The Logic of the Method in Comparative Research

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First Term (October – December 2013)

Thursdays 11:00 – 13:00, Badia Seminar Room 2

Registration with Mariana Spratley (mariana.spratley@eui.eu)

Topic

The 2013-2014 Winter seminar on the Logic of the Method in Comparative Research focuses on the key logical choices in preparing a comparative research design and on the implications of the distinction between comparative statements, comparative research, and the comparative method. The seminar briefly reviews the main approaches to comparative political research and the methodological issues of explanatory comparative research. The main goals are 1) to underline their point of strength and disadvantages of the multiplicity of approaches to comparative politics; 2) to increase the awareness of the conceptual complexity of a comparative research design and of the comparative control of generalizations.

Audience

The seminar is devoted to first and second year researchers, but third year researchers are welcome.

Requirements

The course takes the form of lectures accompanied by readings and followed by discussions. The readings are general for the entire course and are not assigned weekly. Participants are asked to pick up one specific methodological issue discussed during the course and present an exemplary application of it to their preferred research topics. Such exemplary or applicative papers should be between 5 and 10 pages long. Schematic and/or dialogic papers are both acceptable. Depending on the number of participants, these reports will be discussed individually. Extra sessions may be scheduled in December for these discussions. The researchers’ participation to the seminar and the debates and the applicative papers will be the basis for the accreditation of the seminar.
Schedule

The seminar will run from October 10\textsuperscript{th} to November 21\textsuperscript{st}. The list of the seminar sessions is the following:

- Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} October, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Thursday 17\textsuperscript{th} October, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Thursday 24\textsuperscript{th} October, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Friday 25\textsuperscript{th} October, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Thursday 31\textsuperscript{st} October, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Friday 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 11:00-13:00 Emeroteca
- Thursday 14\textsuperscript{th} November, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Friday 15\textsuperscript{th} November, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2
- Thursday 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 11:00-13:00 Seminar Room 2

The Logic of the Method in Comparative Research Syllabus

1) Historical Approaches to comparative politics

- Traditional Country-by-Country Description.
- Theoretical Case studies.
- Traditional Cross-Institutional Analysis
- Typological:
- Functional analysis
- Group Analysis
- System Analysis
- Phenomenon analysis
- Elite Analysis
- Comparative Historical Analysis
- Profile and Scale analysis - Political Arithmetic
- The cross-country mass-survey
- What is ‘new’ in the newism’?

2) Some indemonstrable assumptions (not to be discussed)

- That some external (to our mind) reality exists
- That human beings’ minds have some common properties that allow inter-subjectively exchangeable perceptions

3) Science

- as effectiveness
- as inter-subjective control
- Why are we interested in generalizable knowledge?
- Truth versus ‘utility’

4) Problem selection and formulation
selection
motivations: subjective, theoretical, and socio-political
normative versus empirical components (relationships)

formulation
explicitness (central question versus secondary and peripheral questions)
clearness (lexicographic definitions to avoid terminological ‘vagueness’ and ‘ambiguity’)
thecomplexnatureofvalue(formulatedinsuchawayastocovertowithexistingandaccumulatedknowledge)

5) Hypotheses
- formulation (relationships among properties)
- selection: reflection about alternative hypotheses: bases for their exclusion: division of labour, coeteris paribus clauses, existing literature results, etc.
- control

6) Why to compare?
- Comparison and ‘comparing’ as mental activity;
- Comparison as a method to generate hypotheses about variations;
- The ‘comparative method’ for controlling hypotheses
- Objections and criticism

7) What can be ‘compared’?
- what is comparable? a false question?
- the 'minimal' (or ‘elementary’) comparative statement
- the logical analysis of the ‘minimal’ comparative statement
- the conceptual construction of the comparison.
- The incomparability of objects
- Objects, properties, values/statuses
- Do we need more than one object to compare?
- Objects, properties, value/statuses, time
- Conclusion: the conceptual construction of comparisons.

8) From elementary to causal comparisons
- From the ‘minimal/elementary’ comparison to the ‘causal’ comparison
- the logical analysis of the ‘causal’ comparative statement
- Hypotheses: selection, formulation and conceptual dimension
- Hypothesis as relationships among properties of objects
- reflection about alternative hypotheses
- bases for choice/exclusion of hypotheses: division of labour, coeteris paribus clauses, existing literature

9) How to compare. Concept formation
- Concept formation
  ‘- Observational’ and theoretical concepts
- Concept treatment : definitional procedures
- Lexicographic definitions
- Vagueness and ambiguity
- conceptual intension and extension
- level of abstraction

10) How to compare: Concept ‘measurement’

- concept operationalisation
- direct and indirect operationalisation
- indicators,
- the ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ of indicators
- the impoverishment of operationalisation
- Operationalisation: from concepts to variables (nominal, ordinal and cardinal (quantitative) measurement)
- Conclusion: the complex relationship between theory and empirical research

11) How to compare: classificatory and typological treatment of concepts (The ‘nominal’ measurement)

- The two meanings of ‘classification’
- The criteria of good classification
- Classification as a mental prerequisite? More or less of what?
- Typologies
- Too many types and too few typologies?
- Types as implicit typologies.
- Making explicit the implicit typologies
- Reducing the combination of values/statuses: logical, frequential and pragmatic reduction
- The ‘ideal-type’: an useful instrument?

12) Strategies for controlling the truthness of HPs

- causal relations and the process of research
- reduction of the potential sources of variation: division of labour; heuristic assumptions (coeteris paribus), hypotheses formulation

13) The logic of control: parametrisation

- the logic of parametrisation in science
- experimental parametrisation
- statistical parametrisation (covariation)
- qualitative techniques of parametrisation:
- argumentation
- inadequacy of alternative HPs
- supporting evidence and illustrative examples
- counterfactual mental experiments
- comparative parametrisation of potential causal conditions

14) Necessary and sufficient conditions analysis

- Necessary and sufficient causal conditions
- The truth tables
- logic based on the effects
- logic based on the causes.
- The argument of the sufficient cause
- The argument of the necessary cause
- ‘Law-like’ statements and frequential statements
- Bivariate and multi-variate analysis

**15) Conclusion: the existence of a comparative method (as opposed to the experimental/statistical)**

- Problems of the comparative parametrisation of potential causal conditions

**16) Strategy of research and case selection**

- Units of analysis and cases of analysis
- Mental data matrix:
  - time dimension (synchronic versus diachronic)
  - space dimension: from one to many cases (more or less extensive strategy)
  - property dimension: (more or less intensive strategy)

**17) From units to cases**

- Choice of cases: which ones
- temporal and spatial units
- the choice of the 'number' and 'type' of units
- the choice of the number of properties
- cases ‘representative’ of the variation in the causes(independent variables) or in the effects (dependent variables)
- ‘reasoned’ non-representative choice of cases in order to maximise or minimise the variance
- homogeneity-non-homogeneity in causes, effect and contexts variables
- why this choice?
- with which relations with the definition of the problem?
- with which implications for the strategies of control of the HP?

**18) The case study: does it exist?**

- case study
- a-theoretical, descriptive
- interpretative, hypotheses generating
- explicative
- theory controlling
- deviant-case study

**19) A neglected problem in comparative research: temporal units**

- temporal and spatial units
- the definition of temporal units
- types of diachronic comparisons
- Developmental versus synchronic generalisation in comparative research
- Multi-co linearity in space and time
- A possible strategy combining space and time variation to maximise control

**20) Conclusion: Paradigms, schools, sects and the comparative method**

Readings:


