

# T02W12 / Methodology for comparative policy analysis

**Topic :** T02 / Comparative Public Policy

**Chair :** Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

**Second Chair :** B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Comparative policy analysis is a research area aimed at explaining policy outputs and outcomes, at the crossroad of political science, sociology, economy, history, international relations and administrative studies. For the past four decades, it has experienced a consistent development thanks to the use of large-n probabilistic methods and standard regression models, small-n and middle-n studies, experiments, combinatory analysis and process-tracing.

The Workshop on Methods for Comparative Policy Analysis will integrate these methodological issues with substantive issues of theory-building and theory-testing for policy design. We wish to focus on the utility of the methods themselves more than on the application of the methods. However the methods should always be considered in light of how they can address policy problems.

The central argument of this workshop is that comparative policy analysis is currently facing the challenge of conceptual and analytical harmonization, if it is to make a significant contribution to policy design by bridging applied and theoretical studies. We believe that if the promise of comparative policy analysis is to be fulfilled, then greater attention must be given to ways of linking comparative methods with policy, and likewise to how to link methods associated with policy analysis to comparative cases. Too often these connections of research traditions are not made explicitly and the resulting research may not contribute as much as it might, either to comparative studies or policy analysis. As well as the substantive differences among these research traditions, there are marked differences between large-n and small-n traditions of research, especially in policy analysis.

We will hold five sessions.

The first session will address contemporary trends in comparative policy analysis. Contributions will deal with methodological issues in policy research on agenda-setting, implementation, public administration, and the use of common analytical frameworks for CPA.

The second session will focus on the linkage of issues in comparative analysis. Contributors will discuss the utility of the comparative method, most-similar and most-different systems research designs, small-n case studies, large-n comparison and comparative process tracing, etc.

The third session will address further issues in qualitative methods. Contributors will deal with combinatory analysis (QCA) for CPA, comparative historical research, Q methodology, focus groups, ethnography and biases problems in data collection, etc.

The fourth session will address standard quantitative techniques. Contributors will deal with measurement issues such as regression for policy work, big data and models of policy change.

The fifth session will address multi-methods and experimental research designs. Contributors will examine the role of experimental designs –both laboratory and field experiments–, mixed methods for intermediate-n comparison, social network modeling, risk-benefit evaluation, etc.

Guidelines for authors

Extension:

8000 words (not including references)

Paper organization:

Brief introduction including a state of the art, the question to be addressed and a presentation of the chapter organization.

Please consider organizing your chapter into 3-4 sections and separate each section with a specific, informative title.

Highlights: Emphasis should be made on the methodological aspects raised by the research problem, the theoretical framework and the scope of comparison. Please explain how these problems have been addressed so far in the specialized literature, then expose your main argument. Eventually, try to illustrate your point with empirical studies based on your own research or on outstanding works by other scholars.

References: Please include secondary sources in English in the bibliography, but try to avoid technical

assessments and documents. If possible, indicate the digital link to open access documents.

Schedule:

Abstract due on November 30, 2017 (300 words)

First draft due on January 8, 2018.

Second draft due on May 31, 2018.

Final draft due on July 31, 2018.

## ABSTRACT

This workshop will convey scholars applying different methods in policy analysis, around the following question: Which are the most reliable methods and techniques to improve comparative policy analysis?

The workshop will integrate methodological issues in comparative politics and comparative sociology with those used in policy analysis. We believe that, if the promise of CPA is to be fulfilled, then greater attention must be given to ways of linking comparative methods with policy, and likewise how to link methods associated with policy analysis to comparative cases. Too often these connections of research traditions are not made clearly and the resulting research may not contribute as much as it might, either to comparative studies or policy studies.

