of a RCI framework in 28 out of the 74 articles (37.8%), and Jupille et al. on “institutionalisms” more broadly defined (2003: 10) – rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism broadly defined together making up 50 out of the 74 articles, that is, over two-thirds (67.6%). Yet I also find that in a significant number of cases comparisons are also concomitant to the Grand Theories of European integration (neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism). Overall, the division introduced by Hix (1999) between international relations and comparative tools holds only partly true in the case of the *JCMS*, although a large majority of articles still falls within one specific category according to the coding used (60.3% of the articles under scrutiny deal distinctively either with international relations or comparative approaches, 77% when adding governance approaches). Complementing Pollack, for whom “the traditional international relations and comparative politics approaches to the EU now coexist with yet a third approach, typically labelled the governance approach, which draws from both international relations and comparative politics” (2005:380), it can be seen that the former approach is much more widespread and possibly influent than the latter as an anchor to theories of governance (the international relations-governance duet making up 7.1% of the articles as against only 2.1% for articles mixing comparative and governance approaches). However, the number of articles published remains too small to assess the evolution of these various overlaps over time. It nonetheless confirms that the evolution of political science in the *JCMS* is best depicted by a twofold patchwork: the side by side use of different theories over time in different articles, as well as theoretical combinations within articles.

Summarising the main relevant elements, EU integration theories constitute the leading research tradition in the *JCMS*, despite the gradual and significant rise in comparative and governance approaches. The data also reveals the blurred nature of the delineation between the three approaches through their multiple imbrications. In sum, the pattern provided by the data strongly resembles a patchwork, one piecing together various theoretical blocks.

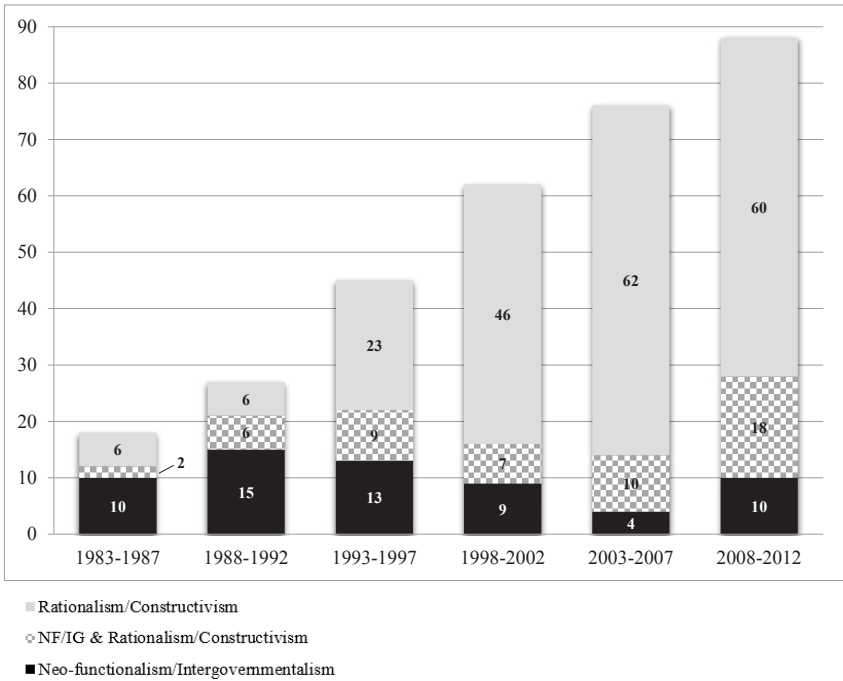
### ***3.2. The state of the original elephant***

In his famous depiction of “the elephant and blind men”, Puchala (1971) only considered (with dismay) the state of affairs within international integration theories. Given the previously-mentioned pre-eminent role of IR theories within the *JCMS*, I emphasize here their evolution in an effort to understand whether Puchala’s vision still holds. With the theories and their divides put forward by the literature at hand, I empirically explore here the extent to which the neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism debate has given way to a rationalist/constructivist one. I then go further by refining the characteristics of the latter, in particular looking more in depth at the nature of the debate.

