

Comparative Political Science in Germany: an outsider's view

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Zusammenfassung In diesem Beitrag werden der Hintergrund und die Entwicklung der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft in Deutschland von einer Außenperspektive behandelt. Nach einem Blick auf die Anfänge wird die Phase der Professionalisierung intensiver betrachtet. Dabei kann der deutsche oder teutonische Stil nicht als Sonderweg angesehen werden, sondern als Bestandteil einer europäischen Version von vergleichender Forschung und Lehre. Dies zeigt sich, wenn unterschiedliche Forschungsfelder und die beteiligten Forschenden diskutiert werden. Allerdings erweist sich die allgemeine Entwicklung über Zeit und Raum uneinheitlich. Näher betrachtet wird die Entwicklung von Theorien und Konzepten und gleichfalls werden methodologische Fallstricke und Widersprüche diskutiert. Die generelle Konklusion aus einer Außenperspektive bestätigt, dass Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft in Deutschland nicht nur fest in den europäischen ‚Stil‘ eingebunden ist, sondern eine wichtige, wenn nicht führende Rolle dabei spielt.

Schlüsselwörter Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft · Deutschland · Comparative Politics: Entwicklung und Themen in Deutschland · Methoden der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft · Teutonischer Stil der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft · Europäischer Stil der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft · Perspektiven der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft

Abstract In this contribution the background and development of comparative political science in Germany is described from an outsider's viewpoint. After having narrated the earlier developments, the era of professionalization is highlighted. Instead of what may have been thought to be the German — or 'Teutonic' - style cannot and should not be considered as a 'Sonderweg' but is clearly embedded in the 'European' way of doing comparative

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political research and teaching. By discussing fields of research developed and the individuals actively concerned it is shown that this is the case. However, the overall development can be seen as an uneven one in terms of loci and time. In the remainder, a number of observations are made as regards theory development, approaches and also a few methodological caveats and pitfalls are discussed. The overall conclusion from an outsider's view is that comparative political science in Germany is not only firmly embedded in the European 'style' but also fulfils an important if not a guiding role in this respect.

Keywords Comparative Political Science · Germany · Comparative politics: Development and main issues in Germany · Methods in comparative politics · Teutonic style · European style in comparative political science · Challenges and requirements in comparative politics

Introduction

In the late 1980's, two textbooks were published in Germany. One by Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (1987; 2003), and the other by Klaus von Beyme serve as a systematic overview of Comparative Political Science and can be considered as the establishment of the comparative approach as a sub-discipline of Political Science in Germany. Of course, other books had been published before that can be seen as 'comparative' and, of course, one can easily show that the 'art' of comparing existed already before the 1980's in Germany (and elsewhere in Europe; Daalder 1993: 12–15). Yet, the most striking feature of both textbooks was the idea that 'comparative politics' is to be considered a crucial part of Political Science and should be regarded as an important step forward in both teaching and doing research in (West) Germany as regards Political Science.

It should also be noted that both textbooks emphasize that Comparative Political Science should neither be considered as a method per se, *nor* should it be restricted to focus on 'government' or formal institutions of the 'state' alone (Berg-Schlosser and Müller-Rommel 1987: 10–11; von Beyme 1988: 50). Secondly, in both books it is stressed that the comparative approach is well suited to serve Political Science by developing theories and (dis) proving hypotheses. Hence, the comparative approach could further the state of the art of Political Science in Germany provided that it is theory guided and empirically founded. At the same time, it is noteworthy that these considerations on the relationship between theory and method and the role of the comparative approach were discussed across the *whole* of Europe at that time. The themes addressed in the various Political Science communities were by and large identical:

- Theory should come *before* method and not the other way around (Keman, 1993: 31–34).
- Implicit approaches should be superseded by *explicit* comparisons (Mair, 1996: 309).
- Methodology is a contested issue due to the divide between qualitative and quantitative approaches (Minkenberg and Kropp 2005: 8; Daalder 1993: 17).
- What, when and how to compare in view of established concepts and approaches to the political process (Lichbach and Zuckerman 1997; Landman 2003).

