

## Preface

This is the second book published by the Research Council of the International Sociological Association. The first was *Sociology: The State of the Art* (1982), edited by Tom Bottomore, Stefan Nowak and Magdalena Sokolowska. The initiative to present an integrated view of the work of the many ISA Research Committees was taken by the late Professor Sokolowska, who was then Chair of the Research Council. The resulting volume became the official book for the Tenth World Congress of Sociology, held in Mexico City in 1982.

The forty-two Research Committees are the backbone of the ISA. This is an empirical as well as a political statement. While the World Congress is the most important event of the ISA, it occurs only once in every four years. In the periods between World Congresses the Research Committees are the lively arenas for joint research projects, local workshops, regional symposia and international meetings, the publications of newsletters, papers and books, and the creation of innumerable informal contacts leading to new research and the consolidation of professional networks. All this activity has only kept on increasing, as has the number of Research Committees, Working Groups and Thematic Groups. Other important initiatives are the creation of the International Sociological Institute, with a Summer School and a Research Forum for the use of all the Research Committees, located at Ljubljana in Yugoslavia, and the Oñati International Institute for the Sociology of Law, located at Oñati in the Basque country in Spain.

However, the professional power of the Research Committees is not sufficiently reflected in the organizational structure of the ISA. Each Research Committee is entitled to send a delegate to the Research Council, which in turn acts as a coordinating and supportive body for the Research Committees and their interests. Little formal power is embodied in the Research Council. Of the sixteen representatives on the ISA Executive Committee, the Research Council elects only five, and the procedures for the elections of president and vice-presidents have as a consequence that the Research Council is not in a position to elect its own Chair. Proposed amendments to the Statutes in order to change this situation have been forwarded to the ISA Council.

In the Preface to the first book of the Research Council it was

stated that, 'Beginning in the early 1950s, the various research committees were among the first organizations to develop comparative research, and they remain a stimulus to the advancement of sociology in various parts of the world.' At a Research Council symposium in 1988 the Research Committees were invited to present papers on the methodology of comparative research. The time had come to review the achievements of sociology within this area and assess future directions.

As a result of the discussion, the Research Council decided that a book on comparative methodology would be valuable. Most of us have never been taught how to conduct cross-national studies. We were trained in universities where the main focus was on sociological methodologies for studies within our own culture. Much of the discussion at the Research Council symposium centred on this issue, and it seemed as though we had all been through the lonesome journey of trial and error in learning how to do cross-national research on our own.

An ideal publication would have been a comprehensive book dealing with the state of the art in comparative sociological methodology. But such a book may not yet be ready to be written. For a long time we assumed that the knowledge and skills in cross-national research would accumulate at the same speed as the increase in the number of comparative studies. Now we know this is not so. This new cognition lies in the knowledge of the limitations of comparative sociological methodology, and it is on this cognition that progress may be made. It now seems as if we are ready to move into a new stage of comparative research, where optimism has yielded the ground to realism.

This book reflects this attitude. The contributors were not asked to furnish the ordinary presentations of a successful piece of comparative research. These presentations are available elsewhere. Instead, our aim has been to make visible some of the important choices we were faced with when engaging in cross-national studies, thereby displaying pitfalls to be avoided and improving our awareness of available strategies and their limitations. We have also made an effort to emphasize and demonstrate weaknesses and strengths of using concepts, theories and methods within cross-national contexts, as opposed to what is ordinarily found within one-nation studies. Doing this has not always been an easy task. The authors have had to call on all their pedagogical skills. Although the aim of the project was neither to write a handbook showing how to do comparative research step by step, nor to do a book for those sophisticated comparativists who have been in the game for a long time, we have wanted to produce a book which at the same time

points to some of the difficulties and potentials of cross-national methodology, directs the readers to available literature on comparative research and stimulates a debate about comparative methodology that involves a wider audience of sociologists than has been the case so far.

The authors have been recruited mainly from the Research Council. On purpose, no attempt has been made to represent certain research traditions or include topics which seem to be a must in most anthologies these days. The contributions have been selected for their quality and the variety of insight they give into methodological issues of cross-national research.

My sincere gratitude goes to my colleagues who helped write the book, to the members of the Research Council who participated in the discussions and to the many members of the Research Committees who through their comparative studies have furnished us all with the wealth of data and analytical insights upon which the future of comparative sociological research will be built.