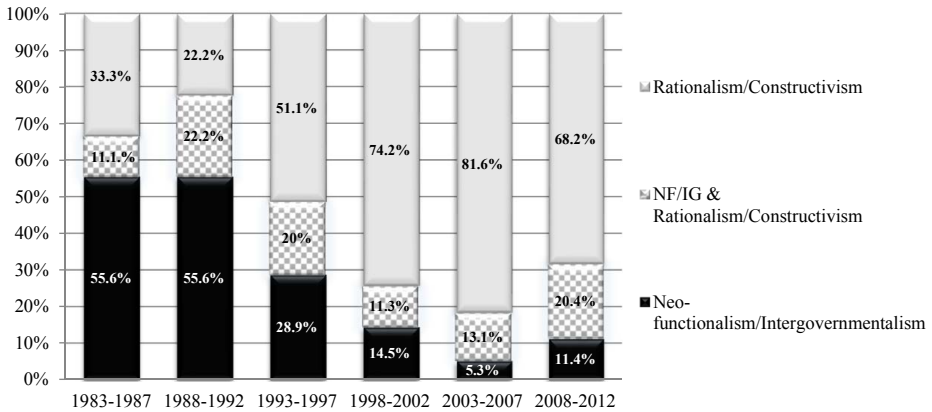
**Figure 5.4:** Evolution of the two fundamental debates within EU integration theories: NF/IG v. rationalism/constructivism (number of articles per year) (N=316)



**Figure 5.5:** Evolution of the two fundamental debates within EU integration theories (number of articles per five-year period) (N=316)



**Figure 5.6:** Relative evolution of the two fundamental debates within EU integration IR-driven theories (percentage of articles per 5-year period) (N=316)

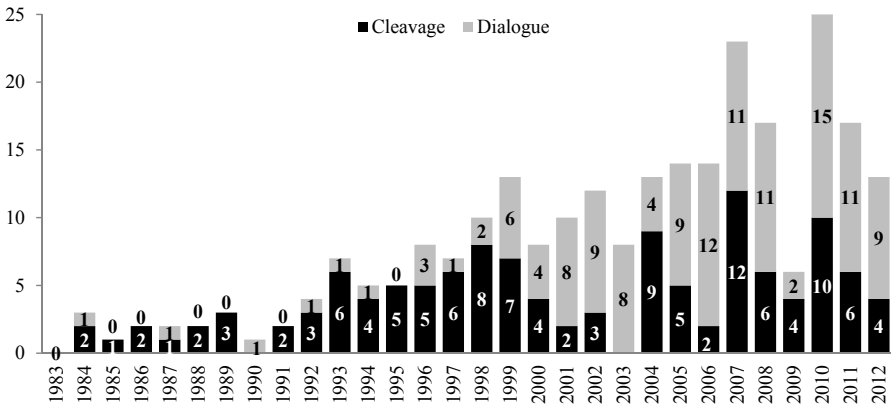


The findings largely confirm a rise in meta-theoretical debate at the expense of the “Grand Theories” of European integration, as often noted in the literature (Pollack 2005). This debate has sharply increased since the early 1990s, representing up to 81.6% of all IR-based *JCMS* articles during the 2003–2007 period. Most striking is the peak observed in the detailed per year evolution, with 1993 arguably appearing as a critical juncture. From that year onward, the rationalist/constructivist debate has been dominant, calling for a link with the introduction of Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism<sup>7</sup>. This does not preclude a kind of nostalgia for the neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism debate, witnessed through its growingly concomitant presence with rationalist and/or constructivist frameworks (since 2004, the association of neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism with rationalism/constructivism has been more consistently evident than the neo-functionalism/intergovernmentalism debate alone).

