Key Issues of Comparative and Cross-National Research

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Overview

• Comparison as method
• Phases of survey research
• Identity vs. similarity
• Equivalence – basic types
• Equivalence & bias
• Types of indicators – objective & subjective
• Methods for establishing equivalence
• Conclusions & impact on EYOUPART-project
Comparison as method

Different types of studies
* type depends on purpose of the study:
  - level-oriented-studies (difference-oriented)
  - structure-oriented-studies

* different levels of comparability are demanded according to different types of studies

Phases of survey research

All phases of survey research can be affected by methodological problems and endanger comparability:

1. Conceptualisation & theories
2. Research design
3. Realization (questionnaire & translation, sampling, data collection)
4. Data analysis & interpretation
5. Documentation
Identity vs. similarity
(van Deth 1998)

Question of identity vs. similarity:

- comparable in which respect
- equivalence as basic concept in cross-cultural research
- various definitions of equivalence and types of equivalence

Examples in terms of indicators, translation, formulation of questions

Equivalence - basic types
(johnson 1998)

- **Interpretative** (e.g. conceptual equivalence)
  
  “... primarily concerned with similarities in how abstract, or latent, concepts are interpreted across cultures”
  
  “... emphasis on equivalence of meaning”

- **Procedural** (e.g. metric equivalence, measurement unit equivalence)
  
  “... concerned with the measures and procedures used to make cross-cultural comparisons.”
**Equivalence & bias**  
(van de Vijver/Leung 1997)

Linking two important concepts:

**Bias**: presence of factors reducing or eliminating comparability  
**Equivalence**: refers to levels and forms of comparability between different cultural groups/nations

Different sources of bias influence different forms and levels of equivalence. Necessary to pay attention to possible bias in every phase of the empirical research.

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**Different indicators**

Different types of indicators:

**Subjective**: values, attitudes, behaviour  
**Objective**: demographic questions

- comparability has to be established & tested for both types

Harmonising demographic indicators:
- CASMIN – Brauns/Scherer 2000: education  
- ISCO-88: occupation and social structure  
- ICO - ILO 1990: occupation  
- EUROSTAT; ESOMAR
Methods for establishing equivalence

According to phases of survey research:

1. Conceptualization & theories
2. Research design
3. Realization:
   - development of questionnaire: Janet Harkness, Jan van Deth, Peter Mohler
   - translation: Janet Harkness
   - sampling: DJI/SORA
4. Data analysis & interpretation:
   Fons van de Vijver
5. Documentation: Peter Mohler

Conclusions & impact

• equivalence has to be established, cannot be simply assumed
• which level of comparability should be assumed?
  ✤ level- or structure-oriented?
  ✤ higher or lower level of equivalence?
• in quantitative part – focus mainly on equivalence of measures
• in qualitative part – focus mainly on equivalence of interpretations and concepts