

# Changing the world one student at a time?

## Uncovering subjective understandings of economics instructors' roles

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# Teaching pluralist economics

*The real world should be brought back into the classroom, as well as debate and a pluralism of theories and methods.*

(ISIPE 2014)



ÉTATS GÉNÉRAUX  
DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT  
DE L'ÉCONOMIE

ENE  
Estudios Nueva Economía

MÉQEPÉ  
MOUVEMENT ÉTUDIANT QUÉBÉCOIS POUR UN  
ENSEIGNEMENT PLURALISTE DE L'ÉCONOMIE



# Why bother?

- Pluralism vs. plurality (Mäki 1997, Negru 2010)
- Monistic approaches unfit for complex problems
- Research and teaching do have **real life implications** (Ferraro et al. 2005)

Pluralism as a call for paradigmatic revision!

# Our approach

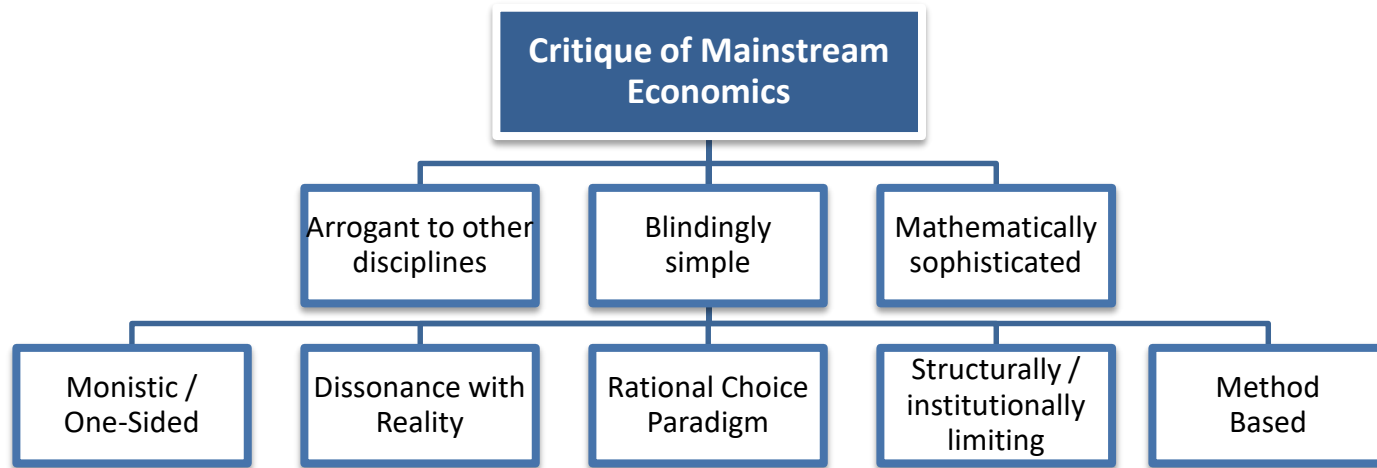
How is the pluralism debate represented in the economics department and its teaching?

- Instructors at the interface of teaching and research.
- Aim: unravel their role in integrating pluralism
- How: through investigating their understandings and perceptions on pluralism and economics in broader terms (Q study)

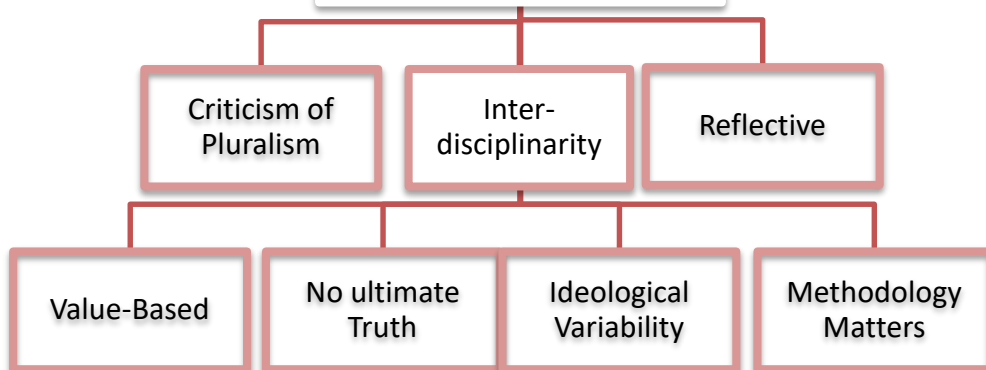
# Q

- Mixed method
- Socially contested topics and concepts
- Aim: rendering shared subjective constructions
- For us: shared constructions on themes within pluralism in economics (teaching)
- Trigger points?