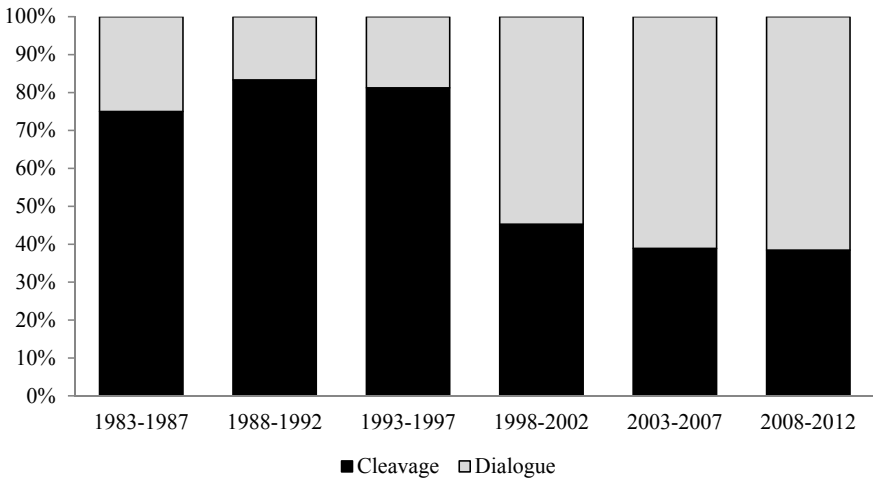
How should we qualify the rationalist/constructivist debate? While authors often oppose the two positions (see for instance: Pollack, 1999), I use my data set to analyse whether a reconciliation is taking place. I find that overall dialogue (concomitant use of both) and cleavage (use of rationalism only or constructivism only) are almost equally present (in 51% *versus* 49% of the articles using a rationalist/constructivist framework). Nevertheless, the evolution presented in Figures 7 and 8 points to the growing importance of dialogue, with this culminating over the last decade, while articles presenting an “either/or” approach have undergone a relative decline.

<sup>7</sup> Moravcsik, Andrew (1993). “Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31: 473-524.

**Figure 5.7:** Evolution of the rationalism/constructivism debate (number of articles per year) (N=255)\*

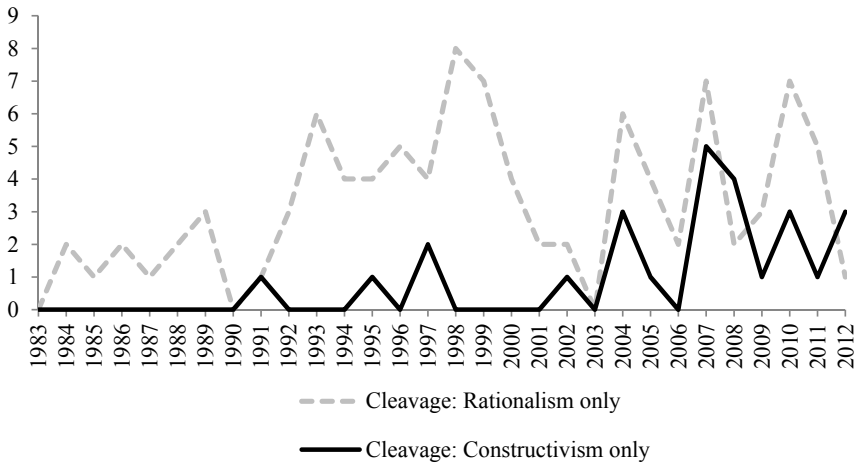
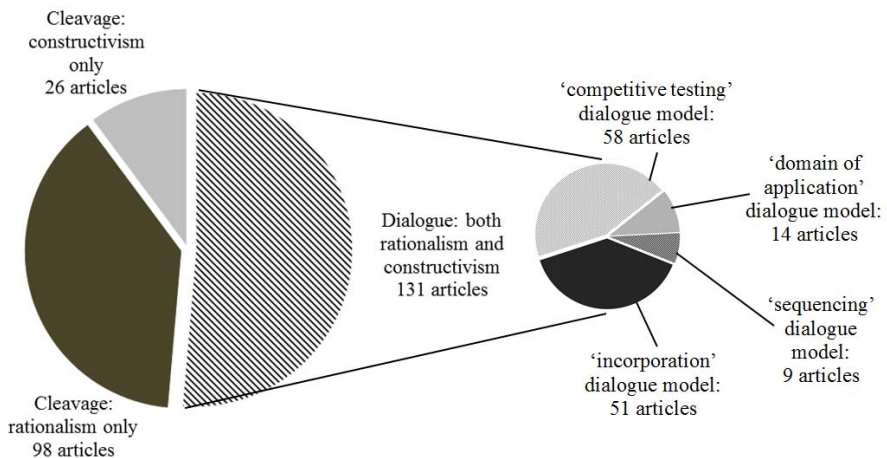