Else Øyen  
Chair of the ISA Research Council

PART I  
COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AS  
A SOCIOLOGICAL STRATEGY

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The Imperfection of Comparisons

*Else Øyen*

There is no reason to believe there exists an easy and straightforward entry into comparative social research. All the eternal and unsolved problems inherent in sociological research are unfolded when engaging in cross-national studies. None of the methodological and theoretical difficulties we have learned to live with can be ignored when we examine critically such questions as what is comparative research, how we go about doing comparative work, and how we interpret similarities and differences in countries compared. The problems are more likely to be exacerbated when another analytical level, filled with unknown variables, is added to our investigations. Yet, more cross-national studies than ever before are being carried out, and the need as well as demand for comparisons across countries is formidable.

The call for more comparative studies has its roots in very different kinds of forces. Some of these forces are located outside the arena of sociological research, and some are located inside the field of sociology. Since the former kind of forces seem to be far more powerful than the latter, questions may be raised as to whether the external forces are more instrumental in directing the development of comparative research than are the internal forces.

The major external force is, of course, the growing internationalization and the concomitant export and import of social, cultural and economic manifestations across national borders. Labour and people flow between countries in ways we have never seen before, and the establishment of international organizations having no country as their natural base increases steadily. This globalizing trend has changed our cognitive map. While some cultural differences are diminishing, others are becoming more salient. Comparative research may have to shift its emphasis from seeking uniformity among variety to studying the preservation of enclaves of uniqueness among growing homogeneity and uniformity (Sztompka, 1988: 215).

## 2 Else Øyen

The globalization of problems is another key concept, which the World Commission on Environment and Development helped put on the agenda through the Brundtland Report on *Our Common Future* (1987). A national crisis is seldom merely national any more. The air we breathe is polluted from faraway sources. An understanding of poverty in the Third World cannot be isolated from a consideration of the wealth accumulated in the rich countries. The suppression of minorities becomes public property throughout the world when caught by television. Within such a perspective the use of countries as units in comparative research may not appear to be the most fruitful approach. However, the world is divided according to these administrative units, and since much of the infrastructure available for comparative research is tied to the territories enclosed by national boundaries, it becomes seductively convincing to use such units in comparative studies.

Also, many of the external actors initiating comparisons are based within a national context and may have vested interests in studies which compare their country to other countries. So far, national research councils and funding agencies have given preference to research which includes their own country. Politicians are calling for comparisons which increase their understanding and mastery of national events, while accepting that intuitive comparisons form a basis for the major part of the decision-making. Bureaucrats make extensive use of national and international statistics for comparisons, and industry and business are constantly comparing the social context of national and foreign markets. The need for more precise, reliable comparisons has become part of a political and economic reality which is a driving force behind the demand for more cross-national comparisons, most of which apply to specific problems and are fairly limited in scope.

In a historical account of the development of comparative social research Scheuch shows how the commercial institutes for market and opinion research went into cross-national comparisons as early as in the thirties. But for a long time the spill-over effect into a comparative social science was limited. In the fifties social science institutions started forming around the polling agencies, which opened up for large international surveys and laid the foundation for the national and international data archives as we see them today. With the advancement of new technology, in particular computers, new techniques and methodologies were developed for handling the enormous masses of data, most of which were collected and processed in the industrialized countries. Much of the present comparative research has its roots in the networks of those social scientists who took over the tools of a commercial and political

enterprise and transformed them into an international exchange system of comparative knowledge. Part of the heritage also is the strong emphasis on technical issues involved in cross-national studies, while theoretical matters have been more of secondary interest (Chapter 2).

Teune elaborates on the history of comparative research and paints a fairly pessimistic picture of the contributions by the social scientists so far. The aim of cross-national research is to reduce unexplained variance and find patterns and relationships, but the variance-reducing schemes presented in the studies do not often yield the relationships which are suitable as a foundation for building theoretical explanations. Throughout the period during which we have been struggling with comparative research, one lesson learned is that whatever we do in the way of cross-national comparisons must be theoretically justified – and cutting into countries theoretically is a complex process, of the beginning of which we have only caught a glimpse. Methodologically, Teune makes as one of several points, that cross-sectional analysis, looking at countries at a single point in time, and cross-time analysis give artefactual results because of problems of aggregation and disaggregation. And after having critically examined some of the major cross-national studies, he concludes that any set of categories established will create biases in the observations. Although our sensitivity to the problems has increased, most of the problems still lie unsolved (Chapter 3).

At the same time, however, sociologists increasingly seem to be drawn towards a return to more holistic models, taking on new challenges without having fully confronted the old ones in a satisfying manner. Macro-sociological analysis used to be the focus of sociological analysis and theory. One of the arguments is that it is still within this framework that theories from the many different sub-fields of sociology can be tested, and that macro-sociology offers the best arena for sociologists to examine their skills as sociologists (Eisenstadt and Curelaru, 1977). Another argument is that cross-national research provides an especially useful method both for the further development of sociological theory, and for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from studies of single nations (Kohn, 1989b: 77). If this is so, then sociology as a science stands to gain from the extended development of cross-national research.