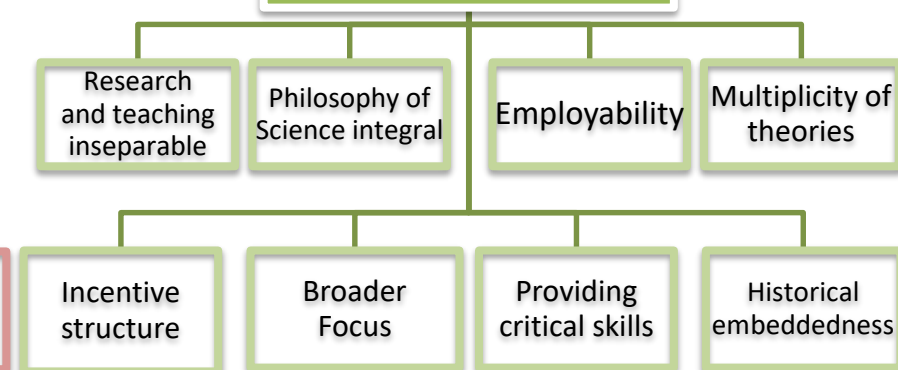
# QCA – Codes & Subcodes



## Pluralism as an Alternative



## Teaching Economics



# Q – sneak peek



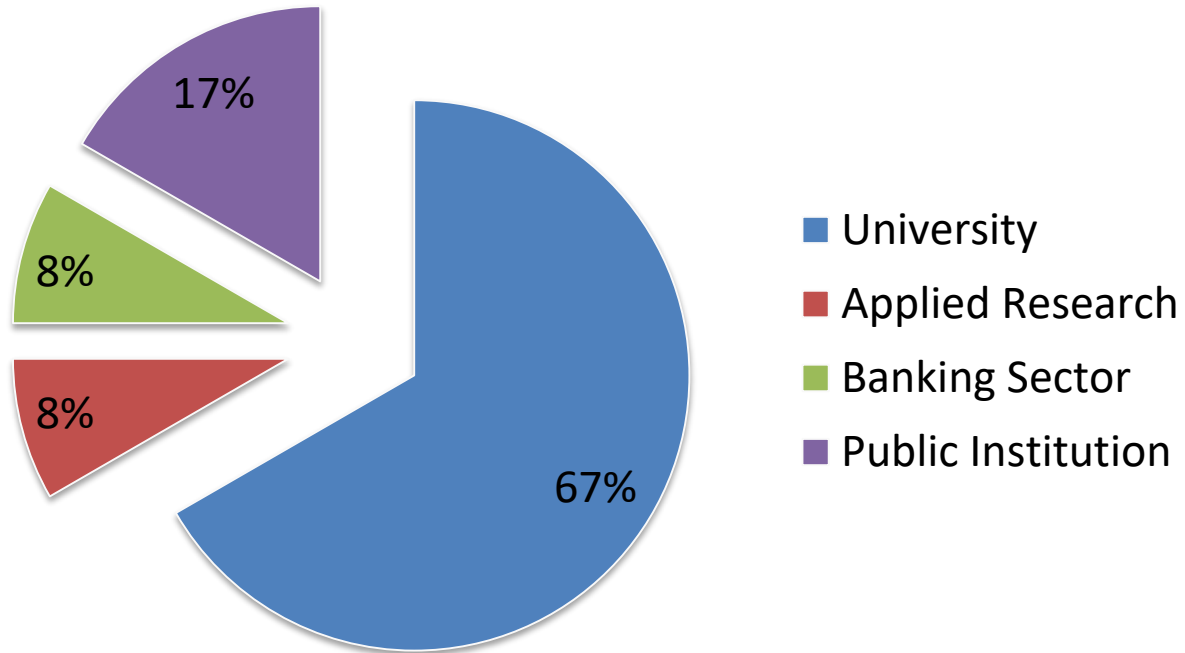
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	30	7	43	27	25	6	18	32	33	23	13
	47	20	2	17	3	42	31	45	1	12	14
(2)		34	22	24	30	46	26	4	28	10	(2)
		(3)	11	29	40	15	37	5	19	(3)	
			(4)	39	38	16	8	41	(4)		
				(5)	9	21	36	(5)			
					(6)	48	(6)				
						44					
							(8)				

# Our sample

- 24 participants
- 16 male, 8 female
- Age range: 26 – 53, majority in mid-30s
- Range of teaching experience in years: 1 – 25
- Educational background:
  - Economics (22)
  - Additional subjects. e.g. Development Studies, Business Admin, Mathematics, Political Science
- Institutional affiliation:
  - University / Research Institutes: 18
  - Public agencies (incl. National Bank and Chamber of Labour): 6



# Institutional affiliation



# Results

- 4 factors
  - (1) Moderate Pluralists
  - (2) Responsible Pluralists
  - (3) Mainstreamers
  - (4) Applied Pluralists
- These account for 17 of the 24 Q sorts in our study
- Consensus statements among all three factors:
  - Teaching economics should begin with economic phenomena and then give students a toolkit to evaluate how well different perspectives can explain them. → common agreement!

# (1) Moderate Pluralists

- Complexity as key part of economic analysis
- Abstraction is needed to deal with it
- In policy advice economists have to recognize the limits
- Context-dependency
- Importance of different points of view
- Contestation and critical thinking skills
- Pluralism is beneficial and requires a more diverse research environment

## (2) Responsible Pluralists

- Pluralism is a responsibility of the university
- Individual responsibility in broadening competences
- Mission: Improving human welfare
- Critique on what is thought and how it is thought
- Contestation, different theories, different methods are essential to tackle economic questions
- No universality
- Cautious approach to modelling and policy advice

## (3) Mainstreamers

- Complexity: comparability and transparency are needed
- These are ensured by abstraction
- Models are simplistic, but provide useful insights into economic phenomena
- Economists not responsible for wider social and political consequences (political realm)
- Pluralism brings the risk of frustration and confusion
- No need to increase diversity in universities, but a moderate change in the “how” economics is thought

## (4) Applied Pluralists

- Reality is complex – economic results are context-sensitive
- Stronger incorporation of history and philosophy of science essential for dealing with context-sensitivity
- Mainstream has become too removed from reality
- Theoretical and methodological pluralism is needed
- Strong link between economics and policy-making, impact daily-life

# Voices of change?

- Each narrative = ideas and norms
- Ideas shape reality!
- Ideas and discourse in neo-institutional understanding of Discursive Institutionalism (e.g. Schmidt 2008, 2011)

# Three key areas

- Complexity
- Context-sensitivity and historical embedding
- Responsibility



# Fight the habit!



# Thank you!

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