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Theoretical Implications of Comparative Survey Research: Why the Wheel of Cross-Cultural Methodology Keeps on Being Reinvented

*Erwin K. Scheuch**

Abstract: Reviewing the earlier literature on methodological issues in comparative research, the paper argues that 'in terms of methodology in abstracto and on issues of research technology, most of all that needed to be said has already been published.' Yet the actual research falls short of this available knowledge. Famous publications based on comparative research are really promulgators of research artefacts. Three goals are being emphasized: (a) to counteract the tendency to reinvent the methodological wheel; (b) to help with ex post interpretations of data from cross-national research; (c) to use the difficulties and pay-offs in comparisons for substantive insights. Thus, 'Galton's Problem' - treating countries as independent cases - forces an evaluation of the pervasiveness of diffusion vs. cultural/national identity. The low stability of many measures requires rethinking the meaning of one-point measurements. Comparative surveys are by implication cross-level research. Therefore, the use of country-names as explanans requires theoretical notions about the nation as context for actors and institutions.

The real problem is not the methodology per se, but it is methodological in its consequences: what can be done to make methodological advances and practical experiences in comparative research more cumulative? Or phrasing the question both more realistically and more depressing: how can we make knowledge in this area cumulative at all?

Some 17 and 25 years ago, respectively, two major international conferences attempted to summarize the state of the art in comparative research both with

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This paper takes off from a presentation at the President's Session, convener Melvin Kohn, during the ASA-meetings in Chicago, August 1987.

respect to historical research, Vol. 18, no. 199a - also for research technology. In 1964 at Yale the leading spirit was Sandor Szalai, and the proceedings concentrated on macrostudies such as *The World Handbook*, *The Yale Political Data Program and the Human Relations Area File* (cf. Merritt and Rokkan 1966). In general the accent was on the research philosophy, including the interrelation between research design and the objective of the comparison.

In the second of the conferences, 1972 in Budapest, many of the same researchers came together again. The main agenda was a post mortem on five large-scale comparative studies (Szalai and Petrella 1970): 'The Time Budget Project'; 'Juvenile Delinquency and Development'; 'Images of the World in the Year 2000'; the Jacobs and Jacobs study on leadership values; and the Verba and Nie Project on political participation'. All of these projects were based on survey research. This second time, basic discussions on design alternated with exchanges of management experiences in actually carrying out comparative research, and on technological devices¹.

The proceedings of both conferences have been published, and these books can still be considered as major compendia. Other creditable books have been published, such as 1984 *How to Compare Nations* by Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy, and in the same year Manfred Nießen, Jules Peschar and Chantal Kurilsky (eds.): *International Vergleichende Sozialforschung*² - both books remaining quite unknown in the USA. It is my considered judgement that for the time being, in terms of methodology in abstracto and on issues of research technology, most of all that needed to be said has already been published. As an example for the methodological refinement already reached by the late sixties, see the internationally comparative study for the WHO on the utilization of medical care facilities 1968-1969, with 48,000 interviews in 12 research sites (Kohn and White 1976, especially Chapter 3).

The problems that are encountered in practical research are not due to a lack of available methodological knowledge. In view of this appraisal of the state of the available methodological knowledge as against the state of the art in practical research, we set ourselves three modest goals:

- (a) To spread the message that methodological discussions are often reinventing what has been forgotten and influence actual research very little. Only in so far as they are included in textbook teachings do they have an imprint on a later generation of scholarship.

¹ Of course, not all of the five projects discussed had the same impact, but some became landmarks of the comparative approach. See Szalai et al. (1972); Verba and Nie (1973); Jacobs and Jacobs (1971).

² Of special importance here is the chapter by Szalai in Szalai and Petrella, op. cit., p. 49-93. A brilliant post mortem of the Jacobs and Jacobs project is Adam Przeworski and Henri Teune (1970).

³ Instructive especially for practical problems in comparative survey work. Theses are the proceedings of a Conference by the Vienna Center of UNESCO, bringing together social scientists from Eastern and Western Europe.

- (b) ^{Historical Social Research, Vol. 18 — 1993 — No. 2, 172-195.} To help with the *ex post* interpretation of data from cross-national survey research. This is especially necessary for the elementary unit of the analyses in this research: the implications of using 'country', 'nation', 'society', or 'culture' respectively'.
- (c) To use the experiences with difficulties and pay-offs in the use of cross-cultural surveys as opportunities for substantive insights.

This is an opportune time to attempt this. This does not result, however, from new basic insights in the methodology of comparative research. There are none. There are two other conditions though, which make this attempt here not only timely but urgent.

1. With a generational change among comparativists underway, there is the danger of a second case of collective amnesia in methodology. Towards the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies the methodological literature on comparativism had grown to such proportions that international institutions commissioned major bibliographies. The International Sociological Association requested Robert Marsh to prepare an overview of the literature since 1950 (1966). The International Social Science Council had asked Elina Almasy for such a bibliography limited to survey research, and subsequently the Vienna Center of UNESCO issued a contract for an update (Rokkan et al. 1969, Almasy et al. 1976). Limiting himself to English language journals only and also somewhat in the scope of subject matter, Frederick W. Frey from the MIT's Center of International Studies compiled an annotated bibliography with 1,600 individual entries (Frey et al. 1969).

Significantly, the first major undertaking in this area was missing in these sources. As early as the fifties the Division of Applied Social Science of UNESCO gave a contract to the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) to prepare a survey of journal articles on cross-cultural research between 1925 and 1955. Stuart C. Dodd and Jiri Nehnevajsa compiled 1,103 entries, and unlike Fred Frey not limiting themselves to one language⁴.

