

Introduction

Observing

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Observing international organizations (IOs) allows us to grasp the machinery of world politics by providing a better understanding of how these organizations work, their everyday enactment, and the power dynamics that structure relationships inside and outside the organization. To do so scholars hold a set of useful and well-established methods throughout the social sciences.

Historically, social scientists have developed methods based on observation to align data collection and data analysis by generating the fieldnotes that feed the analysis. Concretely speaking, the process of observation entails undergoing “thick description” to envisage all hypotheses, without foreseeing, and leaving all interpretations open for future (in)validation. Observation often calls for a certain degree of immersion leading researchers to experience—with varying intensity—the everyday of the observed. This section, entitled *Observing*, explores the various ways scholars can observe, sense, experience IOs, their advantages and challenges as well as the different temporalities at play.

Observing IOs helps investigate several questions. First, researchers can interrogate power dynamics among different actors. For instance, sitting with a civil society delegation during international negotiations is insightful to capture dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within IOs. Second, observing methods permit to answer research questions on the culture of an IO, by feeling at a bodily level the practices, routines, and experiences of individuals involved in IOs’ work. Researchers can grasp IO daily activities from the very mundane ones that are often not considered of interest, even

left behind in interviews, to the technical ones that embody professional practices, or to the most strategic ones potentially hidden from public view. Third, observing IOs allows us to question the meaning actors give to their missions. Studies carried out with observing techniques share a commitment to understanding the reality such as it is experienced by the actors. Observation contributes to uncover and explicate how people in particular work settings understand, account for, and manage their day-to-day situation.

This section includes contributions introducing the different ways researchers can observe an IO along three axes. First, contributors present the varying degrees of immersion implied by different observing methods (see chapter 1—*Direct Observation* and chapter 2—*Participant Observation*). Second, chapters and boxes unpack the entire observation process—before, during, and after. On the one hand, they explore the impact of space and material constraints, namely the architecture of a building, the table arrangements in negotiation rooms, the different devices positioned in halls, on both the study and the observer (see box a—*Observing spatial practices*). On the other hand, they discuss the observers' challenges regarding multipositionality having to sway among various roles (see box c—*Multipositionality*) or having to develop an awareness regarding one's own corporality in fieldwork, be it in office spaces (see box d—*Carnal sociology*) or remote areas triggering new ways of perceiving the world. Contributions then address the key moments when researchers decide to exit their fieldwork and their considerations for the relationships they have created (see box e—*Exiting fieldwork*). Third, contributors present data collection tools while observing. If taking notes has been the traditional form of data collection, contributions also account for interviewing techniques specific to fieldwork contexts (chapter 3—*Ethnographic Interviews*) and look at how pictures taken during observations can feed researchers' analyses (see box f—*Reversed photo-elicitation*).

While new modes of observing, such as digital ethnography (see box b—*Digital observation*) and the collaborative observations of international summits are increasingly being employed, the contributions give rich insight to understand the advantages of observing (in) an IO as well as the various challenges (Interlude I—*Frictions of distance and proximity: Observing IOs in action*).