



# The Logic of the Method in Comparative Research

Seminar, 2<sup>nd</sup> term 2014-2015

Organized by Stefano Bartolini

Please register with Mariana Spratley ([mariana.spratley@eui.eu](mailto:mariana.spratley@eui.eu))

## Topic

The 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 reviews 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 discussions. The list of readings is restricted; it is general for the entire course and readings are not assigned weekly. Participants are expected to read them thoroughly and attentively in the early phase of the seminar so as to use them in the discussions throughout it.

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 4 and 8 pages long. Schematic and/or dialogic papers are both acceptable. Depending on the number of participants, these reports will be discussed individually. If necessary, extra sessions may be scheduled after March for these discussions. The researchers' participation to the seminar and the seminar papers will be the basis for the accreditation of the seminar.

## Schedule

The seminar takes place on **Thursdays at 11:00-13:00**, in Seminar Room 2 in the Badia and will run **from January 15<sup>th</sup> to March 26<sup>th</sup>**. The full list of the seminar sessions is the following:

Session 1:	Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> January	Seminar room 2
Session 2:	Thursday 22 <sup>nd</sup> January	<b>Emeroteca (15:00-17:00)</b>
Session 3:	Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> January	Seminar room 2
	<b>Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>No session</b>
Session 4:	Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> February	Seminar room 2
Session 5:	Thursday 19 <sup>th</sup> February	Seminar room 2
Session 6:	Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> February	Seminar room 2
Session 7:	Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> March	Seminar room 2
Session 8:	Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> March	Seminar room 2
<b>NB:</b>	<b>Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>NO session (applicants interviews)</b>
Session 9:	<b>Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>Seminar room 2 (9:00-11:00)</b>
Session 10:	<b>Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>Seminar room 2 (11:00-13:00)</b>

## 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 assumptions*

- That some external (to our mind) reality exists
- That human beings' minds have some common properties that allow inter-subjectively exchangeable perceptions
- Science as effectiveness; science 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')
  - theoretical value (formulated in such a way as to contribute to existing and accumulated knowledge)

### 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

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

### **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 operationalization
- Direct and indirect operationalization
- Indicators
- The ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ of indicators
- The impoverishment of operationalization
- Operationalization: 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 truthiness 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' of analysis to 'cases'**

- 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?
- Choice of cases: which ones

**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

Almond G., *Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science*, in *A Discipline Divided*, Newbury Park (Ca.), Sage Publications, 1990, pp. 13-31.

Bartolini S., 'On Time and Comparative Research', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 5 (1993), n. 2, pp. 131-167.

Collier D. and J. E. Mahon, 'Conceptual 'Stretching' Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), pp. 845-855.

Caramani, D., *Introduction to the Comparative Method with Boolean algebra*, London, Sage, 2009.

Dowding K., 'The Compatibility of Behaviouralism, Rational Choice, and 'New Institutionalism'', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6 (1994), pp. 105-117.

Lazarsfeld P. F. and A. H. Barton, *Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences: Classification, Typologies, and Indices*, in D. Lerner and H. D. Lasswell (eds), *The Policy Sciences*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1951, pp. 155-192.

Ragin C. C., *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 34-84.

Sartori G., *Guidelines for Concept Analysis*, in G. Sartori (ed.), *Social Science Concepts. A Systematic Analysis*, London, Sage, 1984, pp. 15-85.

Smelser N. J., *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1976, pp. 151-243.