The comparativists of the late sixties and early seventies are probably largely ignored by the current younger American methodologists, as the centre of cross-cultural methodology had by then shifted to Europe (Szalai and Petrella 1977)⁵. In turn, during this Europeanisation it was largely overlooked that there had been a sudden blossoming of comparative social research immediately after 1945. A high point in this development was the 9-country study by Cantril and Buchanan (1953), and the development of standardized tests for international

⁴ This distinction and its implications were first introduced into the methodological discussion by Rokkan (1970).

⁵ This was the 'Project Demoscopes' of which a final report was submitted to UNESCO in 1956. To the best of this author's knowledge, the volume circulated only in mimeographed form (Dodd and Nehnevajsa 1956).

⁶ Two essays of that period afford an instructive overview of the issues already debated and often clarified: Wiatr (1970/71, 1971); Scheuch (1968: p. 176-209).

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surveys (such as the self-anchoring scale by Cantril, culture-free intelligence tests, and cross-culturally applicable versions of the MMPI and the n-achievement testing). As an example of a sophisticated discussion of measurement, see Cantril and Free (1962 : 4-30). A complete presentation of the issues in developing a culture-free scale can be found in Cantril (1965). Of the many areas of specialisation in which cross-cultural research at that time lead to important advances, see Glock (1954). At that time the centre of discussion was the North American continent, and a major forum for methodological contributions was the Mexico-based *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research*.

Then interest in comparative data waned in the USA in the later fifties. The *International Journal* ceased publication for lack of funds, and the *US Public Opinion Quarterly* dropped its section on World Polls. Hadley Cantril's attempt at a world-wide collection of public opinion material 1935-1946 found no successor (Cantril and Strunk 1951)⁷. All of these initiatives were largely forgotten by the mid-sixties when a new generation with different experiences dominated the methodological scene, spearheaded by Stein Rokkan and later Sandor Szalai⁸.

As this is a time of another generational shift, this paper (and its notes) are an attempt to prevent yet another instance of reinventing the wheel in cross-cultural methodology.

2. Comparative research, in so far as it meant data collection in several countries, was an expensive and administratively difficult undertaking (Sarapata 1985: 157-82). This meant that as a rule the researcher was an experienced social scientist. Nowadays, comparative data are available to the less experienced and underfunded, even to the moneyless graduate student. Two such resources will be mentioned towards the end of this paper: ISSP and the EURO-BAROMETER. Data from these sources are easily obtainable but difficult to analyse properly. Nonetheless, I hope to stimulate interest in secondary analysis with cross-cultural data. It is done with the conviction that even faulty comparative research has its merits.

⁷ The closest to this endeavour was Kurt Baschwitz's 'Poll Index project 1947-1955' for WAPOR - which remained unpublished.

⁸ The organisational nuclei had changed as well to the then active International Social Science Council (ISSC), and later to some of the newly installed Research Committees of the International Sociological Association.

Pitfalls in using country as a black box

During the first spell of popularity that comparative research enjoyed following the end of World War II, the preferred tool was the survey - if possible representative for a country. The purpose of comparisons was to demonstrate numerically a uniqueness of the countries surveyed. What accounts for the aberrant political developments of industrialised Germany and modern Japan was a repeated topic of such comparisons using nationally representative surveys⁹.

In such surveys, countries were treated as objects known in their peculiarities. Thus, in their study of 'political culture', Almond and Verba assumed they knew that properties that could be shown as being peculiar to the USA could be used to define a democratic political culture, those peculiar to Mexico as denoting an incompletely integrated system, and those specific for (Western) Germany as an indication of a non-democratic milieu (Almond and Verba 1963; see also Verba 1965). Of course, in each of the countries compared one obtained some percentage points for each response-possibility; a perfect uniqueness in responses being out of the question in survey work. Percentage point differences, in the case of Almond and Verba mostly between the marginals compared, were treated as evidence.

This logic and procedure are still quite frequent in internationally comparative surveys. Examples are the *Reader's Digest* studies on consumers in Europe, the Shell International youth studies, and in comparative surveys on youth commissioned by the Japanese Prime Minister - all rather recent and well funded projects. In comparing practices in these studies, one can see that they imply the following:

Implication no. 1: A mere aggregation of individual responses makes sense

Implication no. 2: For purposes of explanation, individual questions can be used as variables

Implication no. 3: Percentages are taken at face value, even though they may only indicate rank orders

Implication no. 4: If data from several countries are compared, they are compared as though they were regions within one country.

⁹ The attempts to explain the political developments in Japan and Germany attributed a deterministic quality to (presumably) specific and single traits of the respective countries. Thus, Ruth Benedict (1946) related the political development of Japan to socialisation practices, by which a certain code of honor is installed which then prevents the development of a democratic culture. Using additional material from survey research, Jean Stoezel later refutes this argument on empirical grounds. The more basic objection to the type of argument used by Ruth Benedict is the doubtfulness of relating political development to one factor (be it socialisation or culture) as both a necessary and a sufficient condition. However, if one were to use 'country' only as a necessary but not a sufficient condition (e. g. developments in Germany made possible by an X-tradition plus triggered by Y-circumstances) one is forced to abandon the naive use of country as a black-box cause.

