

T11P02 / Case-Oriented and Set - Theoretic Approaches to Comparative Policy Analysis

Topic : T11 / METHODOLOGIES

Chair : Eva Thomann (University of Exeter)

Second Chair : Valerie Pattyn (Institute of Public Administration - Leiden University)

Third Chair : Stefan Verweij (University of Groningen)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The policy process is characterized by a considerable degree of complexity regarding institutional settings, actor and preference constellations, policy goals, contents, and tools. Simultaneously, there is a practical demand for better knowledge of “what works” in public policies and under what conditions or in what contexts. In order to better match methods with theories and empirical realities, the analysis of public policies faces several challenging tasks (Brans and Pattyn 2017). First, it needs to model the complexity that characterizes the policy process and trace the underlying mechanisms. Second, comparative policy analysis detects regularities and achieves a modest degree of generalization. Finally, comparative policy analysis often deals with small or intermediate numbers of cases.

Case-oriented and set-theoretic approaches to comparative policy analysis, such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), Coincidence Analysis (CNA), explanatory typologies, and comparative process tracing, are designed to address these challenges. Situated within a “critical realist” paradigm of social research (Gerrits and Verweij 2013), they model different aspects of causal complexity, such as configurations of different factors leading to policy outputs or outcomes, equifinality (multiple configurations can result in the same outcome), contextual contingencies, and causal asymmetry. Moreover, they can be applied within a variety of small-N or large-N research approaches to evaluate as well as generate theories through a combination of systematic comparison with targeted in-depth case studies (Thomann and Maggetti 2017). As interactive and iterative methods, they also lend themselves to interpretative comparative analysis (Brans and Pattyn, 2017).

Set-theoretic and case-oriented methods are increasingly common in comparative policy analysis (see e.g. Rihoux et al. 2011; Thomann 2019), particularly in policy implementation and evaluation research (Gerrits and Verweij 2018; Pattyn et al. 2017). This panel gathers both theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions that deal with the state of the art of case-oriented and set-theoretic approaches and illustrate their potential and limitations to contribute to the theory and practice of policy analysis.

References

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Recent years have seen an impressive proliferation of set-theoretic and case-oriented methods in comparative policy analysis in general (see e.g. Rihoux et al. 2011; Thomann 2019), and in policy implementation and evaluation research in particular (Gerrits and Verweij 2018; Pattyn et al. 2017). Case-oriented and set-theoretic approaches to comparative policy analysis, including but not limited to methods such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), Coincidence Analysis (CNA), explanatory typologies, and comparative process tracing, are designed to address the challenges of contemporary policy analysis. Situated within a “critical realist” paradigm of social research (Gerrits and Verweij 2013), they model different aspects of causal complexity, such as the prevalence of configurations of different factors leading to policy outputs or outcomes, equifinality (multiple policy strategies or instruments resulting in the same outcome), contextual contingencies, and causal asymmetry. Moreover, they can be applied within a variety of small-N or large-N research approaches to evaluate as well as generate theories through a combination of systematic comparison with targeted in-depth case studies (Thomann and Maggetti 2017).

This panel gathers theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions by both junior and senior scholars that deal with case-oriented and set-theoretic approaches and illustrate their potential and limitations to contribute to the theory and practice of policy analysis. We particularly invite contributions that either comprehensively review or systematize the state of the art, apply methodological innovations to empirical settings, connect methods with theories, and/or contribute to methodological innovation themselves. Papers should engage in a critical reflection of methodological aspects and their connection with the theory and/or practice of policy analysis in general, or implementation and evaluation in particular. Abstracts should include a clear puzzle, research question, outline of the approach, research design, and main contribution of the proposed paper. Preference is given to abstracts that demonstrate an understanding of recent methodological developments.

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Session 1

Friday, June 28th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 3.265)

Discussants

Eva Thomann (University of Exeter)

Qualitative Comparative Analysis of governance arrangements: Identifying configurations for governing decentralized and centralized water systems

Katrin Pakizer (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH Zurich))

Eva Lieberherr (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology)

Large-scale water systems are increasingly under pressure, as they experience highly dynamic and conflicting societal demands and environmental challenges. The expanding yet at the same time ageing infrastructures, which are typically governed by hierarchical structures, tend to lack the flexibility to adapt to population growth, continued urbanization and climate change-related challenges. The implementation of modular water systems, characterized by decentralization, automation and mass production, into centralized infrastructures could mitigate those challenges, enabling radically different and potentially more resource efficient and environmentally sustainable water management. Nonetheless, the existence of technological alternatives has not changed the continuous reliance on tried-and-true solutions, which indicates that the introduction of modular water systems seems to be rather a governance issue than a technological one. However, despite the understanding that the existence of supportive governance arrangements plays an important role for the implementation of alternative technologies, there is little insight into the processes and conditions. For instance, it remains an open question whether centralized governance structures can be simply adapted or new tools and arrangements need to be developed for the integration of decentralized systems into centralized infrastructures. Some researchers argue that the type of governance ultimately depends on the scale of each infrastructure. However, this observation does not consider complex systems, leaving the question what type of governance arrangement is needed for governing simultaneously small- and large-scale (hybrid) water systems ultimately unanswered.