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## Session 1Session 1

Tuesday, June 26th 10:15 to 12:15 (Posvar Hall - 4801)

### Discussants

Patrik Marier (Concordia University)

Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

### Comparative Policy Studies (CPS): Agency and Structure revisited

Diego Alonso Salazar Morales (Institute of Public Administration - Leiden University)

Roger Merino (Universidad del Pacifico)

Traditionally, Comparative Policy Studies focuses on structures rather than policy outcomes or bureaucrats' agency (see de Leon 1998; Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones 2006). Such condition led scholars to widely adopt parochial single case studies rather than comparative medium-ranged generalizable ones as well as contributed to strengthen the view of Policy Studies as a movement or trend rather than as a discipline. Precisely, this paper presents a methodological alternative to this traditional trend. Based on a critical evaluation of agency and structural perspectives, we propose three methodological considerations that might help to overcome both internal and external validity research design issues in CPS. First, we critically assess traditional Political Science comparative analysis focused on structural "systemic differences"; instead, we propose that Policy Studies should rely on the analysis of bureaucratic agency, strategies and managerial practices. The reason underlying this proposition is that systemic or structural based explanations hide the set of causal mechanisms that links bureaucrats' agency with policy results. Second, we propose that comparative analysis of policy implementation could benefit from "most similar" case selection strategies if its application considers both the systemic as well as organisational similarities and differences. Our third argument proposes that the method of process tracing can aid comparative analysis to identify the causal mechanisms that connects bureaucrats' agency to policy outcomes. These arguments are also confronted through a meta-analysis of comparative experiences published in the last decade with a special focus on Latin America. Finally, the paper outlines pending debates and proposes a future agenda for research.

**Keywords:** Comparative analysis. Policy Studies. Latin America. Structures. Agency.

### Developments in Comparative Policy Analysis as a Domain of Study - Twenty Years of Inquiry

Iris Geva-May (The Wagner School, NYU and SPPA, Carleton Univ. Canada)

Joselyn Muhleisen (Baruch College)

Comparative policy analysis has emerged as a distinct field of study in the past two decades. This article performs a coding analysis of unique abstracts among social sciences journals in the EBSCO Academic Complete database to determine the contours of the new field of comparative policy analysis. First, this paper charts the development of comparative policy analysis and compares the trajectories of comparative politics, comparative public administration, and comparative policy analysis. Second, the paper analyzes the results of the abstract coding to reveal the methodologies employed, disciplines addressed, countries studied, number of countries studied, and countries of the authors' institutions. The results from JCPA and other journals in EBSCO are compared to distinguish the dominant role that the JCPA has played in the field. Or as Beryl Radin, the seminal historian of policy analysis states in her *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife*, the Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis (JCPA) and its mission statement

constitute an important stepping-stone in the development of policy studies and policy analysis fields. The question is why, by what means and where is comparative policy analytic studies are heading. Finally in the conclusions we discuss the major trends in the work published in comparative policy analysis, the limitations of the current publications, and further areas for development.

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## Session 2

Tuesday, June 26th 13:45 to 17:00 (Posvar Hall - 4801)

### Discussants

Charlotte Halpern (Sciences Po Paris - Centre d'Etudes Européennes (CEE))

Astrid Molenveld (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

### The Comparative Method and Comparative Policy Analysis

B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

In this paper I will be exploring the utility of the comparative method can be especially useful for comparative policy analysis. In his seminal article Arend Lijphart discussed four alternative research methods for comparative politics, one of them being the comparative method per se. This paper will examine how this method can be used for the comparative study of public policy, which is crucial for the advance of policy studies. Although learning about policy in any of our individual countries can provide some understanding of the dynamics of policy, on that basis it is difficult to develop general theoretical and analytic models of public policy. The world in essence provides a natural laboratory for the study of policy (and any other social or political phenomenon) that enables researchers to build theory and to understand the conditions under which certain factors can influence outcomes with a greater chance for valid generalizations.