It is characteristic in this use of surveys as a tool of comparisons that a country is merely used as a dummy variable for all of the individual cases collected in that area. To proceed in this way appeals to common sense, but it is objectionable in principle and will often lead to research artifacts. The Almond and Verba book on *The Civic Culture* was based on such analyses, not controlling for third factors. Undoubtedly, many statements in that text, widely used for instructional purposes, have to be included in the disturbing list of our research artefacts turned into required knowledge for students.

The most elementary precaution when using country as a dummy variable is correcting the marginals for variables that are later used as independent variables - such as the demography. Thus, in comparing Mexico with the United States by way of two-way tables - as in Almond and Verba - one should normalize through weighting operations the differences in age distribution and in occupational structure plus education, before interpreting differences in political participation as the result of differences in civic culture - or rather the verbal commitment to participation - showing that the United States is a participatory political culture, while Mexico is not.

This example was chosen with two considerations in mind: In all likelihood the differences cited by Almond and Verba for the global property 'participatory political culture' are in this particular instance real and not artefacts - but still the procedure is not adequate to prove the point. And, of principal importance, correcting marginal distributions by weighting may destroy the usefulness of having survey data from more than one country. Let us suppose that the purpose of our comparison were to demonstrate the changes in volume and style of participation as a function of high levels of education and high percentages of adults, then the differences between the United States and Mexico in these respects are just what was needed to clarify the issue¹⁰.

Before continuing with this point - that the methodological criteria in comparative work differ depending on the use that is made of the countries as contexts (see Hyman 1964: 153-88) - there are two more objections to be considered against this most naive use of cross cultural material - namely imputing observed differences by way of black-box argumentation to the countries: the stability of properties measured, and the pitfalls of the 'individualistic fallacy'.

Decades of survey research should have taught the social science community that many of the percentages reported cannot be replicated. They were the property of a moment in time only. In 1973 representative samples in the United Kingdom, the United States, and in France had been asked 'What is the most important problem facing this country today?'¹¹. This was the rank order of the three problem areas at that time:

¹⁰ A more detailed criticism of the Almond and Verba report can be found in Scheuch (1967). Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2

¹¹ The surveys were carried out by the Gallup organization. The example is taken from Douglas A. Hibbs (1985, p. 63-74).

Table 1
Rank Order of the Three Problem Areas

France	United States	United Kingdom
Domestic political	International and defence	Economic
Economic	Economic	Domestic political and social
International and defence	Domestic political and social	International and defence

The differences between countries made intuitive sense as they conformed to national stereotypes: The French are self-centered, showing little interest in the world around them; the British are mercenary; and the United States are internationally hawkish. However, in 1962 among French voters, international and defence affairs had first priority by a large margin. And a measurement in 1978 revealed the very same rank order of concern in all three countries compared.

The data from the cross-polity survey are a case in point for developing countries (Banks and Textor 1963). In a decade-long labor-of-love the authors had coded information about developing countries - much in the spirit of the *Human Relations Area File*. Significantly, they used the sub-divisions of Africa that the former colonial powers had left behind as entities in the sense of Thailand and Ceylon. Proudly they reported as proven causal nexus: former British possessions are characterised by democratic structures and independent legal systems; former French colonies are not. A few decades saw those differences fade away.

Are the Germans industrious? In a time series spanning 30 years, the result for questions referring to attitudes towards work differ by 30 percentage points (Scheuch 1988a). However, according to behavioral data, there cannot have been a major change. What measurements of attitudes showed as change was in all likelihood a mere change in the *façon de parler*. In general, we tend to overestimate the stability of measurements. Test-retest studies have demonstrated the merely approximative nature of measurements especially for attitudinal and opinion items¹². Cross-cultural surveys are especially demanding for the reliability and validity of observations. It is then a very risky undertaking, to treat individual percentage point differences between countries as evidence. Only a configuration (a '*Gestalt*') of results can be trusted.

Observation under differing conditions is the high road of social research. Sociology is an observational science in the sense of John Stuart Mill. This

¹² For a recent study, based on the German equivalent of the General Social Survey, the *Allbus*, see ZUMA-Nachrichten no. 20 (May 1987).

accepted, it is necessary to consider the central difference between observational data and data from experiments. In experiments 'third factors' intervening between the assumed dependent and independent variables are controlled *ex ante* through design. For observational data this control is largely *ex post* through appropriate statistical techniques. Data from comparative survey research are thus more difficult to analyse and interpret than experimental data.

The many meanings of comparison

The prevailing kind of comparative survey research is in practice a cross-level design with an unsatisfactory understanding of the highest of the levels. To understand this better, and to gain insight of what this means for analysis and interpretation, it is useful to recall a distinction proposed by Stein Rokkan: cross-national, cross-cultural, and cross-societal comparisons¹³.

Usually, the nation-state is the geographical frame for sampling. Subsequently, the data collected in various nation-states are used as though that would also mean that the comparisons were cross-cultural and cross-societal as well. Whether the three meanings the geographical sampling frame could have - namely, nation, culture and society - do in fact coincide is in any particular case a substantive issue.

'Juan Linz delineated eight Spains, Erik Allardt four Finlands, and Stein Rokkan as many Norways. Anyone knows that there are three Belgieums, four Italies, and five or six Frances' (Dogan and Pelassy 1984: 15). Whether the nation-state as a relatively recent form of political aggregation did in fact succeed in integrating social structures and neutralising older mediating levels differs by country and also by domain. This was controversially debated in the seventies under the umbrella of 'governability' of Western states. P. Schmitter led the partisans of corporatism - i. e. those who understood the survival of medieval structures during the process of nation building as a great advantage to a polity, and not at all as a liability as is usually argued.