Hence, an ‘outsider’s view’ on the development of comparative Political Science *in* Germany is that it did *not* follow a ‘Sonderweg’: it was developed within the broader context of European Political Science (often within the context of the ECPR— which was founded in 1970). Additionally, it is also my view that this development was an uneven one in Germany. It depended on individuals whether or not comparative Political Science was introduced and developed at the different universities in (West) Germany.

Pioneers in this sense can be traced back to, for example, Konstanz (Lehmbruch), Heidelberg (von Beyme), Mannheim (Wildenmann and Kaase) and Berlin (Klingemann) among others. In other words: Comparative Political Science as a ‘professional’ part of Political Science experienced an uneven development within Germany. In some parts or universities it did not develop, whereas in others it did. Perhaps a sign of this uneven development is that the foundation of the *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* has only begun now. In addition, another special feature of German Political Science is and has always been that much of what is published on comparative politics is *in* German. This new journal is not an exception.¹

Bearing this in mind, I will precede as follows in this contribution: first, I shall discuss as to what extent ‘theory before method’ is (still) a major feature of the German ‘way’ of doing comparative research. This should be seen (in part) as a follow-up of the (re)emergence of Political Science in Germany after World War II. Second, I shall focus on the issue of methods in relation to research as it developed during the 1970’s and 1980’s. This will help to understand that comparative Political Science in Germany indeed ‘internationalized’ — albeit unevenly across the country and over time. This means that the universities and the concomitant feedback to professionalization of this sub-discipline took place around the turn of the last century. Third, I shall develop some ideas on the present state of affairs and the challenges ahead for comparative Political Science and thus also for this sub-discipline in Germany. My overall conclusion will be that it is now firmly established as a part of ‘normal’ Political Science in Germany — a fact that is reflected in recently published textbooks on the subject (e.g. Kropp and Minkenberg 2005; Jahn 2006; Lauth 2006).

1. Theory before Method: The Teutonic Style?

Klaus von Beyme (1980: 15) classifies the German development of comparative Political Science within the tradition of a ‘Teutonic’ vis-à-vis Anglo-Saxon, Japanese and French styles of Social Science. The major differences in comparison with the other styles are the preference to develop deductive theories, the relative separation from society (Ivory Tower syndrome), and the fragmentation of approaches (in terms of: neo-Marxism, Kritische Schule, post-behaviouralism and traditional institutionalism, i.e. Staatslehre). By and large, this development is typical for the ‘revolutionary’ era of the 1970’s, and has not been unique to German developments alone. An important consequence of the debates

¹ In 2002, I was a member of a review committee on the state of the discipline in *Lower Saxony*. What was striking was not only the differences in the overall quality of the performance, but also the reluctance of quite a few departments to go international. I view this as a partial explanation of the uneven and somewhat delayed development of comparative Political Science and the related professionalisation of the discipline in Germany.

between critical rationalists and neo-Marxists at that time, however, was the emphasis of the ‘state’ as the epi-phenomenon of a political system, on the one hand, and the debate on the role of social and economic forces in society (e.g. classes and clashes) on the other hand.

These debates, conducted throughout Europe, but particularly in (West) Germany have been conducive to comparative studies that were often innovative. For example, the research on the origins and development of European Welfare States can be seen in this light (e.g. Flora, Schmidt, Leibfried and others). The further development of consociationalism and democratic decision-making, on the one hand, and corporatism focussing on industrial relations and the role of the state, on the other hand, are other examples (Lehmbruch, Czada, Armingeon and others). Another example is the attention paid to political parties: not as organizations, but rather the patterns of interdependence of citizens’ opinions and attitudes in relation to the political process (Kaase, Klingemann, van Deth and others). A related example is the growing attention paid to the study of democratization within and outside Europe (Berg-Schlosser, Nohlen, Müller-Rommel and others). A final development that can be mentioned is the approach where “Staatstätigkeit” was related to the comparative study of various public policy sectors (Politikfelder). These ranged from environmental studies to socio-economic issues etc. (Héritier, Lehner, Scharpf and others). These examples are neither exhaustive nor unique, but they demonstrate that German comparative Political Science is indeed theory based and by and large its topical development emanates from (international) academic debates. For a long time, however, methodological concerns were hardly a topic of debate within the German Political Science community (but see: Berg-Schlosser and De Meur 1997). This explains to a large extent that indeed theory could come *before* method and *explicit* modes of comparing were not yet a normal practice in Germany.