### **What is Comparative Social Research?**

For most sociologists the very nature of sociological research is

considered comparative, and thinking in comparative terms is inherent in sociology. All empirical observations must be related to some kind of theoretical construction, and no theoretical construction has any value unless it bears some relation to empirical observations. When sociologists choose to observe only part of the surrounding social realities the choice always represents a comparison of the selected phenomenon under observation in relation to other social phenomena, whether this choice is made explicitly or implicitly. Normal behaviour and norms cannot be studied without acknowledging deviations from the normal. Actually, no social phenomenon can be isolated and studied without comparing it to other social phenomena. Sociologists engage actively in the process of comparative work whenever concepts are chosen, operationalized or fitted into theoretical structures. Trying to understand and explain variation is a process which cannot be accomplished without previous reflections on similarities and dissimilarities underlying the variation.

The whole discussion on explicit and implicit comparisons is an integral part of a scientific world, and the discourse is particularly well developed within the philosophical and literary traditions. The debate has solid roots in social anthropology and political science, but has left as many unanswered questions there as it has in the sociological discussion on the issue, which received new and vigorous attention in the 1970s and 1980s.

One of the main questions, in the present context, is whether comparisons across national boundaries represent a new or a different set of theoretical, methodological and epistemological challenges, or whether this kind of research can be treated just as another variant of the comparative problems already embedded in sociological research. Quite another kind of question is whether doing comparative research involving two countries is any different from research involving three or more countries, and how different the countries to be compared can be allowed to be before they are no longer comparable. Answers to the latter kind of questions are usually referred to the limited theoretical context within which the variables are selected, because only within such a framework do these questions seem meaningful. But the search for answers also reaches beyond theoretical fragments and joins the eternal search for basic patterns of human behaviour which transcends all cultural influences. The only logical terminal point for such world-wide comparisons – and terminal it may be – is the discovery of all-embracing ‘social laws’ which either bend towards still higher levels of abstraction or portray fundamental humanistic behaviour in such a way that we are forced to ask whether the results should rather be interpreted as a result of basic biological needs.

Sociologists are not a very homogeneous group, and they vary in the way they relate to basic issues in sociology, as they vary in their approaches to comparative research. When going through the very extensive literature written on comparative studies, it looks as if at least four different ways of conducting cross-national studies can be identified.

One group of sociologists – let us call them the purists – stand firmly in the belief that conducting comparative research across national boundaries is no different from any other kind of sociological research. Therefore they include no special discussion on problems encountered in cross-national studies, but refer to theoretical and methodological considerations involved in doing multi-level research. At heart we are all purists.

On the other hand we find those sociologists – shall we call them the ignorants – who pursue their ideas and data across national boundaries without ever giving a thought to the possibility that such comparisons may add to the complexity in interpreting the results of the study. Such behaviour may not be as unforgivable as it sounds. Most of us have sinned in this respect, either directly in our own research, or indirectly by uncritically importing research results or theories developed in another country and implanting them into our own analysis. As a matter of fact, in our education as sociologists this is much the tradition in which we have been brought up.

The third group of sociologists, the totalists, are only too well aware of the many problems of doing cross-national research in a world of complex interdependencies. They consciously ignore the many stumbling blocks of the non-equivalence of concepts, a multitude of unknown variables interacting in an unknown context and influencing the research in question in unknown ways. And they deliberately ignore the scientific requirements regarding the testing of hypotheses in settings which do not and cannot meet the conditions for such testing. If they were to take all these unmanoeuvrable problems into consideration, the totalists would be paralysed and have to leave the field of cross-national comparisons. Instead they go ahead, opting for compromises and trying to make the tools of sociological analysis provide new insights (Øyen, 1986a; 1986b).

Then there are the comparativists who acknowledge the points of view held by the purists and the totalists, but argue that in order to advance our knowledge about cross-national research it is necessary to raise questions about the distinctive characteristics of comparative studies. Ragin, for example, states that one of the differences between the comparativists and the non-comparativists is that the



former by a conscious choice define the macro-social units as real, while the latter tend to treat these units as abstractions that need not be operationalized and made explicit. Another distinction of comparative social science is 'its use of attributes of macrosocial units in explanatory statements' in order to reach 'the twin goals of comparative social science – both to explain and to interpret macrosocial variation' (Ragin, 1987: ch. 1).