In the frequent comparative surveys, including the four Scandinavian countries, the most important one is the Welfare Survey, directed by Eric Allardt - Finland is often the odd case. This proved to be true again in an investigation of the incidence of various illnesses. In particular, coronary heart disease has a much higher incidence in Finland than in neighbouring Sweden. An analysis of the survey data by sub-region, rather than only by country, showed that this high incidence was entirely due to the concentration of that ailment in the northern, much more rural half of Finland; values for the southern, more developed part - where one would otherwise expect higher incidences - were identical with rates for Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The currently accepted

¹³ The taxonomy was in part inspired by Talcott Parsons' distinction between a social system, a cultural system, and the polity.

explanation for the concentration of coronary heart diseases in rural Northern Finland is the combined effect of life under stressful conditions for farmers, and especially lumber workers, and the fantastic levels of alcohol abuse in these dismal settings. It was not 'Finland' as a nation-state, culture or society that could account for the odd values, but Finland as an administrative unit included a setting with aberrant living conditions (see also Allardt 1966).

The reverse problem, that the causative element is part of a much larger geographic context, is just as frequently overlooked. In this case the unit society, or nation-state, or culture, is incorrectly used in sampling and as a frame in analyses. Thus, in *Human Relations Area File* one speaks of 'samples' that are drawn from 'cultures'. Maybe that is permissible for some ethnographic units, but not for the file as a world-wide collection. That issue had been debated in ethnology already at the turn of the century as 'Galton's Problem'. 'Galton's Problem' is the issue whether a given culture can be thought of as 'causing' something, or whether that something is instead the result of diffusion across cultures. The issue is given the name 'Galton's problem' as it was first raised by him during a meeting of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1889. Galton, at that time already a most famous statistician, is quoted as having remarked in discussing a paper by Tylor: 'It was extremely desirable for the sake of those who may wish to study the evidence for Dr. Tylor's conclusion, that full information should be given as to the degree in which the customs of the tribes and races which are compared together are independent. It might be that some of the tribes had derived them from a common source, so that they were duplicate copies of the same original' (Tylor 1961 [1889]: 23).

The Human Relations Area File the most ambitious effort so far at comparative social research. Here, 'cultures' are treated as units in explanation - within-culture variation (as is frequent in cross-cultural comparisons) being bypassed as an irritant¹⁴.

With world-wide communication systems, unprecedented levels of international trade, and a volume of cross-border travel exceeding the level of 400 million movements per year, international diffusion is evidently a major factor in culture change¹⁵. However, while the volume may be something unique, the phenomenon is not new at all. A case in point are eating habits and presumably

¹⁴ The official presentation of the program is George P. Murdock (1949). The most important methodologist of this approach is Raoull Naroll (1961, p. 15-39; 1965, p. 428-451). A discussion of the various proposals to neutralise the effects of diffusion, and consequently being able to treat the 'cultures' as statistically independent units, can be found in Thomas Schweizer (1978 especially Ch. 5).

¹⁵ On tourism as a vehicle of international diffusion see Scheuch (1981, especially p. 1109 ff). Also Eric Cohen (1979); T. Hamer (1979); K. Hudson (1972); H. Matthews (1978); C. G. Varley (1978). A case in point for the increasing internationalisation of tourism is Western Germany. Here, the share of vacations spent abroad rose from 15 per cent in 1954, to 50 per cent in 1967, and to 69 per cent in 1987; cf. Franz Dundler (1988, Table 4).

national cuisines in Western Europe. Before a social scientist attributes the dominant position of the potato in the German cuisine to a German preference to dig deep, he should consider another causation: the combined effect of a climate disadvantageous to a great many agricultural products, and the efficiency with which authorities in an area, that was later named Prussia, could force the population to accept this then new vegetable of American Indians.

'Gallon's problem' is everywhere! In comparative work it is fraught with the danger to use a stochastic approach in selecting study areas in the whole Western world if one looks for explanations of differences in consumer styles, leisure behavior, or food preferences. Differences between e. g., Scandinavia, Germany and France in their preferences for housing and interior equipment were considerable twenty years ago, and they were usually attributed to 'culture'. Differences still exist, but the kind of changes since then have to be largely attributed to national housing policies and the different policies of the respective industries (as long as these were protected by customs barriers and administrative chicaneries). While in many respects a Western European society is emerging with a strong 'family likeness' between the countries, quite a bit of descriptive knowledge, including historical information, is required before remaining country differences can be attributed to black boxes called Spain or Britain.

Since the mid-sixties, protest movements have become a routine element in the politics of Western Europe¹⁶. There are cross-national differences and similarities but the factors explaining differences are primarily not national but cultural. Those movements have become an as yet uninstitutionalised parallel to institutionalised politics - and as such are a characteristic of Protestant Europe, and within that context weaker in Lutheran areas. Maybe that is true only as description, and to turn the descriptive correlations into an explanation is premature. Is it really something in Protestantism as a religious culture? Or is it at least in part the consequence of its younger clergy? Or is it mainly the consequence of a tension between the desire for individual moral/religious commitment, and the waning of institutionalised religion in a society with high functional differentiation? Or is it an interrelation of all those factors? All this is currently unclear. What is clear is the fact that the explanandum cuts across the administrative boundaries of nation-states. States that enclose both Protestant and Catholic territories - that is the case in West Germany - offer an opportunity for a check as to which factor is the stronger: religious culture or

¹⁶ The famous French cuisine of the late 18th century was an import from northern Italy; the Italian noodle was brought to that country by Marco Polo as an import from China. Consequently, an attempt to develop a sociology of food could not use countries of Western Europe in a naive way as a collective variable in explanation, and any sociology of food for that area would lead to grievous errors if it were to lack a historical dimension.