In contrast to von Beyme, I would not call this development ‘Teutonic’ but rather label it as the *European* continental style. Similar developments can be traced in Scandinavia, France, Switzerland and the Benelux. Conceptual developments and cross-national comparisons were used to discuss socio-political change and led to a wider approach of ‘politics’, namely to view it as a ‘societal’ process. A view that differed from the US and the UK. Contextual variables were introduced and to a large extent initiated new ways of studying ‘politics’ (see: Keman 1993 and also Berg-Schlosser and Müller-Rommel (2003; Kropp and Minkenberg 2005; Schmidt 2000; Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982, Scharpf 1991; Lehner and Widmaier 1995). This development has been conducive to a more encompassing approach of political systems, their intrinsic working, and its relationship with society at large. Together with other European scholars, German comparativists emerged with their own style which was theory guided and included a conceptualization of the ‘political’ that can be characterized as a *triad*: politics – polity – policy (Cf. Keman 1997; Schmidt 1992; von Beyme 1988). Only in the 1990’s did the methodological debate also emerge in Europe. Hence, although theory may indeed come before method, it also appeared to be in need of a more sophisticated methodology to substantiate its theoretical claims empirically. This tension and the ways it was dealt with have been conducive to a varied development of comparative Political Science in Germany.

2. From Implicit to Explicit Comparisons: from Heterogeneity to Uniformity?

As is well known by the comparativists, the issue of “how, what, when to compare” became paramount as a major debate across the whole world from (1970) onwards (Holt and Turner 1970; Przeworski and Teune 1970; Lijphart 1971, 1975; and so on). The ensuing debate — which is still going on by the way (see: Jahn in this issue and for an overview Brady and Collier 2004) — led to a certain progress with regard to the development of a ‘positive’ theory (cf. Keman 2005), but also tended to overshadow substantial matters as regards inductive theory development and the use of well defined case studies. In a sense, the comparative approach to analyse political processes tended to be considered as a *method* rather than a sub-discipline *per se*. Philippe Schmitter, for example, observes:

“... that the future of comparative politics should (and hopefully will) diverge to some degree from the ‘fads and fashions’ followed in the recent years by many political scientists ...” (Schmitter 2005:1).

In his view, the “rich” past encompassing comparative (but also quite ambitious) studies of state and society tend to be forgotten and the analytical results were rather sterile and at best theory confirming (see also: Jahn in this issue). Yet, at the same time it can be concluded that this shift towards methods has been beneficial to a more systematic way of doing comparative research and meant a farewell to the impressionistic study of ‘foreign’ countries, often in isolation of each other that were published in edited volumes without a coherent framework of comparative analysis. According to Mair (1996: 310), this development led to a more *explicit* type of ‘comparative’ and meaningful research. Hence, the emerging emphasis since the 1970’s to reflect and develop a more sophisticated ‘art’ of comparing has certainly been beneficial to European comparative Political Science.²

An important part in this development has been played by both ECPR and IPSA where prominent German political scientists played a leading role. For instance, Rudolf Wildenmann (Mannheim) has been instrumental for the introduction of the *Joint Sessions of Workshops* and fostering research groups throughout the 1980’s (see: Daalder 1997: 50–52). These initiatives have certainly helped Political Science in general, but first and foremost the internationalization of comparative Political Science in Germany. Both Klaus von Beyme and Max Kaase presided over IPSA and together with Wildenmann and others — like Gerhard Lehbruch and Hans-Dieter Klingemann — have guided German Political Science into the ‘modern art’ of comparative politics and related methods. This development was not only visible in the growing attention to this sub-discipline in the text books already mentioned, but also in various series of Handbooks like the *Lexikon der Politik* (Band 2), edited by Dieter Nohlen and the *Wörterbuch der Politik*, edited by Manfred Schmidt, both from Heidelberg, as well as the influential *New Handbook of Political Science*, edited by Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Robert Goodin. In addition, and as a further indication of the growing sub-discipline of comparative political research, more German political scientists participated in comparative research groups and have published articles in international