Alapuro and his colleagues distinguish between endogenous and exogenous models for comparisons. In the endogenous model both the possible causes and the possible effects are seen as located within the country being compared. The 'utilization of general concepts makes one object of study in a basic sense comparable to others' (1985: 22). In the exogenous model the countries are viewed as a system of interdependent units, and the position of a country within this larger system is considered an external factor affecting the processes under study.

Kohn identifies four kinds of cross-national research on the basis of the different *intent* of the studies. Here countries can be (1) the *object* of the study – that is, the investigator's interest lies primarily in the countries studied, (2) the *context* of the study – namely, the interest is primarily vested in testing the generality of research results concerning social phenomena in two or more countries, (3) the *unit* of analysis – where the interest is chiefly to investigate how social phenomena are systematically related to characteristics of the countries researched, and (4) *trans-national* – namely, studies that treat nations as components of a larger international system. Kohn proceeds to show how the theoretical implications of the different kinds of studies are distinguishable (1989a: 20–4).

Ragin elaborates on this classification within a two-dimensional matrix. Along one dimension is placed the number of countries included in the comparative studies. Along the other dimension is presented the nature of the explanatory statements of the studies, such as the intrinsic qualities of the countries, general features of the countries, and features of a larger unit of which the country/countries form part. Within the nine cells formed by cross-tabulating the two dimensions Ragin also places the types of comparison described by Kohn. One of the gains of the matrix is the addition of the single-country study – the assumed uninteresting case for cross-national research – and the demonstration of its usefulness when the emphasis is on explanatory statements based on characteristics of the country and the analysis is either of a more general nature or can be fitted into studies done in other countries. As a demonstration of the power of his classification Ragin places examples of different studies within the nine cells. The seemingly different studies have as a major commonality that 'characteristics

of macro-social units appear in explanatory statements in all nine types', which to Ragin is a key, unifying feature of comparative social science (1989: 65–8).

The vocabulary for distinguishing between the different kinds of comparative research is redundant and not very precise. Concepts such as cross-country, cross-national, cross-societal, cross-cultural, cross-systemic, cross-institutional, as well as trans-national, trans-societal, trans-cultural, and comparisons on the macro-level, are used both as synonymous with comparative research in general and as denoting specific kinds of comparisons, although the specificity varies from one author to another. The confusion reflects the point that national boundaries are different from ethnic, cultural and social boundaries. Within all countries, even the very old and fairly homogeneous ones, we may find several sub-societies which on some variables may show greater variation than comparisons across national boundaries can demonstrate: that is, within-variation may sometimes be greater than between-variation. Good examples may be found in the history of India (Oommen, 1989), and in recent changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where conflicts between cultural, social and national norms form the basis for the demands for changes of administrative and country borders to accommodate the different identities.

Calderon and Piscitelli stress the double-sided relationship of the Latin American region which at the same time has its own identity, different from the rest of the world, and also embraces a set of different cultural identities within the region. This leads the authors 'to presume the existence of a complex, uncomfortable and enthralling relationship between the Latin American identity and the methodological levels of analysis focusing on it' (Chapter 5). Teune shows the different implications of using nation versus country as unit of analysis for comparative studies (Chapter 3), while Scheuch points out that only in the most ideological form does the nation-state assume a sameness among its citizens (Chapter 2). Therefore, a mere cleaning up of the ambiguities built into the different concepts only meets the problem halfway, as the complexity embedded in the social realities still remain to be accounted for.

The term 'cross-country' in this volume is synonymous with 'cross-national' (notwithstanding the reservations made by Teune, as the English language does not provide an adjective for 'cross-country' studies). At the Vienna Centre, for example, the trend has moved towards the use of the term 'trans-national' research, thereby signalling that the focus now is on the macro-structures in the countries to be compared (Charvat et al., 1988).

In the following the use of the terms 'cross-cultural', 'cross-societal', 'trans-cultural' and 'trans-societal' are rather a result of

the different authors' preferences and educational tradition than being a reflection of substantive realities. The terms have much the same content and imply that 'the level of analysis is below that of the level of country. The term 'cross-historical' contains the ambiguity of pointing both to a certain methodological approach in comparative research (see Etzioni-Halevy, Chapter 7), and to the more diffuse meaning of making comparisons of social phenomena over time. The terms 'cross-institutional' and 'cross-systemic' simply mean what they signal; namely, comparisons of the same kinds of institutions or systems in different countries.