¹⁷ An analysis of this development - using data from five countries - will be found in Samuel H. Branes and Max Kaase (1979).

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nation-state. Both are relevant, but religious culture appears to be the much stronger one (Scheuch 1987).

While nation-states, culture, or society may be too large a unit for a causal attribution (e. g. the Finnish example) or too small (as in the case of protest movements), it may also be too weak a context to account for differences observed with individual data. True, in its most ideological form the nation-state assumes a basic sameness among its citizens. However, all industrial societies are pluralistic + and if material well-being and the political system permit this, they are so pluralistic that often within-country differences are larger than between-country differences.

Since the seventies, the High Commission for the Common Market has comparative surveys carried out in all member states several times a year, the F.UROBAROMETER¹⁸. One does observe differences in percentage distributions; some of them even remain consistent even over time. An example are levels of dissatisfaction in various countries, where satisfaction levels are consistently below average in Italy, average in West Germany, and above average in Denmark. However, variations for such attitudinal data rarely exceed 10 per cent between the countries high and low on a measurement. Obviously, when between-country variances are smaller than within-country variations, then it is quite improbable that references to countries can be understood as explanations. In such pluralistic societies, survey research can usually be treated as observation under differing conditions, and not as a test of the meanings and effects of a culture, a society or a polity.

The many difficulties, and as a consequence the many errors in an attribution when using units such as Japan, or Australia, or Hungary as black box explanation should lead us to two conclusions:

1. Very often we do not really know what we are talking about when we use nation-names.
2. One needs a great **store** of descriptive knowledge before one can use nation names as explanans in comparative work.

Nation names in global studies

In the discussion of the ecological fallacy, a distinction between aggregate and global properties of higher order units - such as regions or nation-states - gained currency (Scheuch 1969).

¹⁸ The data and machine readable code books are available to the social science community directly through the Zentralarchiv at the University of Cologne, or indirectly through data archives that are members of the International Federation of Data Archives (IFDO).

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It is possible to use aggregated properties, and that can lead to a fallacy that is specific for that mode of procedure: the 'individualistic fallacy' of incorrectly imputing to the higher order unit the aggregation of values for individuals. Using responses by the same individuals to characterise nations or cultures, and also as an explanandum, one is in danger of circular reasoning. Beyond that, many of the aspects of a nation or a culture are global properties in the sense that Lazarsfeld uses the term. By definition global properties are those characteristics of a collective that cannot be explained by the composition of the individual units¹⁹.

One influential type of comparative research can be labelled 'global studies'. This approach is characterised by using the largest number of countries possible - as is true for ethnological research for *The Human Relations Area File*, and the *Cross-Polity Survey* - treating the countries as black boxes being simultaneously congruent with societies, cultures and nations. Survey data are only part of the empirical base but, by treating a very large number of societies as global entities, it is here that the use of surveys is often improper on logical grounds.

These global studies are especially instructive for the country-as-black-box approach in comparative work.

Beginning with the *Yale Political Data Handbook*, global studies attained a certain importance, especially in political sociology (Russett et al. 1964). Even though the use of countries in the YPDH was already severely criticised in the early sixties, that argument had absolutely no effect on this project, nor on other global studies²⁰. Ted Gurr and David Singer (1972) started a 'school' relating incidences of violence - a typical aggregate property for within-nation violence but certainly not so for between-nation violence - to global properties of nations (Singer and Small 1972; Wallace and Singer 1973; Gurr 1968, 1974)²¹. More central for sociology has been the world systems approach by Immanuel Wallerstein. It became a veritable research paradigm, possibly because of its ideological appeal (Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1984; see also Bollen 1983; Haman and Carrol 1988)²². A related 'school' started by Peter Heintz

¹⁹ Apart from physical characteristics, for social characteristics that are global in nature, Robert K. Merton has given a theoretical rationale: the 'principle of emergence'. For nation-states there are hardly any attempts to specify such 'emergences'.

²⁰ Richard L. Merritt and Stein Rokkan (1966) is largely a detailed methodological critique of the black-box approach of the Global Studies as exemplified by the YPDH.

²¹ An elaborate and critical review of the Singer-Gurr school is Ekhard Zimmermann (1977).

²² The ideological commitment that in French is ironized as *tiers mondism* is quite evident in Wallerstein's follower Volker Borschier (1980); also with Christopher Chase-Dunn (1985). When critics pointed to the obvious problem of all global studies, that countries in various parts of the world are different as social entities, and that the social problems of Africa were quite unlike those of Latin America, Borschier maintained: the correlates of underdevelopment were the same the world over

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(the late President of the *Weltgesellschaft* foundation in Switzerland) understands this comparison of the largest feasible number of nation-states as an attempt to test propositions in a quasi-experimental design (Heintz 1969, 1973, 1982).

In all these cases the nations compared are treated as black boxes. In just correlating an input variable, such as foreign investment, with an output variable, such as per capita income, all structural properties of nation-states are ignored. True, by using partial regressions for the largest possible number of countries to establish relations between input and output variables of countries treated as systems, one eliminates all third factors as in an experiment. But it is just this that makes this 'largest numbers of black-box countries'-approach unsociological. If theoretically sounding terms are used, as by the Wallersteiners with their terms 'center', 'periphery', or 'dependencia' or 'world system', they are undefined and/or used metaphorically²³. Taken as an approach, global studies are probably more responsible for research artefacts than any other comparative approach.