² In fact this endeavour to reflect on methods of comparison was boosted in Germany already in 1984 when a symposium was organized by WZB to discuss comparative policy research. Actually the discussions went much further than policy analysis alone. See: Dierkes et al. 1987.

journals. From this perspective, it is obvious that comparative Political Science, seen as a *sub-discipline* that is defined by *both* its substance (the study of plurality of political systems — often countries) and its method (the systematic analysis by means of empirically founded — often statistical — methods), has been flourishing in many parts of German Political Science. From implicitly comparing, many practitioners developed into becoming *explicit* and well versed comparativists: German comparative Political Science, in short, was and is part of the mainstream developments in Political Science in Europe.

However, the question that is still begging to be answered is to what extent this has been conducive to a more uniform approach. Recall that I pointed out a certain heterogeneity in European comparative Political Science. Two dimensions should be taken into account: on the one hand, the themes and fields of research that were addressed, and on the other hand, the methods that were applied. In this respect, one can observe *divergence*: different schools of thought persisted and chose methods corresponding with their ontological and epistemological positions. Like elsewhere in Europe one can observe the tendency towards what Verba has once depicted as ‘same menu, but different tables’. Post-behavioralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism and Public Policy research entered European Political Science and also Germany. This has implied that both the various levels of analysis (micro- meso — macro) induced different techniques, data collections and led to different scopes of comparison. One only has to think back to the ‘Globus’ programme at WZB, on the one hand, and the ‘Manifesto Research Group’ (also at WZB), on the other hand. Alternatively, the Welfare State studies of Peter Flora and his students or the Corporatism school of Gerhard Lehmruch can be mentioned. More examples can be mentioned (e.g. rational institutionalism and policy analysis by Fritz Scharpf and Renate Mayntz), but the thrust of the argument remains that comparative Political Science has blossomed and has produced a large variety in terms of *what* the subject of analysis is and *how* it should be analysed. To a certain extent, so I argue, this has led to a rather high degree of variation in topics and themes studied and — more regrettable — to (almost seemingly endless) debates on methods in isolation from substantial questions. The paradoxical situation then is that the debate on methods has become more important than theory development as such (Cf. Keman 2005; Schmitter 2005)³.

In short, German comparative Political Science has matured and has also played a leading role in Europe since the late 1980’s. At the same time, heterogeneity in substance and diversity in methodology have been conducive to a certain degree of fragmentation within Germany. In part, this is due to the tendency to import US Political Science practices whereas others choose to remain within the ‘Teutonic’ tradition, in another part this is due to overemphasising methodological issues over theory. In my view, this tension may become a danger in disguise: uniformity as a result of internationalization and so-called professionalization, on the one hand, and a style of its own, on the other hand, may well blur to some extent the identity and tradition German Political Science of late.

³ This observation should not be read as if methodology and the related debate on the comparative method are unimportant. On the contrary: see Pennings et al. 2006. What is crucial, however, is that competing methods should not be discussed without referring to theoretical issues and without attempting to make an argument by using evidence or examples that prove the points made.

3. Quo Vadis: Germany and the European Style of Comparative Political Science?

It should be remembered that Political Science as an institutionalised discipline in Europe only developed after the Second World War (except for France: where Public Administration was the core activity, and Great Britain: following by and large the Normative Institutionalism of Lord Bryce and the likes). Although the motives differed to some extent, the emergence of Political Science in Europe after 1945 was considered relevant and legitimate in view of the political developments (see for example for the Netherlands: Knegtman and Keman 1997). This implied that the agenda for research was different from the Anglo-Saxon one: instead of development studies and pluralist models of democracy, European political scientists focussed on how to (re-) organise democracy and how to enhance its stability within the existing rule of law, on the one hand, and on the role of the state in society, particularly by developing a welfare society, on the other hand. In part, this was further enhanced due to the intensifying Cold War, the emergence of Christian Democracy and Social Democracy as dominant socio-political forces and the slow but inevitable Europeanisation of inter-state relations in Europe. All of these elements have in my view fostered the identity and traditions of European comparative politics.