### Measuring policy change

Jale Tosun (Heidelberg University)

Quantifying policy change across countries is a challenging endeavor. The scholarly literature offers several strategies for coping with it, of which all have specific strengths and weaknesses. This chapter offers a comprehensive discussion of the respective advantages and disadvantages of the different measurement approaches. The first measurement option relates to the use of policy outcome data, such as levels of environmental pollutant emissions or changes in infant mortality. Such data is typically compiled and published by international organizations like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the World Bank. Therefore, this data is relatively easily accessible. Moreover, this data tend to vary over time, which is important for measuring policy change. The second alternative is represented by the use of survey data. For example, the Global Competitiveness Reports published by the World Economic Forum is helpful for learning about the opinion of experts on changes in regulation. The advantage of survey data is that the uniformly applied Likert scale values facilitate cross-country comparison. The third approach treats the countries' spending for policy sectors as a proxy for policy outputs. An increase in spending levels is associated with a government placing greater emphasis on a particular policy area compared to others. Similar to policy outcome data, data on government spending is readily available – especially for advanced democracies such as the OECD states. Moreover, and again similar to the previous measurements, we are likely to observe variation over time. The fourth option is to rely on policy outputs, which then can be coded in different ways. One of them is to count the number of policies produced by a government in a specific sector. Another one is to concentrate on specific policy types and to code them by looking at the specific policy types, their settings, and scope. The fourth perspective on measuring policy change makes it more difficult to observe frequent instances of policy change. At the same time, this measurement may be desirable in terms of construct validity.

## **Current trends in comparative agenda setting research**

Laura Chaqués Bonafont (Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals)

Christoffer Green-Pedersen (Aarhus University)

Studies of agenda-setting have a long tradition within public policy research with seminal work by Barach and Baratz, Cobb & Elder and Kingdon among others. In recent years, this research tradition has gained considerable momentum not least due to the establishment of the Comparative Agendas Project and the research based on the data. The CAP is built on the foundational work by Baumgartner and Jones and their dataset on the US, and today it gathers together research groups of 18 different countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The growth of the CAP dataset has generated a flourishing literature which has moved the policy agenda-setting tradition forward in several ways. From a methodological perspective, a number of tools have been developed to explain agenda setting in a comparative perspective. This has generated a much better understanding of agenda-setting dynamics across time, issues and countries. Among the methodological innovations, the comparative aspect of the data has been the foundation of a growing body of comparative research about how and why policy issues get into the agenda. Thus, agenda-setting processes around policy issues are in many ways better understood than just 10 years ago. However, many aspects are also poorly understood and two are worth highlighting. One is that though policy problems are widely recognized to be crucial for agenda-setting process, the exact role is still poorly understood. Further, the link between agenda-setting and actual policy decision is an aspect which has not received much attention in this recent literature. Attention to policy issues is studied as important in their own right without much focus on implications for policy

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## Session 3

Wednesday, June 27th 09:00 to 12:15 (Posvar Hall - 4801)

### Discussants

Jale Tosun (Heidelberg University)

Tero Erkkilä (University of Helsinki)

### Index formation and global indicators as policy instruments

Tero Erkkilä (University of Helsinki)

Global indicators have become influential as policy instruments, effecting national policies and serving as assessment criteria when making decisions on countries' eligibility for loans and development funding. This has also raised interest in the composition of these measurements and their methodology. Global country rankings and indicators on good governance have faced criticism for their normative character and methodology. In particular, the global rankings have been criticized for using blunt aggregate figures in establishing rank orders. Because of this, there have been attempts at creating so-called actionable governance indicators that provide more detailed and reform-oriented measurements of governance. However, as if to counter the above move towards methodologically advanced second-generation indicators, there has been a recent surge of regional and city-level rankings of competitiveness and innovation. Aiming to provide 'holistic' measurements, these composite indicators draw variables of from various sources. Here the problems identified in the early rankings of good governance are again encountered. This article analyses measurement issues that arise in developing policy indicators in international context, including the producers of comparative knowledge and their relations, process of knowledge production as well as the interlinkages between different measurements and sharing of data. Attention is given to the rise of actionable governance indicators and related methodological debates and changes in the production and use of indicators as well as the recent reemergence of composite indicators. I use measurements of transparency and knowledge governance as a case for analyzing the above shifts in global governance indicators.