Our goal is to investigate the governance configurations that enable the implementation of modular water systems. Through our previous research, we already identified relevant cases that have implemented decentralized water systems into their established water infrastructure and determined potentially necessary conditions that support or hinder implementation success. The set-theoretic and case-oriented approach of fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) allows us to analyze and compare our twenty case studies, which we selected from an extensive literature review, testing whether regulatory instruments, economical instruments, informational instruments, horizontal accountability and participation are sufficient and/or necessary conditions for the successful implementation of modular water systems. This way, we can model the complex causal relation of instruments and mechanisms that support or hinder successful policy implementation, in our case the simultaneous governing and organization of small- and large-scale water systems.

The implementation of the female labor law in comparison of the public and private sectors in Vietnam: Using the fsQCA approach

Huong Vu Thi Thanh (University of Duisburg-Essen)

The Vietnam Labor Code 2012 stipulated some priority policies for women to enhance their rights and benefits in employment. The questions are given: Are there similarities and differences in policy implementation between the public and private sectors? What conditions explain the implementation outcomes? This paper provides a comparison of policy implementation between two sectors and explores the causal complexity of the diagnosed outcomes by using the methodology of fsQCA as a case-oriented and set theoretic approach (Gerrits & Verweij 2018; Pattyn et al. 2017; Ragin 2008; Schneider &

Wagenmann 2012; Thomann 2019). Since there is no effective public administration in charge of policy implementation, aspects usually referred to like the distribution of competence in public administration and the role of civil servants involved in policy implementation cannot be included in the analysis. Instead, the study proposes an analytical framework with six possible conditions associated with the implementation outcomes. These independent variables, in the language of QCA 'conditions' are: latitudes of interpretation within the respective legal norms, the severity of legal sanctions, the availability of financial resources for policy implementation on the side of the norm addressees, the disposition of the employers, interest groups supporting or obstructing effective compliance, and the information level of the employees about the policies. From this theoretical framework, some directional expectations are drawn which are laid down in hypotheses. The analytical framework serves the function to structure 84 not representative case studies on the implementation of three different policies for female workers. The sample size for each sector is equal (42 cases in the public sector and 42 cases in the private sector), of which each case study was conducted along a structure determined by a given questionnaire containing open and closed questions. The face-to-face interviews were performed by a native speaker with both employers and female employees in agencies, organizations, companies, enterprises, and factories in various fields. Under favorable conditions, the study approached furthermore a representative of the trade union and a civil servant to contribute to the reliable value of data. The respective data are transformed into a fuzzy set to make use of fsQCA, a powerful research methodology for identifying how necessary and/ or sufficient the conditions are (single or in combination) to lead to the implementation outcome. The analyses are performed separately for both the outcomes of compliance and noncompliance. As revealed by my research results, the private sector tends to be vulnerable to more deficits than the public sector in implementing policies for female workers. The multi-causal pathways to policy noncompliance in the private sector are more complex than in the public sector, while the multi-causal pathways of policy compliance are nearly the same in both sectors. In general, the characteristics of the regulations still make a difference in policy implementation, and the supportive disposition of the employers is a condition for relative consistency with policy goals. The results also reflect the current reality in Vietnam that the trade unions and the workers still play an ambiguous role in policy implementation.

Assessing the new international development paradigm of capacity strengthening in researcher training in sub-Saharan Africa through consortia membership: Case studies from the DELTAS Africa consortia in Kenya and Senegal

Pierre Abomo

Endogenous capacities for scientific research in Africa are limited. This is particularly the case for the health sector, where sub-Saharan Africa is poorly represented in both numbers of scientists and research outputs per capita. This fact contributes to lower participation of the sub-Saharan African region in global health policy research and discussions, as well as the influence of its researchers in setting the global health policy agenda and priorities. Over recent decades, the development of Health Research Capacity Strengthening initiatives such as DELTAS Africa has been the new policy paradigm to address this gap. However, this new approach is not well understood in the literature. There is still limited evidence as to how consortia membership enhances the capacity of African research institutions to provide quality research training programmes to African researchers. This study aims at contributing to filling this knowledge gap. It implements a case study approach in two countries selected representing the diversity of higher education and research contexts in sub-Saharan Africa.

The overall aim of this study is to explore to what extent the membership to Consortia leads to the improvement of the capacities of African higher education and research institutions to support researchers' training.

The study is carried out through case studies conducted in institutions from two countries hosting DELTAS consortia and illustrating two contrasting linguistic and political contexts in sub-Saharan Africa (Anglophone and Francophone Africa). The focus of the case studies is the researcher training programmes provided by the selected institutions belonging to the DELTAS network. Data collection is done via semi-structured interviews, site observations and documents reviews.