The so-called 'world models' can be considered intellectually as a spin-off from global studies. World models that strongly influenced public discussion, such as those of the Club of Rome (important in Western Europe), Global 2000 (of primary interest in the USA), of the Bariloche model (oriented to the public of Latin America) were really designed as educational (or propaganda) tools. Their authors meant them to be self-destroying prophecies. Frightened by the picture of a future as sketched in the world model, the public would pressure for action to avoid the predicted fate. Such models are easy to design: In an equation predicting growth that includes many factors, one merely has to postulate that at least one factor will have a slower growthrate than the other factors; then that one factor will create the bottleneck causing the system to come to a grinding halt.

'To compare two events or two things is always a process of matching... No two events are all alike in everything, but we compare them in those aspects that matter for the purpose at hand. We also therefore compare things which in other aspects are not comparable', writes Karl W. Deutsch (1985: 5), one of the pioneers of comparativism in social research. From this perspective it becomes obvious how hazardous an approach the use of countries as black boxes is. Deutsch proceeds in arguing that in comparative research countries should be treated as systems with internal transactions that decline - gradually or abruptly at system boundaries - While other processes, therefore termed outer processes,

(1980: 170). For a criticism of the 'school', and an empirical refutation of the contention by Boraschier, see Carl Olivia (1987: 531); also Erich Weede (1986: 421⁴¹).

²³ Michael Hester points to this in his review (1975: 217-22). The lack of distinctiveness in using the term 'world system' is criticised by Arthur L. Stinchcombe in a review (1982: 1389-1395).

the boundaries of the system than inside of it' (ibid.). Properties of systems are not simply additive - within and/or systems the properties are reactive. This systemic character of the units compared is characteristically ignored in global studies, and global studies even fail in the first consideration quoted here by not testing the rationale for comparing properties.

Deutsch proceeds to propose three catalogues of basic functions to be used as common yardsticks in comparisons across many countries.

(a) In the *General Theory of Action*, Talcott Parsons delineates in his AGIL-Scheme four BASIC FUNCTIONS OF SYSTEMS:

- Pattern maintenance;
- Adaptation;
- Goal attainment;
- Integration.

To this Karl W. Deutsch adds - he claims 'ultimately' with the consent of Parsons, but that is here of secondary relevance only - two more basic functions:

- Goal change;
- Self-transformation (transformation in some dimensions while maintaining continuity in others - as in revolutions).

With the two additional functions, Deutsch attempts to make Parsonian functionalism more useful for analysing system changes.

(b) A set of eight POLITICAL NEEDS OF MODERN POPULATIONS - a set that comes in four pairs, one of the poles denoting tangibles, the opposite intangibles²⁴.

- Maintenance of physical equipment ... and of the authority system
- Increase of physical capital ... ethics of performance (Leistungsethik)
- Communication equipment ... readiness for communication
- Preservation of environment ... need for spontaneity

(c) On the level of STATE FUNCTIONS, Deutsch postulates seven characteristic ones, five of which are important in the present world already, two more to become decisive within the next hundred years.

- Internal order;
- International power;
- Increase wealth;
- Promote common welfare;
- Mobilisation of relevant populations;
- Adaptive learning (new);
- New initiatives (just emerging).

²⁴ The labels subsequently used in the taxonomies are in part inferred by us, as Deutsch sometimes uses sentences instead of phrases for traits. This is especially true when he incorporates elements of *Zeitgeist* discussion. Specifically for the function of the state, the responsibility for a possible mislabelling would be mine.

Several social science journals such as *Journal of World Systems Research* and *Journal of World Systems Research* specifically the one for populations and the one for the state - are obvious. The one for population, worked out jointly with Rudolf Wildenmann und Bruno Fritsch (another "*Weltgesellschaft*"-social scientist from Switzerland), is indebted to the spirit of the time (*'Zeitgeist'*), and has no rationale save its appeal to plausibility. An ad-hocishness is even more evident for the list of functions of the state. One is reminded of the twenties when lists of basic needs, or drives, or level of personality were being proposed by psychologists. However, while none of these suggestions of the twenties was empirically 'proven', they were useful milestones in making psychology more cumulative.

Thus, it might indeed be preferable to continue with Deutsch's hypothesis that these needs will be important in all industrialised countries organized as pluralistic democracies. 'Comparative research on the twenty or thirty industrial democracies in the world would tell us whether this is in fact the case or not' (Deutsch 1985: 8). Survey procedures would have an important part in the research design for such *i* project. It would still belong to the tradition of global studies, and yet avoid the black box treatment - the latter meaning by implication excluding a contribution to sociological theory.

Countries as unstable aggregates and stable configurations

When using nation-states as sampling frames, then proceeding to compare observations under differing conditions, the use of countries presents no problem of a principal nature. There is merely the practical problem whether the researcher is sufficiently well informed about the conditions in a country. However, countries are also chosen as units in comparison because one wants to relate their unique (?) configuration of properties, including global properties, to the dependent variables. In doing this, several problems occur that are frequently not seen at all.