### Small-N Comparative Research: A Viable Strategy for Explanatory Analysis in the Field of Public Policy?

Dimiter Toshkov (Leiden University)

Comparative research has a long and distinguished lineage in the study of public policy. The validity of comparative designs based on a small number of cases for causal inference has been challenged, however, by the rising prominence of experimental methods (randomized control trials) and quasi-experimental designs based on large-N statistical data (e.g. regression discontinuity and synthetic case controls). At the same time, interest in small-N comparative research has been reinvigorated by Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and other set-theoretic configurational methods. But these methods have been challenged from various corners of the social sciences (and beyond), and their ability to deliver causal inference in particular is an issue of a hot debate.

In the proposed paper I review the logic of small-N comparative designs for causal (explanatory) analysis and examine their viability as a method able to produce valid and reliable inferences. I review both the traditional most-similar and most-different system designs, as well as the new approaches offered by QCA and related methods. I argue that small-N comparative designs can only deliver causal inferences if combined with within-case analysis of the individual cases. Small-N comparisons appear viable only as a hybrid design that combines features of cross-case and within-case methodologies. Finally, I draw the

implications of this re-conceptualization of small-N comparative research for the practice of designing and implementing research projects in the field of public policy.

## **Explaining instruments constituency in policy design: Theoretical implications of ontology and methodology alignment**

Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

Comparative research in policy design has gained importance since the 1980's. Yet, the literature still lacks a common language and protocols that would turn theories into analytical frameworks, hence building cumulative scientific knowledge on multiple case studies. The present paper advances toward a solution to this puzzle, with a state of the art organized around the problem of alignment between ontology and methodology.

A typology of policy design theories is built on the combination of ontology with methodology which defines four "scientific wagers" (Jackson, 2016): neo-positivism (based on a dualist ontology and a phenomenalist methodology), critical realism (based on a dualist ontology and a trans-factual methodology), analyticism (based on a monist ontology and a phenomenalist methodology) and reflexivism (based on a monist ontology and a trans-factual methodology). We contend that the combination of ontology and methodology is crucial to assess causality in policy design. While dualist ontologies share a common interest in explaining policy outcomes by policy design, they differ in treating instruments constituency as a consequence (for neo-positivist) or a cause (for critical realist) of a governance mode. On the other hand, while monist ontologies share a common interest in interpreting policy design as the expression of power relations, they differ in treating instruments constituency as a consequence (for analyticist) or a cause (for reflexivist) of framing and actors' values.

Jackson's typology is then used to compare the approaches to policy instruments and instruments constituency, coming out different core theories. Neo-positivism treats policy instruments as substantive tools rationally chosen by governments, hence instruments constituency is conceived as implementation style, in accordance with rational choice and public choice theories (Salamon, 2000; Landry and Varone, 2005; Trebilcock, 2005). Critical realism treats them as causal powers, hence instruments constituency is seen as a logic of appropriateness, in compliance with neo-institutional theories (Hood, 1986; 2007; Linder and Peters, 1984; 1987; 1989; Peters, 2000; 2005; 2014; Howlett, 2005; 2011; Lascoumes and Le Galés, 2007; Hood and Margetts, 2007). Analyticism treats them as cognitive factors, hence instruments constituency is seen as heuristic, which is consistent with social constructivism (Hoppe et al, 1987; Schneider and Ingram, 1988; 1990; 1993; 2007; Schneider and Sidney, 2009; Pierce et al, 2014; Hoppe, 2017). Reflexivism treats them as domination tools, hence instruments constituency is seen as a domination strategy, as stated by neo-marxist theories (Dryzek, 1983; 1988; Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987; Van Nispen and Ringeling, 1998; Turnbull, 2017).



