



Outline of course on:

“Comparative research designs and comparative methods”

Instructor: Prof. (em.) Dr. Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Ph.D.; Philipps University Marburg/Germany

Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of modern empirical social science, once stated that the comparative method is the only one that suits the social sciences. But Descartes already had reminded us that “comparaison n’est pas raison”, i. e. comparison is not reason (or theory) by itself. This course provides an introduction and overview of systematic comparative analyses in the social sciences and shows how to employ this method for constructive explanation and theory building. It begins with comparisons of very few cases and specific “most similar” and “most different” research designs. A major part is then devoted to the often occurring situation of dealing with a small number of highly complex cases, e.g., when comparing Latin American political systems or particular policy areas. In response to this complexity, new approaches and software have been developed in recent years (“Qualitative Comparative Analysis”, QCA, and related methods). These procedures are able to reduce complexity and to arrive at “configurational” solutions based on set theory and Boolean algebra, which are more meaningful in this context than the usual broad-based statistical methods. In a last section more common statistical comparative methods at the macro-level of states or societies are presented and the respective strengths and weaknesses discussed. Participants are strongly encouraged to present their own research problems and data, if available. Some basic quantitative or qualitative methodological training is probably useful to get more out of the course, but participants with little methodological training should find no major obstacles to follow.

Week 1:

Day 1. Epistemological foundations, Mill’s “canons”

Assigned readings:

Moses/Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing*, chapter 1, pp. 1 – 15.

D.B.-S., Epistemological building-blocks for a universal (?) political science, unpublished ms.

Day 2. Further Advances, Overview of comparative research designs

Readings: Rihoux/Ragin (eds.), *Configurational Comparative Methods*, SAGE, 2009, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. XVII – XXV and 1 – 18.

Moses/Knutsen, chapter 5, pp. 94 – 115.

Day 3. Most similar and most different designs (MSDO/MDSO), Matching and Contrasting of Cases

Readings: Rihoux/Ragin, *op.cit.*, chapter 2, pp. 19 – 32.

Berg-Schlosser, *Mixed Methods in Comparative Politics*, chapter 8, pp. 130 - 159.

Day 4 . Introduction to Boolean Algebra, main steps of QCA

Readings: Rihoux/Ragin, *op.cit.*, chapter 3

D.B.-S., *Mixed Methods ...*, chapter 6.1, 6.2

Goertz/Mahoney, chapter 2, pp.16 -38.



Day 5. QCA applications, troubleshooting, Multi-Value QCA (mvQCA)

Readings: Rihoux/Ragin, *op.cit.*, chapters 4 and 6;

D.B.-S., *Mixed Methods ...*, chapter 6.3

A.Marx/B. Rihoux/Ch. Ragin (2013), "The origins, development, and application of QCA: the first 25 years", *European Political Science Review*, pp. 1 – 28.

Week 2:

Day 6: Fuzzy set analyses, basic features

Readings: Rihoux/Ragin, *op.cit.*, chapter 5

Ch. Ragin, *Redesigning Social Inquiry – Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*, University of Chicago Press, 2008, chapters 4 and 5, pp. 71-105

Day 7: Fuzzy set applications (fs/qca)

Readings: Ragin 2008, *op.cit.*, chapters 10 and 11, pp. 176-212.

D.B.-S., *Mixed Methods ...*; chapter 6.4

Day 8: Macro-quantitative analyses – aggregate data

Readings: U.Wagschal and S.Jaeckle "Aggregate Data Analysis", in: *International Encyclopaedia of Political Science*, SAGE 2011.

D.B.-S. and S. Quenter, "Macro-Quantitative vs. Macro-qualitative Methods in Political Science – Advantages and Disadvantages of Comparative Procedures using the Welfare State Theory as an Example", *Historical Social Research*, vol.21,no1, 1996, pp. 3-25.

Day 9: Reduction of complexity –multi-method analyses

Readings: D.B.-S., *Mixed Methods ...*, chapters 9 and 10.

Day 10: Contributions by participants, review, further perspectives

Reading: Rihoux/Ragin, *op.cit.*, chapters 7 and 8.

D.B.-S., *Mixed Methods ...*; chapter 12

An updated version of the TOSMANA (Tools for Small N Analysis) software, which now includes fuzzy set procedures, will be used. A massive open online version of the course (MOOC) is also available.



Recommended further readings:

Berg-Schlosser, D.(2012) , *Mixed Methods in Comparative Politics – Principles and Applications*, Houndmills: Palgrave.

Brady, H. E. and D. Collier (eds.) (2010), *Rethinking Social Inquiry – Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd ed., Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield

Goertz, G. and J. Mahoney (2012), *A Tale of Two Cultures – Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*, Princeton: Princeton UP.

.Moses, J.W. and T.L. Knutsen, (2012), *Ways of Knowing – Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*, 2nd ed., Houndmills: Palgrave.

Peters, B.G. (1998), *Comparative Politics – Theory and Methods*, London: Macmillan.

Ragin, Ch. (2008) *Redesigning Social Inquiry – Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*, University of Chicago Press.

Rihoux, B. and Ch. Ragin (eds.) (2009), *Configurational Comparative Methods*, Los Angeles: SAGE.

Schneider, C. and Cl. Wagemann (2012), *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences – A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis*, Cambridge: CUP.