



Thomas König
ZENS

<http://www.gwdg.de/~uspw/tkoenig>

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY IN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

There are many reasons, why international comparisons have become *en vogue* in the social sciences. International research helps to unravel one's own hidden cultural preconceptions by showing alternative lines of action and concepts. The quasi-experimental research design of much of international comparative research ensures a high degree of ecological validity, while it allows at the same time for a reasonable control of key variables. Finally, in times of so-called globalization, international comparative research is an almost natural match for current theoretical debates.

This seminar introduces students into theory and methodology of international comparisons. During the first three weeks we will discuss the logic that stands behind comparative research. Subsequently, we will analyze the key methodological problems in international comparisons. In the final part of the seminar we will have a look at international methodology "at work." We will use the insights learned in part one and two to evaluate four landmark studies of international comparative research.

Organization: All required readings are to be read *prior* to the sessions to which they are assigned. Monographs are to be skimmed focusing on methodological issues. On average, reading assignments will cover about 50 pages.

Requirements: Students must submit weekly assignments and produce either a term paper or an oral presentation.

Grading: assignments 70%, class participation 20%, presentation 10%; when term paper is chosen: assignments 55%, class participation 10%, term paper 35%

Prerequisites: Completion of introductory course in research methodology (e.g., *Schein* in „Einführung in die Methoden empirischer Sozialforschung"); some knowledge of German and epistemology a plus.

I. Theory of international comparative sociology

Week 1 Introductory Meeting

Overview over the class. The following readings are relevant throughout the semester:

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Week 2 Why compare?

What are the peculiarities of comparative research? Which advantages does comparative research offer to social scientists? as ist komparative Sozialwissenschaft? Welche Vorteile bringen sozialwissenschaftliche Vergleiche für die Theorieentwicklung?

Required readings

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, Kapitel 1.

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Kapitel 1.

Week 3 Compare what?

International comparative research frequently considers that national societies are the basic units of comparison. This seemingly innocent assumption creates unexpected theoretical problems.

Required readings

Luhmann, Niklas. 1992. "The Concept of Society." *Thesis Eleven* 31:67-80.

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, S. 20-26.

Recommended readings

Billig, Michael. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London, U.K., Thousand Oaks, CA & New Delhi, India: Sage.

Week 4 Compare how?

With which criteria should we select cases for comparison? That is the key question in Mill's now famous essay on the logic of comparisons. Smelser extends on Mill's logics of comparison.

Required readings

Mill, John Stuart. 1888. "Two Systems of Comparison," (Auszug aus *A System of Logic*), in Etzioni, Amitai and Fred DuBow. 1969. *Comparative Perspectives Theories and Methods*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 205-213.

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Kapitel 5.

Recommended readings

Mahoney, James. "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis." *Sociological Methods and Research* 28 (2000) 387-424.

II. Methodology in International Comparative Research

In this section of the seminar we will learn about major hazards that plague international comparative research in particular.

Week 5 Concepts in international comparisons

How broadly should concepts be designed to enable comparisons across cultures? How narrow must the concepts remain to avoid excessive ambiguities?

Required readings

Collier, David und James E. Mahoney, "Conceptual Stretching Revisited: Alternative Views of Categories in Comparative Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 87:4 (1993), 845-855.

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall, chapter 6.

Recommended reading

Sartori, Giovanni. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64:4 (1970), 1033-53.

Week 6 Indicators

The same concepts frequently require different measurements within different settings. How can we ensure that different indicators measure the same concepts?

Required reading

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall, chapter 6.

Week 7 Reduction of Complexity

How can a complex data set be analyzed to gain meaningful information for the examination of sociological theories?

Required readings

Ragin, Charles. 1997. "Turning the Tables: How Case-Oriented Research Challenges Variable-Oriented Research." *Comparative Social Research* 16:27-42.

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall, chapter 7.

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, chapter 4.

Recommended reading

Ragin, Charles C. 1987. *The Comparative Method Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

III. Comparative Studies: True, modern and wannabe-classics

Week 8 Durkheim's Suicide

Durkheim's *Suicide* is probably the first big internationally comparative social study and definitely one of the most influential sociological studies to date. Durkheim develops on a series of suicide data from a number of different countries a typology for suicides and social anomie.

Required readings

Durkheim, Emile. [1897] 1973. *Der Selbstmord*. Neuwied: Luchterhand.

Smelser, Neil J. 1976. *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Prentice-Hall, chapter 4.

Week 9 Few cases, small universe

Theda Skocpol develops on the cases of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions a general theory of revolutions.

Required readings

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, Kapitel 6.

Week 10 Few cases, large universe

Brubaker shows in his seminal study, how the different concepts of citizenship in France and Germany have affected their national citizenship laws and migration regimes.

Required reading

Brubaker, Rogers "Immigration, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in France and Germany: A Comparative Historical Analysis." *International Sociology* 5 (December 1990), S. 379-407.

Alternative reading

Brubaker, Rogers. 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Week 11 Many cases, large universe, qualitative data

Drawing on a wealth of secondary data, William Gamson has developed an ingenious and highly generalizable resource mobilization account of protest movements.

Required reading

Gamson, William A. 1990. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. 2 ed. Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishers.

Week 12 Many cases, large universe, quantitative data

Data from the largest global value survey are employed to corroborate Ronald Inglehart's thesis of a shift towards postmaterialism in developed countries.

Required reading

Inglehart, Ronald. 1990. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Week 13 Zwei Fälle, alle möglichen Arten von Daten

Ferree et al. recently presented the new authoritative study of the abortion discourse in Germany and the United States. It also is a landmark study for the empirical research on democracy.

Required Reading

Ferree, Myra M., William A. Gamson, Dieter Rucht, and Jürgen Gerhards. 2002. *Shaping Abortion Discourses Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 14 Round-up

What makes international social research successful? How can macro phenomena and theories shed light on developments on the micro level.

Required reading

Tilly, Charles. 1997. *Micro, Macro, or Megrim?*
www.asu.edu/clas/polisci/cqrm/papers/Tilly/TillyMicromacro.pdf, 13.03.2002.