### **Theoretical Poverty of Comparative Research**

If we accept that comparative research, whether it is carried out as cross-national studies or as comparisons on a lower level, has as its major aim to verify social theories, then the attention is directed towards the present state of social theory. Nowak argues that the development of sociological theory has for a long time been neglected, and that much of what today is called sociological theory is formulated in such a way that it makes empirical verifications of hypotheses or theorems 'difficult or even impossible'. Given that Nowak is right, then the major building block for conducting comparative studies is missing. More will be gained by developing sociological theory in general, hereunder also specifying the relationship between the different levels of analysis, be the studies cross-national or comparative on a lower level. Only through such a process, says Nowak, can we begin to close the gap between what comparativists pretend to do and what they actually are doing (1989). The term 'theory' here refers to 'possibly unambiguous sets or systems of laws, or to broad lawlike generalizations, integrated on the basis of a common unifying principle, with clearly stated topological and (or) historical conditions of their validity' (Nowak, 1989: 40).

Presumably, part of the problem is that to many comparativists this very definition of a sociological theory does not constitute their point of departure, but the *intent* of their research, and conducting cross-national studies, incorporating the historical dimension, are their instruments for arriving at broad, law-like generalizations.

The chapter by Ferrari is a meticulous attempt to establish one of the basic building blocks that Nowak is calling for; namely, that of translating a concept from one cultural context into another cultural context, without distorting the content and meaning of the concept, and without losing valuable and characteristic information through the translation (Chapter 4). This is probably the area in which the social anthropologists have wrestled the longest, trying to interpret

their observations in 'native' societies within the native system of explanation and without undue interference from their own Western culture. At the same time the observers face the challenge of communicating the original and interpreted observations back to a Western framework of understanding, *and* relating the observations in a meaningful way to observations in the Western countries. Only through such a process can concepts be developed and more general theories be formed so as to explain the behaviour in the original observations as well as in the observations from the Western cultures (see, for example, Bohannan, 1963). Step by step Ferrari takes us through the deliberations sociologists of law go through when trying to arrive at meta-theoretical clarifications for the sake of comparison. As an example he uses the central concept of *law*, which spans the range between official state law and intuitive folk law. The legal systems in which the concept originates reflect not only different national cultures and local traditions, but also different kinds of power structures and doctrinal style of interpretations. Therefore, Ferrari says, law should not be defined as a static concept, but should reflect the normative content and the interaction between the social actors involved in the process of limiting the range of behaviour in a community. Although the ultimate goal has always been that of building a common and unambiguous lexicon of concepts as an instrument for comparative research, part of the sociological reorientation is to acknowledge that a concept can also be a variable among variables.

Calderon and Piscitelli give evidence of the failure of an entire theoretical tradition in sociology which was uncritically translated and exported from the 'central' countries to the 'peripheral' countries (Chapter 5). Cross-national research was revived and took a new direction when the Third World made its way on to the political agenda of the industrialized countries in the fifties and sixties. Theories of development and modernization, in sociology as well as in political science and economics, zoomed in on the 'undeveloped' countries and paved the way for an analysis coined in the terms of the Western countries. While comparative research in general may have benefited, as more refined and differential approaches to macro-societal analysis surfaced (Eisenstadt and Curelaru, 1977: ch. 2), social science in peripheral countries experienced a serious setback. In Latin America social scientists in good faith were instrumental in adapting ideas embedded in theories of development and modernization for political implementation. The analysis and the conceptual tools proved inadequate, theoretically as well as politically. As a consequence, Latin American social scientists are now very conscious of the processes involved in transforming sociological approaches and concepts generated outside the region,

even the local region, within which the research is carried out. The notion of syncretism has become a central and necessary element in revitalizing the research strategies.

The strategy for a comparative social science stretching towards a universal social science, for which Galtung is a proponent, takes as its point of departure that much of what is being presented as sociological theory might just as well be labelled story-telling or meditation, while sociologists who follow the textbook prescription for theory construction run the risk of presenting only the static reality of the past. Requirements of a good theory are not only that the theory reflects the enormous complexity of the present social reality, the course of which is constantly being changed by its own actors. It should also make possible the incorporation of the social realities of an unforeseen future, and include a meta-theory which reflects on the social and political consequences of the ideology underlying the theory (Chapter 6). The linkage to the fate of the theories of development and modernization in Latin America is evident here. No single theory can meet all these requirements, and Galtung therefore argues for working simultaneously with a multitude of theoretical approaches, none of which should ever be completely believed or disbelieved on its own merit. This is the classical ideal, forgotten in the empire-building of sociological schools. The analysis is carried into a discussion of the linkage between the micro-level and the macro-level in comparative research, although Galtung prefers the term 'space' to 'level', in order to avoid the causal explanations and reductionism inherent in the idea of lower and higher levels within a social system. People live in spaces (nature, personal, social, world), experience spaces, have images of spaces; and the spaces in their turn interact in many other ways than hierarchically ordered levels, including the level of nation. Of course, questions may be raised as to whether this reordering really escapes causality and reductionism. However, in the present context the importance of the contribution lies in the pregnant questions raised about the use of traditional concepts, models of thought and research strategies.

