

RSS01.C1 Comparative Research Designs detailed program

On Day 1, after an introduction on all the practical and organizational aspects of the course, the main topic will be to frame comparative research in the broader context of a comparative *approach*. This necessitates to consider some epistemological issues underpinning comparison. Starting from the discussion of comparison as a basic mental operation, we will progress to comparison in the social sciences. One core focus will be laid on the different goals of comparison, with practical examples. We will also discuss a first series of participants' projects, with a focus on the goals pursued (why go for a comparative research design?).

On Day 2, we will locate comparative research designs vis-à-vis other research designs. We will also present all the practical steps of a robust comparative research design, with a focus on the major arbitrations to be made. We will also have a first look at a first set of "step 1" operations that lie upstream of case selection. Indeed quite a few core priori arbitrations must be made, such as the formulation of the research question(s) and hypotheses (if applicable), the correct use of concepts for the purpose of comparison, the number of cases one will be able to manage, and the choice between cross-country or within-country case selection. We will also discuss a second series of participants' projects, with a focus on upstream arbitrations.

On Day 3, we will pursue the examination of the "step 1" operations, and deepen the question of "what is a case" within a comparative research design – with an emphasis on some core arbitrations such as depth v/s breadth and cross-country v/s within-country v/s within-system casing and case selection. Then we'll go through a systematically survey all the main options for the core "step 2" operation: case selection. We will first envisage basic case selection strategies, from very small N to very large N, and following different criteria; the pro's and con's of each strategy will also be discussed. We will also discuss a third series of participants' projects, with a focus on "casing" and case selection

On Day 4, examining further the "step 2" operation, we will turn to more advanced case selection strategies, in particular taking into consideration issues of time/sequence and of multilevel phenomena. The pro's and con's of each strategy will also be discussed. Then we'll move on to hands-on 'tricks of the trade' on how to *collect and manage data* in a comparative research ("step 3") – including ways to trouble-shoot and to make adjustments in terms of case selection as the research develops. We will also discuss a fourth series of participants' projects, with a focus on case selection and data collection/management.

Finally, on Day 5, we'll examine different ways to engage in comparative data *analysis*, envisaging three main families of options: (1) more case-oriented (or 'qualitative') analyses, (2) Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) for systematic cross-case comparison, and (3) statistical/'quantitative' analyses. The pro's and con's of each one of these options will be examined, as well as the potential and difficulties of sequencing different data analysis techniques in a mixed- or multi-method design. We'll particularly discuss the potential of sequencing QCA with single case studies, in small- or intermediate-N designs. Then, in the second part of the session, we'll wrap up the course by revisiting some of the core points – with a focus on the strengths of comparative research designs, but even more on main perils or caveats of comparison. This will be followed by an open interactive session, discussing points still to be clarified, points of debate or disagreements, remaining questions and answers about participants' projects, etc.