This observation appears to be certainly true for German Political Science — a reconstructed and divided country where a new political system was developed under the aegis of occupying forces. As Daalder (1993: 23ff) argues, the research agenda was strongly directed by the experiences of the Nazis, on the one hand, and the urge to set up a new type of social science that was influenced by the Anglo-Saxon format, on the other hand (see also: Von Beyme 1988: 44–45).

The research agenda at that time (during the 1950) evidently focussed on Totalitarianism and the functional requirements of representative government (in particular: Carl J. Friedrich) and on parties, elites and electoral politics (e.g. Kirchheimer and Wildenmann). The impact of the *'émigrés'* as well as of the American support for academic exchange has implied (like elsewhere in Europe) that the modernisation and professionalisation of Political Science at large became the cornerstone of the discipline. This feature certainly was evident in comparative Political Science as of the 1970's. Yet, it was a slow development and it took some strong-minded and active political scientists to introduce 'modern' comparative politics and to transform it into an accepted part of the curriculum and of research programmes. In fact, it was not before the eighties that a higher number of (then young) comparativists began to publish internationally. Yet again, this trajectory was similar for the development in Scandinavia, the Benelux and Great Britain. All this has contributed to a European 'brand' of comparative Political Science.

At the same time the influence of Anglo-American Political Science also provoked a natural reaction against what was often felt to be too specifically 'British' or 'American' theories, typologies or models, and fostered a desire to develop alternative theories and approaches which were more in line with the understanding of one's own country or European countries altogether. This ironically enough required 'translating' their experience into Anglo-American concepts (Cf. Daalder 1993: 23). It is this generation, for example Sartori, Duverger, Rokkan and the German scholars already mentioned in this paper that brought this 'European' view to the fore. An example of this has been the development of 'consociationalism' by Lijphart, Lehmbruch, Steiner and others during the 1960's. Likewise the development and comparative research on 'corporatism'

is to be seen as an alternative to pluralism and conflict theory. Finally, gradually the study of “Europe” began to grow both from a comparative viewpoint and as an intellectual challenge. These developments have also affected the contemporary state of affairs of comparative Political Science in Germany (see also Simonis et al. in this issue) and led to new challenges and requirements.

4. Comparative Political Science in Germany: Challenges and Requirements

The comparative study of ‘Europe’ (i.e. not confined to European Integration as such) that developed over time is an example of the *variety* within comparative Political Science in Germany and elsewhere. Pioneers like Rokkan, Finer, Lijphart (although an US citizen), Budge, and many of the German political scientists already mentioned have developed ‘topological-cum-topological’ macro-models of the political processes of representative government and society in Europe. This development led to many collaborative studies on various topics and issues going beyond descriptive and country focussed comparative studies (see Dahl 1966; Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979; Castles 1982; Rose 1974; Budge et al. 1987; Laver and Budge 1992; Scharpf 1997; Wildenmann and Castles 1986; Kemazn 1993 and 1997, Lijphart 1999; Gallagher, Mair and Laver 1992). In my view, two lines of inquiry can be distinguished: one comparing nations (considered as unified systems) in terms of the “Triad: Politics – Polity – Policy” (see Section 4 of this paper); the other comparing specific clusters of interdependent actors and institutions across a (often carefully selected) number of cases to enhance theory development.

The first avenue has been mainstream practice and is best characterized as ‘cross-national’ comparative research. Whether it concerns (comparable) case studies (see: Lijphart 1975) or cross-sectional research designs, the underlying idea has been that uniformity within a nation-state can be assumed vis-à-vis the differences and similarities of other countries under review. Nettl (1968) has called this the degree of ‘stateness’ underlying much comparative analysis. As the overviews of Lauth (2006) and Berg-Schlosser and Müller-Rommel show, much research at German universities has gone down this road by focussing on (parts of) the ‘triad’. This type of research is well established by now and has a good reputation outside Germany.