It is usual in comparing values for some variables between several countries to take for granted what (the countries stand for. Most often this is identical to the stereotypes current in intellectual circles in one's home country. After all, everyone knows what France stands for? But does one really even in an elementary sense? The process of nation-building penetrated to with varying degrees into the social structure of current countries - as is now becoming apparent even in nation-states as classical as those of England and France. The monopolization of functions at the national level is a variable, not a defining constant of every nation-state.

The present-day nation-states in Europe and America could be understood, according to this perspective, as unique aggregates of properties which do not coincide with the domain of state. The Federal Republic may on occasions be described as 'capitalistic' as is Japan; in another perspective, however, as 'Eu-

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rope. The GDR. The GDR may as a political system regard itself as part of a socialist world, together with Tanzania and Vietnam, but it is also an industrial society and as such more dissimilar to Bulgaria than to the Federal Republic.

There exists a German culture and this does not, nor ever did, coincide with the political boundaries of any one political entity. For village life, in so far as this still exists today in central Europe, there is something like an Alpine village life in contrast to the village life of the North German lowlands. In the demography and fertility patterns the Federal Republic and the GDR are, compared with developing countries, part of an aggregate of 'old societies'.

Internationally comparative surveys among industrialised and affluent democracies already show outlines of a common civic culture. The results of the 1985 International Social Survey Programme are an example²⁵. Among a whole battery of questions relating to the role of government, it was asked:

'All systems of justice make mistakes, but which do you think is worse -
To convict an innocent person?
To let a guilty person go free?'

Table 2

	Australia	West Germany	Britain	USA	Austria	Italy
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Convict innocent	77.1	85.3	76.7	75.2	82.6	82.0
Guilty goes free	22.9	14.7	23.3	24.8	17.4	18.0

The differences cluster in two groups: an Anglo-Saxon variant of the civic culture, and a continental variation (Table 2). And between the two there is a distinctive family-likeness. For a methodologist this is a nightmarish confirmation of the fear that Galton's problem lurks everywhere. For the social scientist motivated by substantive interests it is a suggestion that Deutsch is most likely right in assuming a common culture for industrialised affluent democracies.

Sometimes differences are quite substantial, and yet they are obviously response distributions following the same pattern. To give an example from the same ISSP survey 1985:

²⁵ The ISSP is a loose federation of organisations carrying out a variant of the General Social Survey of the USA. Each year a common module of 15 minutes of questions is fielded internationally. Data and machine readable code books are available from the archive of the ISSP, the Zentralarchiv at the University of Cologne.

'It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes'.

Table 3

	Australia	West Germany	Britain	USA	Austria	Italy
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly	15.1	29.5	22.5	12.5	36.7	30.5
Agree	27.8	26.9	29.7	17.0	29.6	36.5
Neither	16.3	23.5	24.0	20.5	21.4	18.3
Disagree	24.3	10.0	17.5	30.7	7.3	12.4
Disagree strongly	16.5	10.1	6.2	19.4	4.9	2.2

Here the countries line up along a different axis than before (Table 3). Going by welfare state indicators, the correlation appears to be: the larger the public sector and the welfare state apparatus, the smaller the acceptance of income inequalities²⁶. Of course, this is merely a first diagnosis which needs to be tested for contextual effects. Historical factors need to be considered as to whether there could be a common causal agent for both variables: size of public sector and rejection of income inequality.

However, the more important lesson from both examples is: in our explanations we are here not really dealing with countries as distinct entities but with different locations as sets of conditions. Given nation-states of the 'First' and of the 'Second' World, one may safely assume that in most instances of cross-cultural surveys these countries are not the causative entities in their global or 'cultural' peculiarities. In most instances of actual survey research countries affect the explanandum as a set of conditions.

Immediately after World War II, whenever surveys showed a difference - especially among American social scientists - the usual interpretation was a reference to 'culture'²⁷. For the already mentioned aberrant political developments in Japan and Germany, 'culture' was even habitually referred to as causative. Thus, B. H. Schaffner (1948) explained the successes of Nazism in Germany with the conditioning to authoritarianism in a specific 'German' fa-

²⁶ For the methodological problems in computing an indicator for the size of the public sector and growth of governments, see Tom W. Rice (1986: 233-257). The historical dimension of differences between Western European developments is characterised in Peter Flora, Jens Alber and Jürgen Kohl (1977: 707-722); Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer (1981).

²⁷ The emphasis on 'culture' as causative for an explanandum was a characteristic, anyway, of the 'Chicago school' since Robert Park, and to a large part of American sociology.

looked for, whether there was indeed a specific German family tradition - different from bourgeois family traditions in France or England. By way of contrast, in the very same year, 1948, another research report by David Rodnik argued that German families were overly warm in their socialisation practices. On the descriptive level the contradiction between the two reports was probably due to an emphasis on different strata in German society.

In referring to whole societies, such as Poland or the Federal Republic, one is plagued by doubts that our characterisation of such whole societies lacks criteria for what is important and what is ephemeral. There is a continuity in Polish society, unaffected by the great changes in the territory of the state, even unaffected by the reduction of the Poles to the status of national minorities within the borders of other states, but what is this - partly latent - continuity? In this twentieth century, 'the Germans' were the population of an imperial domain (*Kaiserreich*) which was simultaneously conservative and yet modernising rapidly; afterwards they lived with a rather liberal republic (Weimar), and subsequently with a quite efficient form of totalitarianism. Since the Second World War the Germans exist side by side as the populations of two political systems of a totally different kind, in their respective 'Western' and 'Eastern' contexts which are relatively equally successful. What constitutes continuity in constant change? The attempted partial and ad-hoc-answer for Germany was: (a) elements of the stratification system and the work orientation, distinct features of the leadership sub-culture, and the exclusion of ideological cleavages from whole domains of life; (b) the corporatistic network of intermediation between the level of state and the private worlds (cf. Scheuch 1988b).