### **The Art of Methodological Compromises**

The question of whether cross-national research has qualities different from sociological research in general may now be repeated as we enter the discussion on the methodology of cross-national studies. Is it possible to distinguish a specific comparative methodology, other than that of adding to the complexity of the analysis as an additional level is introduced? Again, there is little consensus on the matter.

Also the issue is muddled by the fact that cross-national research becomes part of a

built-in transition from internationality to interdisciplinarity: it is simply difficult to establish acceptable comparisons between countries and cultures without bringing in broader ranges of variables than those of only one discipline. . . . We find a variety of attempts at interdisciplinary bridge-building in works of theory and methodology but only very few signs of a corresponding recognition of the need for interdisciplinarity in the actual programmes of training or research: at that level, there is much greater stress on disciplinary identities, on the demarcation of boundaries. (Rokkan, 1978: 5)

This implies that participating in cross-national research may require knowledge and the use of methodological skills which sociologists are not familiar with, and more or less have to learn as they go along.

Although Nowak (1989) and Galtung (Chapter 6) disagree on the goals and the theoretical framework for cross-national research, they join hands in defending the premise that basic rules of scientific analysis must be applied. Classical skills such as those of carefully constructing concepts and typologies, and securing ties between data and theory, as well as making use of inference, remain indisputable virtues. The studies presented by Etzioni-Halevy (Chapter 7) and Turner (Chapter 8) are good examples of this tradition.

In the study of parliamentarians, by Etzioni-Halevy, the research problem is comparative in the sense that the questions asked cannot be answered unless data from different countries are compared. The theory calls for countries which are well-established democracies with similar parliamentary systems. Thereby one level of analysis is given, and the range of countries limited. The choice of countries to be included in the study was finally determined by the fact that the researcher had easy access to data and familiarity with these two countries in question. Such compromises form part of the research process, but can at the same time yield windfall solutions, as the familiarity with a country provides additional information, increasing the value of the explanatory statements. The question of equivalence is particularly pertinent in the present project, where the comparisons focus not only on people's actual patterns of action, but also on their norms and standards, their definitions of the situation, and of their own roles. The problem becomes even more prominent where the 'something' to be compared is as elusive as semi-corruption. The choice of two countries with a very similar background may meet some of the difficulties involved in the quest for equivalence. But the researcher is thrown back into the struggles of interpretation when differences and similarities occur within the same group of interviewees (Chapter 7).

Turner uses corporation biographies in a study of mobility patterns. The project fits into a larger research scheme concerning differences in the British–American cultures, so the choice of countries is self-evident. The challenge of equivalence when comparing documents from different countries is countered through the establishment of national validation panels, a procedure well-known in social psychology but not in comparative content analysis. Two panels of judges, chosen from British and American business and industry, were presented with a questionnaire listing verbs and verb expressions identified in the biographies as describing job change. The judges were asked to give their opinion on the meaning of these expressions when used in different kinds of contexts. Practical problems made it difficult to construct the panels according to the original intentions. Content analysis can be used to make inferences about public opinion, attitudes, values or the nature of social structure, and many forms of written documents can serve as objects of such analysis. Disadvantages of the method lie in the sampling and the indirectness of the observations which assume knowledge about the translation from the observable. Advantages of the method lie in the unobtrusiveness which eliminates interaction between the investigator and the data producer, and that inferences can be made about non-observable phenomena. Turner concludes that national validation panels are a valuable instrument for reducing the impact of cultural differences in the judgement process, a method which can be further improved and made adaptable also to comparative studies in countries which do not share the same language (Chapter 8).