The second perspective has been used to analyse concepts across political systems by focussing on its typological features *per se* and its effect-producing capacities by means of comparison. Examples of this are the meaning and existence of ‘corporatism’ (e.g. Armingeon 1994; Woldendorp 2005), the structure and working of party government (e.g. Budge and Keman 1990), the analysis of parties and party systems (Reif 1997; Pennings and Lane 1998) and analyses within the context of ‘new’ institutionalism (Czada et al. 1998). Many more examples can be put forward, but the main point I wish to make is that in essence, the institutions *within* a nation-state were compared in order to analyse the behaviour of actors (and often the combined effect on policy performance; see: Schmidt 2002; Keman 2002; Scharpf 1998).

However, the assumed unity of the state as a unit of comparison has been criticised since the nineties by methodologists like Przeworski, Ragin, Mayer and the late Stein Rokkan. Therefore, one of the challenges of comparative Political Science is to take up

the issue of controlling for case based variation across the nation-states under the review. Secondly, the selection of cases for comparative analysis requires not only the predicament of ‘most different’ or ‘similar’ research design (as introduced by Przeworski and Teune 1970), but also the development of a notion of ‘systemic’ features — that is to what extent units of analysis (e.g. party government or a policy sector) are validly represented by the units of observation and reliably measured for each polity as such (i.e. the problem of ‘equivalence’). This requirement is often not met and becomes most blatantly clear in studies that are either globally (for instance Lijphart 1999) or area focussed as in Europe-centric analyses (who knows Europe, if he only knows Europe?). In particular German political scientists, living and working on the watershed between East and West should be aware of this.

A related issue is the idea of ‘globalization and ‘transnational’ regimes (Nölke 2004). The internationalization of domestic politics and economy is a feature of the interactions between countries and is related to the emergence of regimes and institutionalized forms of cooperation and is another challenge for comparativists (see: Zürn 2000). Although this problem is not a new one and has been labelled long ago as ‘Galton’s problem’, it is nevertheless a serious problem that requires not only a methodological solution (by means of complex statistical procedures), but even more so is in need of serious conceptual discussion and elaboration in terms of comparative operationalization (see for example Schmidt 1989; Scharpf 1998, and others).

In a large part, these challenges and requirements of developing comparative Political Science are, again, *not* unique to German comparative politics. The message I wish to send out is that — given the development in Germany and its central European setting — it could (and should?) be a guiding force in this respect in Europe. In addition to the fact that theory development and methodological sophistication were useful, the development of ‘truly’ comparable data is a requirement. In this respect a lot has been done in Germany (WZB — party programs, Lüneburg — democratic institutions; Bern (sic) — party and polity; Mannheim — electoral behaviour & elections; Bremen — Welfare State Studies, etc.). In addition, the analysis of public policy performance has been widely developed in Germany, perhaps more than elsewhere. Yet, notwithstanding these efforts, the challenge remains to reflect on the (potentially) biasing effect of ‘stateness’, on the one hand, and how to include inter and transnational features in a ‘truly’ comparative research design.⁴ This “problem” is in need of serious debate and solution (see also Simonis et al., in this issue).

⁴ I forego the debate on shifting paradigms in theory development (see Jahn in this issue). However important the ‘clash’ between Rational Choice and New institutionalism may be, it is not relevant for the sub-discipline as such. Other than the debate on qualitative and quantitative methods, the meta-theoretical differences rather imply concerns about proper conceptualisation — operationalisation — observation and the problem of case selection. Hence, positive theory development is dependent on the question to what extent the results of the comparative analysis are both internally *and* externally valid. See: Janoski and Hicks 1994; Landman 2002; Pennings et al. 2006.

5. From ‘Teutonic’ to a ‘European’ Style of Comparative Political Science

Recall that the thrust of my argument so far has been that the development of comparative Political Science in Germany can be considered to be ‘European’. At the same time, it is also put forward that the European approach is more focussed on theory (in the broader sense of the word; i.e. it is not by definition or always following the strict empirical-analytical doctrine. See for this approach: King et al. 1994) and has moved from implicit to explicit modes of comparison. In addition, as is argued in Sections 4 and 5, European comparative Political Science is in need of elaborating its substance in relation to valid concepts and measurement that fit contemporary topics and terms in Political Science. In my view, the following topics need to be discussed to enhance the comparative approach within Political—Science also in Germany:

- The role of the *state* as a closed system;
- The idea of *government* as a central focus;
- The issue as regards *context* and variation;
- The development of the ‘political’ as a truly *comparable* entity.