**Figure 5.8:** Relative evolution of the rationalism/constructivism debate (percentage of articles per 5-year period) (N=255)



On the one hand, while initially almost all articles presenting a cleavage were based upon a rationalist approach, articles with a constructivist framework have gradually come to be as numerous as rationalist ones. This largely confirms Pollack’s thesis at his time of writing (1999) that the “rationalist approach is now the dominant approach to the study of European integration in international relations theory, with constructivism remaining as the primary rival, but less developed”, a thesis which does not fit well with the following years of *JCMS* publication. On the other hand, although Jupille, Caporaso and Checkel identify inferences enabled by different research designs for each type of dialogue (2003), I simply employ their four models to highlight the nature of the dialogue. The results show that the “competitive



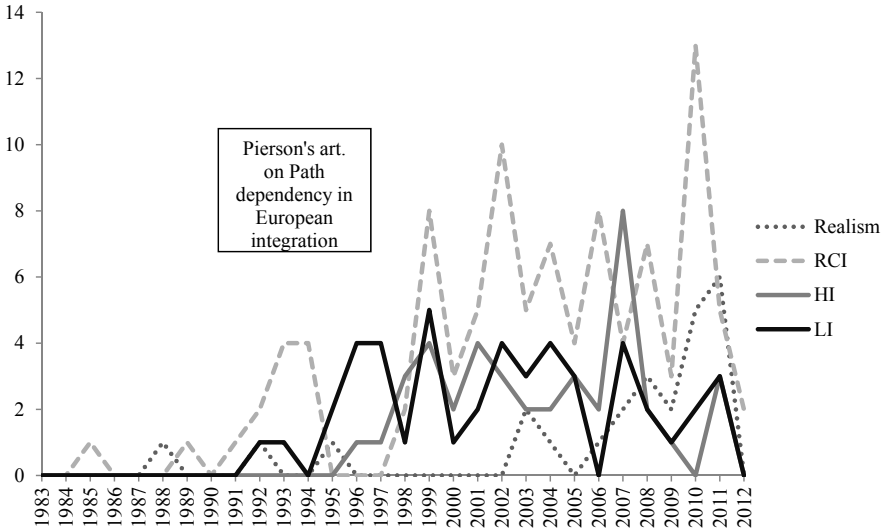
**Figure 5.9:** Evolution of the rationalism/constructivism cleavage (number of articles per year) (N=124)**Figure 5.10:** Models of cleavages and dialogues within the rationalism/constructivism debate (N=255)

testing” and “incorporation” models are those most used in the *JCMS*<sup>8</sup>. A further note could be made on the competitive testing model; when one of the two meta-theories that are tested is found to dominate the other, it potentially feeds back in the cleavage category (or at least the link is tenuous). Although the evolution of the dialogue over time is not presented here because of the small number of cases, I find that among the

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted however that a number of articles do not explicitly fit any one of the models, and that the coding has then been carried out based on the author’s interpretation rather than on explicit mention of the dialogue in the articles themselves.

58 articles displaying a competitive testing model, 13 authors explicitly take the side of constructivism *versus* only 7 that of rationalism.

**Figure 5.11:** Evolution of the rationalist approach (number of articles per year)



Finally, breaking down the “rationalist framework” as has been done elsewhere (Pollack 1999), and despite numerous articles which do not explicitly refer to any of the four theories spotlighted here, the importance of new institutionalist theories based on rationalist assumptions (both rational choice and historical institutionalisms) can be highlighted. The link between the different types of enquiry could however lead to further analysis. This could deal with how the different rationalist approaches themselves engage in a dialogue (according to Pollack’s assumption that they can be grouped within a single model), or the kind of rationalism used to engage in dialogue with constructivism. In particular, it could investigate further whether this dialogue is mainly based on new institutionalisms (i.e. a historical institutionalism or rational choice institutionalism dialogue with sociological institutionalism), or whether liberal intergovernmentalism is reconcilable with or at least testable against constructivism. This would allow empirical testing of Moravcsik’s claim that constructivists do not allow for empirical falsification of their hypotheses, especially against alternative theories such as rationalism (Moravcsik 1999: 669).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the theoretical evolution within European Union (EU) studies as a crucial field in political science research is often oversimplified in the literature and needs to be backed up by empirical research investigating the actual publication frameworks. It would be presumptuous to claim that this chapter can provide definite answers to the question of what has been and is the “nature of the beast”, which is by essence indefinite. Instead, on the basis of the data generated by