In a critical review of the progress of comparative research, Sztompka proposes a paradigmatic shift for cross-national studies. He argues that the models of comparative work have been outdated by the rapid changes in the social realities. ‘Galton’s problem’ (cf. the discussion by Scheuch, Chapter 2) is more problematic than ever, and the dubious logic of quasi-experimentation is even less feasible in a world which has grown into an interdependent and interlinked global system. We need more variety in our comparative approaches, and in a two-dimensional matrix Sztompka offers six such approaches, each of which requires a different methodology. If we accept that the goal for comparative inquiry is that of formulating propositions about society, then one dimension in the matrix is the focus of comparative research (respectively modifying the scope of applicability, changing the scope of objects and altering the scope of predicates). The other dimension is the direction of comparative research (seeking uniformity versus seeking uniqueness). The emphasis used to be on comparisons seeking uniformity

and attempting to establish generality of findings across national borders, in 'an attempt to imitate the logic of experiment'. Now the time has come, he says, to search for uniqueness and comparisons that point to the peculiarities of a country, to single out a certain category of people by contrasting them with other people, and to search for attitudes and beliefs that are atypical. To reach this goal a reorientation towards history and the humanities is necessary (Sztompka, 1988). The implications of such a shift also point to a revival of theories of deviation, and will certainly provoke a discussion in epistemological terms.

Bertaux has written his contribution much within the same comparative framework, although *ex post facto*, as the research was carried out before the investigators became aware of the paradigm advanced by Sztompka. With a 'wide-angle vision' the early commitment to the students' movements of the sixties was analysed in six countries, through the life stories of selected persons who were close to the movements from the beginning. One of the research questions was why these very people were to become the first activists. Life stories are in-depth accounts of personal experiences which sociologically can be used not only to study the subjective side of social life but also to understand structural relationships. The wealth of the data collected is complex and diverse, and 'it takes a sociological eye' to analyse a particular experience and to understand what is universal about it. Sociological thinking has to be present at every step of the research process, and part of the sociological imagination is to perceive processes that transcend nations and cultures. The goal is to generate hypotheses that can be exposed to the critique of the sociological community. Bertaux stresses that the process of generating hypotheses, and the process of testing them, are two processes which should not be confused. The emphasis in comparative research on the latter is killing off the sociological imagination necessary for the former (Chapter 9).

Whereas the populations studied by Bertaux were highly visible, Van Meter directs his research towards populations that are hidden or in hiding from public attention. Surveys and descending methodologies do not capture these groups, some of which are also very small. Through the snowball technique one or two persons in the hidden population are approached, and via their networks still more persons are identified. The process is repeated over and over again, until the point of saturation and the entire population is identified. This ascending methodology can be used for numerical purposes and for intensive data collection which can be linked together in a cross-classification analysis, incorporating data from various countries. Comparative studies of (for example) drug use in different major



European cities seem to yield valid results which could not have been obtained otherwise (Chapter 10).

Some will label the methods used by Bertaux and Van Meter as qualitative, although Bertaux does not adhere to the term, and Van Meter rejects the discussion about qualitative versus quantitative research as outdated and not tenable in concrete comparative research projects. Others may refer to the methods as empirically intensive.

This is a methodological discourse which has been carried over from general sociology, and at times has obscured issues about comparative methodologies as such. One of the most significant contributions to sorting out the analytical dimensions involved in using empirically intensive and empirically extensive methods in comparative studies has been done by Ragin (1987; 1989). He develops a research strategy, described as Boolean methods of qualitative comparisons, which is an attempt to bridge the gulf between the case-oriented approach and the variable-oriented approach, while incorporating the strength of both methodologies. This is not the place to develop the argument or the objections. It is more relevant to direct attention to his thorough discussion of causal complexity and the questions it raises for comparative reasoning (1987: ch. 2), and the conflicting logic underlying case-oriented comparative methodologies (1987: ch. 3).

The chapter by Lane is a demonstration of methods which can be labelled empirically extensive. Here the efforts at turning the enormous masses of data stored in the many national and international social science data archives into meaningful comparative research are presented, exemplified by the use of data archives in political sociology. The studies introduced range from comparative modelling to semi-comparative work with comparative implications. Lane examines critically advantages and disadvantages of using the archives for cross-national research, and directs our attention to the selective procedures whereby data find their way into the archives. The contents of the archives are forceful in determining the direction of comparative studies, and research on political behaviour is one of the fields which have benefited the most. In the future it is important that theoretical considerations play a larger part in influencing the composition of the data in the archives. But it is also important that a wider variety of theoretical interests be reflected in the data collected (Chapter 11).

The project presented by Andorka on time series is among those studies which would have benefited greatly, had comparable data on the use of time series been available in the national social science archives, and had they been categorized in such a way that

equivalence in time units could have been incorporated. Instead, the social indicators had to be developed through comprehensive surveys and national statistics which were not tailored to the research in question. Andorka and his colleagues ask the kind of political questions that are being asked widely after the many recent events in Eastern Europe; namely, what did a socialist model mean for the development of a country compared to a capitalist model? This kind of question can only be answered within a comparative perspective (Chapter 12). And the driving force behind the demands for such comparisons is not only researchers, but now also politicians, bureaucrats and people in general who are trying to grasp the social realities of a rapidly changing world.