The role of the state as an institutionalized body representing authority and legitimacy that is capable of organizing society has been contested for long. Yet, with respect to comparative politics it is worthwhile to ponder over this concept more closely (see also: Daalder, 1993; Schmitter, 2005). Whenever we refer to ‘nation’ and ‘state’ we tend to view it as an *organic* whole in which the institution may vary from state to state, but implicitly we also assume that the state is a unique form of organizing political life that dominates other organizations, is spending a large part of the national economy, provides a shared identity for its citizens, and is the final instance for the (re-) allocation of material and immaterial values in a (national) society. Apart from the fact that this idea of the state has been under siege (Held 1995; Strange 1995) it should be realized that the debate should be directed more towards the core elements that are (still) central, but also shared with other types of polities (transnational regulatory systems) and interactions with other ‘states’ and ‘regimes’. In short: to further theory within comparative Political Science these developments need be elaborated and empirically developed. A possible trajectory could well be to return to contemporary types of system’s design (Easton 1990) where *systemic* features are compared, taking into account the *contextual* variation across the cases (or: systems) under scrutiny (see for an attempt: Hix 1999; Keman 2002). These systematic features, or structuring elements of a given set of political systems can then be meaningfully compared on the basis of theory guided Research Questions (see: Jahn 2006; Keman 2005; Scharpf 1997; Ragin 2000).

A similar exercise in conceptual redefinition appears to become relevant for the notion of ‘government’. Increasingly, one notices the use of ‘governance’ as a similar but yet different concept of the executive powers within a society. This debate has been raging for more than a decade now (see for an excellent overview: van Kersbergen and van Waarden 2002). And — as is common with unfinished debates the meaning and locus of it is, as yet, undecided and sometimes confusing. Nevertheless, as with the concept of ‘stateness’, comparativists should attempt to conceptualize its meaning and ramifications for comparative research. At least two matters are in want

of elaboration: 1. *Poly-centric* governance; 2. *Multi-level* governance (see also: Marks and Hooghe 2001; Schmitter 2005). The former term indicates the diffusion of executive power over different actors across different competences that vary in their territorial aggregation (think of ‘subsidiarity’ in the EU for instance). This idea obviously feeds back into discussions on ‘regimes’ and transnational institutions that were mentioned earlier and, last but not least European studies.

The idea of multi-level governance is more accepted and applied in comparative politics (e.g. in research on Federalism, see e.g. Scharpf 1999; Braun 2000). One reason is that it nicely fits in EU-related studies. In addition, the approach is in essence of a (neo-) functionalist nature. At the same time, this concept requires a thorough re-thinking of the implication of comparative indicators for use. Simple aggregations of behaviour beyond national societies are hazardous. Since one of the implications is that different agencies and politics become interdependent, this means that empirical observations on different levels of analysis can easily become fallacious: correct inferences will depend on controlling for contextual variation and systematic differences given the multiplicity of actors involved, the rules of action that apply, and the plurality of competing centres of authority that have emerged.

Although this debate of ‘governance’ is multi-faceted and still an unfinished journey, it cannot be ignored. However, in my view it is precisely the ‘Teutonic’ heritage that could provide a fertile ground for further development. The institutional studies of German political scientists like Scharpf, Schmidt, Czada, Lehbruch etc. offer ample ground for elaboration if not a comparable advantage in comparative endeavours.

One tradition in German (and North Western European) comparative analysis to build on is the tradition to view comparative politics as part of Political Science, in particular in conceptualizing the dynamics of political systems in terms of: Politics — Polity — Policy. In essence, this “triad” (Keman 1997) allows for a process driven analysis where mixed (or: hybrid) institutional arrangements can be conceptualized and investigated. Such an endeavour avoids simple dichotomies (e.g. presidential vs. parliamentary; unitary vs. federalist; public vs. private; democracy vs. autocracy; etc.) and instead allows the specification of the organization of political life under varying circumstances: in democracies there are also non-democratic agencies, mixed economies and variations of delegation, control and accountability exist (Budge et al. 2002; Strøm et al. 2003). Again, the history of ‘stateness’, in particular in Europe, as well as the emergence of political authorities ‘beyond the state’ requires such a debate and a concomitant comparative investigation from a truly ‘systematic’ perspective.