the research, the objective has been to revisit a number of implicit assumptions that tend to be used when academics think about developments in EU theory.

In line with the assumption that “it is impossible to make any statement about social phenomena in a theoretical vacuum” (Rosamond, 2000: 4), the empirical material collected has shown that original articles published in the *JCMS* have overall reflected general trends identified in the literature, but that these trends need to be further refined. First, assuming that the *JCMS* can be considered pivotal to any empirical assessment of the evolution of political science theories related to the EU, the preliminary delineation conducted through this research has established that most articles present a clear framework involving theories of the EC/EU (with a separation between theory and policy-oriented articles seldom applying). However, this does not necessarily mean that the literature was examined in a fully-fledged, systematic theory-testing fashion. The results nevertheless appear in sharp contrast to atheoretical studies which have been detected elsewhere, notably where the focus of the study concerns relatively new or secondary policies for which data is lacking as much as theories (Franchino 2005).

Second and central to our claim, this overarching account can be characterized by a steady rise of comparative and governance approaches, which does not necessarily or only occur at the expense of IR-theories, but also occur in combination(s) with the latter. Categories of theories are not mutually exclusive and there is no reason why theory-testing exercises should be limited in their scope, despite the format of the articles considered here. To that extent, the boundaries between international relations and comparative approaches appear particularly porous. They contribute to the idea of an overlapping rather than a neat separation of approaches: in other words, a patchwork rather than a mosaic. Well characterising these circumstances, and in contrast to Hix (2005), Jupille has argued that “it would be perverse if the erosion of such disciplinary boundaries were to be resisted in EU Studies, the object of study of which seems precisely to fall in the interstices of the two subfields” (Jupille 2005). Further investigating the softening of this theoretical borderline, I found, much in line with Jupille and Caporaso (1999), that institutionalist approaches often appear at the crossroads. Third, although the neo-functional/intergovernmentalist debate has to some extent stalled, the rationalist/constructivist debate largely took off in the early to mid-1990s, offering renewed perspectives. Among these, EU studies in general and *JCMS* articles in particular have borne witness to increased theoretical reconciliation: a dialogue between constructivism and rationalism now forms as much a part of the picture as do cleavages. In this context, the “incorporation” model under which rationalism embraces constructivist assumptions constitutes the main alternative to “competitive testing”, pitting them against each other.

This study has tried to shed light on the main theoretical developments in EU Studies and has revealed their diffuse nature and softened edges, without denying theoretical breakthroughs in the field, a number of which have emerged from articles originally published in the *JCMS*. To our knowledge this research is the sole of this kind, building on empirical material systematically gathered in a journal, and contributes to new ways forward in the delineation of EU studies, whether in terms of networks, policies, or authors.

Further research could however attempt to expound the existing data set more systematically, as well as to explore other paths. One of these paths concerns in particular the theoretical orientations of authors, and the assumption often found in the literature that their geographical origin matters when it comes to endorsing specific outlooks. This would also allow further reflection on the often-assumed methodological and epistemological gap between positivism and non- or post-positivism (Jensen and Kristensen 2012: 14). Envisaging the theoretical tradition of the authors would indeed contribute to the mapping of the evolution of the foundations of EU studies. This seems very much in line with the thrust of this chapter, which holds that giving lenses to blind men is a useless venture; one should rather try to help them recover their sight of the overall picture. As such, “theory building is complex and ongoing. Theories need to be constantly tested and the underlying constructs explored, as knowledge of a field evolves” (Shearer 2009). EU studies largely subscribe to this enterprise, as much as political science in general does.