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## Session 4

Wednesday, June 27th 13:45 to 17:00 (Posvar Hall - 4801)

### Discussants

B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

Laura Chaqués Bonafont (Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals)

### **Does policy matter? The added value of a quali-quantitative approach to analyzing historical policy processes.**

Charlotte Halpern (Sciences Po Paris - Centre d'Etudes Européennes (CEE))

This paper discusses the added value of a quali-quantitative approach to understanding policy processes and their outcomes. Drawing on an original qualitative dataset about long-term transport policy developments in European cities (CREATE project, funded under Horizon 2020), this paper critically examines the extent to which policy processes have contributed to the reduction of car use ("peak car") in Paris and London. So far, it has been extremely difficult to conclude with absolute certainty what specific variable(s) explain this similar outcome. A vast share of the social sciences literature refers to macro-economic, social and cultural trends observable throughout industrialized societies (Kaufmann et al., 2004; Banister and Hickman, 2013). Yet there is a growing tendency to account for car reduction and changing mobility patterns in cities by focusing on the policy offer and initiatives seeking to promote alternatives to car transportation. Notwithstanding the vast number of Large N comparative policy evaluation studies, most policy studies seeking to examine whether or not policy matters refer to context specific initiatives or projects, and less so to policy processes (Banister, 2005; Goodwin 2012).

By contrast, this paper argues that the relationship between the reduction of car use in both cities and long-term policy developments in transport can be explored by developing a comparative analysis of historical policy processes (Haydu 1998; Howlett 2009). This is particularly true of large metropolitan areas such as London and Paris, which are reputed ungovernable (Travers, 2002; Lefèvre, 2003) and characterized by specific forms of governance (Le Galès and Vitale 2013; Peters and Pierre, 2016).

A quali-quantitative analysis of policy processes over time was applied in order to combine within-case comparisons with small-n analysis, and to identify intervening causal mechanisms between policy outcomes and independent variable (George and Bennett, 2005, 180; Blatter and Blume, 2008). The paper first discusses problems of causation and the extent to which the process tracing method helps addressing them. Second it introduces the quali-quantitative research design that was used in order to analyze historical transport policy processes in Paris and London since the 1060s. It discusses the added value of the qualitative database that was developed in order to collect a longitudinal and a comparative dataset about dimensions of policy processes (objectives, resources, etc.) and transport governance (issue salience, degrees of local autonomy, etc.). Third it discusses the limitations of quali-quantitative approaches in order to identify co-variations and beyond, some causal mechanisms.

### **Focus Groups in Comparative Public Policy**

Patrik Marier (Concordia University)

Daniel Dickson (University of Ottawa)

Anne-Sophie Dube (Université de Montréal)

The use of focus groups in public policy scholarship remains fairly rare relative to other research methods

such as survey research, individual interviews and statistical analyses, and even more so in comparative public policy. A search for comparative public policy articles in three leading journals (Governance, Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, and Journal of European Public Policy) reveals only 4 articles where the authors conducted focus groups. The aim of this contribution is to provide a succinct overview on the use of focus group in comparative policy research and in other social sciences. It provides also insights into the benefits and challenges of using focus groups in policy research. For this portion, the chapter relies strongly on the experience of eight focus groups conducted in the province of Québec (Canada), as part of a large comparative project analyzing the generosity of social policies targeting older adults. As there is already a rich literature on how to conduct focus groups, the analysis focuses primarily on why this method should be used in (comparative) public policy and on providing lessons from the recent experience of our research team.

## **Ethnography as a research method for comparative policy analysis**

Raul Pacheco-Vega (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Mexico)

While traditional policy analysis has usually taken a methodologically quantitative, large-N approach, the usage and value of qualitative methods in undertaking comparative studies across policy sectors, issues and regions is undeniable. In this paper, I examine the use of ethnography, one of the most important methodologies within the qualitative methods suite of techniques. Participant observation and long-term immersion are two of the major characteristics of ethnographic research. Throughout this chapter, I highlight the mechanistic components of undertaking a comparative policy analysis ethnographic project. I focus primarily on five elements: first, I examine how the researcher's questions can be framed and reframed to better understand target populations. Second, I explain how a comparative policy analytical research question can be answered through observational strategies. Third, I clarify the conceptual muddiness of using a culturally-focused methodological research strategy to explain broader concepts. Fourth, I untangle the different strands of ethnographic methods and outline several ways in which these methodological varieties can be used to improve comparative policy analysis. And fifth, I show examples of how ethnographies within a comparative policy analysis framework should be conducted. Specifically, I draw from my own research on the comparative politics of garbage policy across four different countries, and on a comparative analysis of wastewater policy across 5 Mexican states. I show how country context, cultural elements and other variables should be accounted for when conducting this type of research.