In the USA, Japan, and the countries of Continental Western Europe both aspects of a modernised country are apparent: social change is common and rapid but at the same time there is strong continuity as countries in comparison with one another - despite the complaints of cultural critics about universal Americanisation. This is less true for many parameters which are emphasized in the description of social systems as global collectives: the value of the GNP, living standards, distribution of income, even occupational structures and types of housing. Differences in housing are one of the most obvious distinctions between the USA, Britain, France, Germany, Denmark and Italy. However, surveys have shown that differences in housing preferences in the respective populations are much smaller by far than differences on the supply side. Primarily, these obvious differences were the consequence of a shortage of urban housing on the Continent for generations plus regulatory policies of governments. Thus, they cannot be used as expressions of popular culture - rather they are indicators of differences between economies and polities.

Differences which, toward the end of the fifties, seemed to social scientists as characteristic of countries - such as variations in the value of GNP and in

living standards - are viewed over time as quite unreliable indicators distinguishing e. g., between England and Italy. These properties are, however, of key importance to mark the position of the 'trilateral' countries (Japan, USA/Canada, Western Europe, Australia/New Zealand) vis-à-vis the entire world. The 'affluent society' can in many respects - life styles, marriage patterns, orientation towards work - be regarded as a distinct social type. Affluent society means a new priority of values, it means a shift of apprehensions from economics to events in one's private world, implies a higher degree of institutional differentiation, and, as a consequence, a greater need for integrative processes and institutions. On the basis of a more intuitive recall of survey results we feel certain that these affluent countries have a strong family likeness as social systems. Unfortunately we lack a theoretical rationale, empirically supported, for this judgement.

After decades of reading results from comparative surveys we feel encouraged to suggest that a more sociological characteristic of a society may be its mode and degree of differentiation. Central for modern societies appears to be the acceptance of sectorial autonomy, combined with domain-specific rationalities (*Eigenesetzlichkeit*). Phrased in Parsonian language this means that diffuse orientations turn into functionally specific ones. That we are identifying central and distinctive elements of societies is suggested by signs of disorientation that visitors from less differentiated societies display with this very aspect of everyday life in an economically and socially modern society. Historically and worldwide, multi-functionality of behavior and institutions has been prevalent, and a minimum of multi-functionality and functional diffuseness may be crucial for social stability. Was Durkheim right in suspecting that societies characterised by sheer mechanical solidarity were untenable in the long run? (Hence Durkheim's plea for corporatism).

A central lesson from comparative survey research

Viewed over a period of nearly three decades, there are two dominant experiences:

1. Comparisons that include both modern and developing countries produce differences that are very hard to interpret - if they make sense at all. An example: in youth surveys one observes young people in developing countries reacting with high degrees of optimism that factually are completely inappropriate - such as in India. By way of contrast, young people in Sweden or in the Netherlands exude gloom in the wake of incomparably greater opportunity. In appraisals of parent-child relations there appears to be zero correlation, if not a negative one, between differences in restrictiveness of behavior and differences in expressed evaluation. Of course, that should not be read as a 'no' to comparative survey research but it points to a need for intensive consideration of

intervening and contextual factors before differences between countries can be 'explained'. In routine research such comparisons are advisable only for the 'most different' designs in testing universals²⁸.

2. Comparisons between countries with similar levels of modernity are frustrating and stimulating at the same time: most of the time, the differences at the level of individual measurement do not account for differences at an institutional level, especially not for the behavior of formal organisation, and hardly at all for differences between polities. Hence one has to introduce substantive assumptions about system features for the polities between which comparisons are attempted. One needs theory - and usually middle-level theory - to make sense of data.

Comparative research in its very frustrations, using countries as part of reality and not mere data collection frames, can be a major stimulant for a theoretically guided description, and an empirically grounded macro-sociological theory. Two developments should help to attract researchers, especially younger ones, to such comparisons.

(a) Since the early seventies the European Community has four times a year conducted representative surveys in all of its member countries - twelve countries by now. This material of the EUROBAROMETER allows both comparisons - a time series analysis and a cross-national comparison. The demographic section permits tests as to how important the level nation is relative to other integrative institutions. It is easy to relate these survey data to masses of non-survey data produced by institutions.

(b) The 'General Social Surveys' of several countries have developed internationally comparative modules, the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme). These are the topics of international modules²⁹:

- 1985 Role of government
- 1986 Social networks and support systems
- 1987 Social stratification
- 1988 The family
- 1989 World of work

All of the participating countries are of the highly modern variety, making comparisons at the level of countries less hazardous with respect to research artefacts.

²⁸ The distinction between the two designs 'most similar systems' and 'most different systems' in using countries was proposed by Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune (1970). The most similar design is the preferred design in specifying time-space coordinates for a non-universal relationship or factor. On implications in choosing and using countries in the comparative approach, see also Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy (1984, Part 3, especially pp. 117-32). The considerations seem to be strongly related to John Stuart Mill's rules of evidence in causal attribution.

²⁹ A large number of these surveys is already available through member institutes of the International Federation of Data Organizations (IFDO) in Germany the Zentralarchiv of the University of Cologne.

Now that we are data-wich, the limiting condition in advancing knowledge is our poverty in not having a theory of society.

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