All of this is, of course, an agenda for the present *and* the future of comparative Political Science *in and outside* of Germany. It also implies that the methodology and methods applied are in need of re-consideration and further development. If we are to re-direct our future endeavours in comparative Political Science in conceptual and theoretical terms, it goes almost without saying that also methods and data collection ought to be reflected upon. In that respect, simple dichotomies between quantitative and qualitative, on the one hand, and ideographic and nomothetic approaches, on the other hand, may well be useful starting points for discussion (see Jahn in this issue). In addition, I would like to see more focus on those methodological elements that are in direct need of discussion in order to enhance comparative methods in the future:

1. The relationship between cases and variables;
2. The inferences based on Most Similar vs. Most Different;
3. The relationship between context control and systemic analysis.

Ad 1. The well-known discussion concerns the perennial choice between many vs. few variables vis-à-vis few vs. many cases. Equally known is the related debate on variable vs. case based analysis. By now, however, new techniques have been introduced that permit alternative types of analysis (see: Ragin 1987; Berg-Schlosser and de Meur 1997; Liebertson 1994). In addition, two-step analysis and Qualitative Case Analysis make multiple causation inferences possible as well as the development of comparisons within larger collections of cases that are seemingly too different for valid modes of comparison (Ragin 2000).

Ad 2. Another doctrine in contemporary comparative methods has been and is the choice between a ‘most different’ and ‘most similar’ research design (Fauré 1994). This distinction has been quite helpful in order to draw solid conclusions and to developing parsimonious models across more cases. However, without throwing away these ‘logics’ of comparison, at the end of the day this choice is based on the assumption that the cases are *equivalent* with regard to their empirical information (Cf. van Deth 1998). This will simply not do anymore if indeed the conceptualization of political processes also takes into account new types of institutions and politics (recall our remarks with respect to the poly-centric state and multi-level governance). Data collection is an important stage in applying various ‘logics’ (see e.g. Woldenorp et al. 2000).

Ad 3. Throughout this paper I mentioned the problem of contextual control, on the one hand, and of system’s analysis, on the other hand. As is known, controlling for contextual variation is a matter of assuming that the *ceteris paribus* clause is valid. However, how much and what type of variation of course matters as regards applying statistics, but also matters as regards systematic forms of description: how much is enough, feasible and acceptable? More often than not, the assumed control of contextual variation appears to be heroic and misleading. In other instances, the case selection is too ‘closed’ or too ‘diffuse’ to allow for new insights and tends to re-generate (if not re-cycle) existing knowledge. In part, this is due to statistical restrictions and available data, and is conducive to the fallacy of having too many theories and too little data. Instead of going up the ‘ladder’ of generality (Cf. Sartori 1991) and merely aggregating data, I would like to see more attempts to develop ‘systematic’ comparable case analyses: i.e. where core elements are operationalised on a basic level and compared if, and only if, the meaning and reliability of the indicators meet the standards of concept validity and equivalent information (e.g. Pennings et al. 2006). Although there will be constraints in terms of data collection, it also opens new windows of opportunity: various elements are defined by means of their intrinsic regularities instead of their inherent differences. I concur with Schmitter (2005) and Scharpf (1997) that perhaps the quest of comparative Political Science ought to be directed at understanding *equi-finality* and the related diversity. In other words: why do different systems and core elements produce *similar* outcomes or the other way around demonstrating multiple causation? This observation dates back to John Stuart Mill and implies that multiple causation is more likely than uniform mechanisms in ‘real world’ comparisons.

All of these issues are relevant topics of debate in furthering the quality of comparative research and will help to develop ‘positive’ theory development. In a large part, discussing the logic of causal inferences, conceptual problems and variables across different cases and levels of measurement should be highlighted on the agenda every where, also in Europe and Germany. Obviously, the German community is aware of this as the *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* proves.

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