### **Organizing for Comparative Research**

It can be assumed that much research, comparative or otherwise, is guided by the principles of least resistance or invitation by opportunity. One of the central research strategies, although not much discussed, seems to be the preference given to available data and methodological tools, and the leaning towards accessible networks and easy funding. Many comparative projects would never have surfaced, had they not adopted such a strategy. Organizing for comparative research, involving two or preferably more countries, and taking into account as many of the theoretical and methodological considerations mentioned above as possible in order to carry through a high-quality study, demands resources of such a magnitude in terms of money, time and personnel, that only relatively few sociologists will ever have the opportunity to control such funds. The pristine goal of sociological research as a guiding principle for our choices in cross-national research may for most of us have to stay pristine.

Another kind of barrier to a well-composed comparative investigation can be found in the social context for the project. In his review of the activities of the Vienna Centre Berting notes a development of a culture which favours a research strategy

emphasising the influence of 'traditional' and other system-specific differences, of decision-making by political and economic elites and of intended and unintended consequences of human actions upon the direction of societal development . . . the projects are lopsided in a specific way: cultural variables . . . are treated as dependent variables which can have a significance in their own right in a process of explanation. . . . [The projects] tend to neglect social phenomena which are indicative of collective protest movements and conflicts in relation to societal change, . . . and the research designs are seldom of a diachronistic type. (1988: 75–7)

Political barriers to certain research topics are not unknown, and within Unesco, for example, some countries exempt themselves from the participation in certain kinds of comparative studies. Sociology is not a globally recognized field of inquiry, and as noted earlier, comparative studies can also be used as political instruments.

So far most of the cross-national studies have been located in Western Europe and North America. This is also where we find most of the sociologists, the sociological institutions, the data banks, the agencies for funding basic and applied research, and the infrastructure for conducting social investigations. The climate for using social research in policy-making is milder here than in most other places, and we find that a discussion of comparative methodology can also be tied to questions as to what methodologies yield the best understanding of how social policies can be improved (Higgins, 1986; Lawrence, 1986).

From their strongholds social scientists from developed countries have reached into the developing countries with comparative studies. The time of the 'native' social scientists feeding their 'educated' counterpart undigested data, to be processed and analysed in a foreign context, has passed. Now there is a widespread understanding, legitimated ethically as well as methodologically, that cross-national studies profit from being conducted in close cooperation with researchers based in the respective countries, and collaborating during all the phases of the project. Familiarity with the national history and culture is now considered a prerequisite, as it provides an interpretation of the results which cannot be obtained by an outsider. Some will argue that close collaboration with a country-based social scientist is necessary merely in case-oriented comparisons where local knowledge helps tie together the intensive data in a meaningful way. Others will argue that neither can the results from the variable-oriented comparisons, based for example on data derived from national archives, be interpreted by an outsider (compare the earlier discussion of equivalence and the renewed emphasis on cross-historical approaches).

Informal and formal networks link sociologists together in groups which are used for producing comparative research. Not much is known about how these networks are formed, how they are transformed into productive units of research, what the criteria and critical mass for research production is, and who the participants are. By looking at the end result of the production, the publication of comparative studies, it becomes evident that, for example, women seem to participate less in comparative investigations than do men. Does that mean that women are less interested in cross-national studies than men, or do they not get invited to join the

networks? Have women leaned towards micro-sociological studies, or are they alienated in the male-dominated arena of statistical analysis and mathematical modelling which is growing out of the data banks? Have women oriented themselves towards research problems which do not attract sizeable funding, or do they not gain entrance into the networks which have access to the funding agencies? Or are cross-national studies simply so time- and energy-consuming that they are incompatible with the combined role of mother, wife and comparativist? Let it suffice to pose the questions.

Social scientists in the Third World have formed networks of their own, partly as a reaction to the networks of 'central' scholars, partly to stimulate social science in their own region, ask different questions, and help develop the region. In Latin America, for example, networks were formed around the non-governmental institution of CLACSO (the Latin American Council on Social Sciences). The network functions as a multi-purpose instrument, fulfilling the aims of the Council to train social scientists from the region and to encourage regional research, and as a bank of knowledge for comparative studies. The explicit ideology has been to incorporate younger scholars, avoid elitism and make information accessible throughout the entire network. Given the enormous distances and the scarcity of travel funds, a project is under way to develop electronic networking (Piscitelli, 1989).

The loose and the somewhat more formalized networks developed by the Research Committees within the ISA are another important instrument for comparative research, embedded in which is the promising potential for becoming a central vehicle for future world-embracing studies.

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