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Session 2

Friday, June 28th 10:30 to 12:30 (MB 3.265)

Discussants

Stefan Verweij (University of Groningen)

Approaches to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA): A systematic review of Public Administration research

Eva Thomann (University of Exeter)

Jörn Ege (German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer / University of Exeter)

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The approach and method of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) have undergone remarkable developments since its launch in 1987 (Ragin 1987), in terms of dissemination, methodological innovation, and a diversification of approaches to QCA. At the same time, the use of QCA often lags behind methodological recommendations of good practice (Schneider and Wagemann 2010). This is a serious problem. Poor quality applications not only bear a high risk of flawed inferences, but also frequently raise harsh critiques of the QCA methodology as such. The recently introduced typology of approaches to QCA (Thomann and Maggetti 2017) outlines the (in)appropriateness of different analytic choices depending on a given approach, and urges users to apply QCA approaches consistently. However, no systematic knowledge exists as yet about the empirical prevalence of different types of approaches to QCA and whether they might be characterized by specific methodological problems. To address this gap, this paper performs a systematic review of 89 studies applying QCA in the field of Public Administration. Given its epistemological “affinity” toward some core assumptions of the QCA methodology, the field of Public Administration can be regarded as a typical case of contemporary QCA use.

Our review addresses three questions. First, which types of QCA approaches prevail in Public Administration, and how prevalent are the more inconsistent “hybrids”? Second, are different approaches linked to particular good or not-so-good practices? Third, how have these phenomena evolved over time? We derive three expectations on this link. First, we expect that particularly the “hybrids” should display more methodological problems due to inconsistent analytic choices. Second, we expect some QCA approaches to meet the standards of good practices more consistently than other approaches, as these standards were developed for a specific type of QCA approach. Third, we expect that the standards of good practices have more frequently been met in more recent QCA applications, as the training and dissemination of such practices have considerably improved over time. This analysis provides the first empirical test of the usefulness of Thomann and Maggetti’s typology for describing and understanding the use of QCA. The results allow us to refine the standards of good practice for QCA in order to account for the prevalence of different QCA approaches. Moreover, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of the state-of-the-art of QCA in Public Administration. This information is important for users, reviewers, and teachers in order to move the use of QCA forward, in Public Administration as well as other areas of social research.

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The durability of policy reforms: A fsQCA analysis of the endurance of eight policy reforms across four different countries

Joannah Luetjens (Utrecht University)

Through public policies, governments around the world have enormous potential to shape the lives of their citizens. There is a lot at stake when new directions are forged, or when established ones are altered. In general, policy scholars are well-versed in deciphering the processes and conditions that can lead to successful agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984), problem definition (Stone, 1989), and coalition building (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). The challenge, however, lies in what happens next.

Recent research in political science, public administration, and public policy suggests that the post-enactment success of policy reforms requires further study (Patashnik, 2008; Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). A hard-fought, path-breaking reform might later be repealed, amended, underfunded, or expanded beyond what its creators planned. To understand the endurance of reform, we need to get beyond the enactment of reform and ask a simple question: what makes policy reforms endure?

This paper first introduces a new concept of reform durability as a sophisticated measure to trace the trajectory of policy reforms post-enactment beyond mere continuation versus termination. Building on Eric Patashnik's (2008) analysis of the drivers of policy reform in the United States, this study then draws on policy documents and interviews to explore the fate of major policy reforms across different political systems: Canada, Australia, Ireland and Sweden. The cases are chosen to represent policy domains which are more inclined to take a long-term view (for example, forestry and pensions) as well as areas which are more likely to suffer from the vagaries of political change (for example, parental leave and public utilities).

The study employs fuzzy-set QCA to unravel the combinations of conditions that shape reform durability. Reform processes involve many factors operating at multiple levels that, in combination, shape the fate of the reform. However, this complexity is often perceived as an impenetrable barrier to fruitful analysis. fsQCA methodology is well-suited to the study of reform durability as it encourages an explanation using combinatory logic and a more nuanced judgement of drivers for reform and endurance.

By drawing on a range of reform experiences from different political systems, this study highlights the contingent, contested, and interacting factors which enhance (or undermine) reform durability. The study contributes towards both a more nuanced understanding of performance, moving beyond a simple distinction between termination versus continuation, and a more comprehensive understanding of the political changes that help reforms endure.

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Institutional analysis of food safety regulation through QCA: evidence from 15 EU countries

Giulia Bazzan (Tilburg University)

This paper investigates differences in effectiveness of food safety regulation across the EU countries and

explains them by differences in domestic governance design. The focus is justified by a pragmatic consideration, inspired by the Institutional Analysis and Development framework (IAD: Ostrom 2005, 2011): although policy effectiveness more directly depends on a wide array of non-institutional factors, the institutional dimension of governance is the one on which intervention is relatively easier, and that shapes actors' strategies and endowments. Drawing on this tenet, this work asks which institutional features of the national governance design make food safety regulation effective. Given the configurational nature of institutional effects (Ostrom, 1986), Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is the suitable technique to find out the necessary and sufficient conditions associated with high / low effectiveness of food safety regulation. Specifically, this paper aims to illustrate both the potential and limitations of this methodological approach to conduct institutional analysis, with the aim of contributing to the theory and practice of policy analysis (Rihoux et al., 2011; Thomann and Maggetti, 2017; Thomann, 2019).