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## Session 5

Thursday, June 28th 09:00 to 12:15 (Posvar Hall - 4801)

### **Cognitive and institutional determinants for public policy changes: a Process Tracing comparative analysis of Chile and Brazil**

Norma Munoz del Campo (Universidad de Santiago de Chile)

Melina de Souza Rocha Lukic (York University)

The research is based on three policy change case studies: tax policy in Brazil and the environmental and cultural policies in Chile. In Brazil, the paradigm of the tax system has changed when the Constitution of 1988 was implemented and the democratization process has occurred. While in Chile, a new cognitive approach concerning the environmental and cultural policies has emerged, with the influence of the international organizations. We analyzed that, despite this initial change in these policies, their paradigms have changed in a different way that the cognitive theory prescribes: not as a radical paradigm change (Hall, 1993), but rather as a more incremental way. So, the analysis to explain the policy change based only on the cognitive criteria has shown limits and could not explain the process occurred in the Brazilian and Chilean cases. On the other hand, the neo-institutionalism approaches have proposed a much more refined model to explain the policy change by presenting a model based on incremental changes (Mahoney, Thelen, 2010).

Although Mahoney and Thelen explain the incremental change (gradual institutional change), their model does not consider the cognitive criteria as a central variable (it is centered in the veto capacity of the actors and institutional context) and does not consider that ideas and discourse as starters of mechanisms. Indeed, we defend a vision according to which the study on "ambiguity, power and agency" requires a link between ideas and institutions.

This study adopts a methodological framework based on comparative public policies and causal process tracing tool (CPT). This small-N comparative approach (within the case) attempts to identify the causal chain and causal mechanism from global sequences and critical processes that establish a "comprehensive storyline" (Blatter y Haverland in Engeli y Rothmayr, 2014) to reveal that ideas and discourse starting mechanism.

Thus, this paper aims to explain this layering process of policy change integrating the cognitive approach with the neo-institutionalism theories in order to study and propose a model of policy change in Latin America based on ideas and institutions criteria.

### **USING Q-METHODOLOGY FOR (COMPARATIVE) POLICY ANALYSIS**

Astrid Molenveld (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Objective policy measures, free from (e.g. political) preferences, do they exist? Numerous scholars and practitioners would argue that they do not (Brown, 1974; Howlett, 2009; Peters & Hoornbeek, 2005; Scharpf, 2000; Wlezien, 2004), as the nature of knowledge, the approach, envisioned outcomes, spending and politics associated with policy solutions differ among stakeholders, politicians, civil servants and citizens (Peters, 1998). In other words, both the problem and solutions are often viewed by multiple stakeholders, who have different interests and values, from a different angle. This is typically how wicked and complex policy problems are described (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Termeer, Dewulf, & Breeman, 2013).

These differences are fundamental, people view and perceive complex policy issues fundamentally different, and therefore policy solutions are inherently biased by different problem-frames and value-laden (Rittel & Webber, 1973). This becomes clear if you bring stakeholders and public servants with different expertise and knowledge together in the debate about possible solutions and approaches (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

Q-methodology is an forthcoming method for comparative policy analysis, which can disentangle the

different discourses in policy arenas and communities. The approaches, goals and research questions in Q-methodological applications differ, but also show clear similarities. In this book chapter the method state of play in comparative policy analysis is studied, and the lessons learned from these applications are reflected. On the basis of a literature review of about 60 articles and book chapters, this chapter will distinguish different dimensions on which Q-methodology applications in public policy research vary. Furthermore, it will show different conceptual ideas and approaches, which might be of interest to researchers planning a study based on Q-methodology.

#### Bibliography

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