International Comparative Longitudinal Research: Concepts, Methods, Research Projects, and Results

Lectures, Trento University
8 March – 2 April 2010

Time schedule

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Program and reading list

1. Overview of the program

The increasing availability of life history and panel studies for many countries, provides the extraordinary opportunity for more explicit cross-national life course analysis in order: (1) to establish the generality of findings about the life course found in one particular society and (2) to study the specific impact of variations in institutional settings and social structures, historically developed and country-specific, on specific phases of the life course or the life course as a whole.

Cross-national life course studies can greatly extend the scope of sociological knowledge by answering the question of whether a specific life course mechanism established in one country also applies outside the particular context of this country. They also tend to deepen our understanding of cross-national differences when we give a convincing explanation of the impact of institutional and social structural conditions on the life course in various nations. Thus, cross-national life course research helps us escape cultural one-sidedness or ethnocentrism, because we as life course researchers often wear cultural blinders of some sort that are connected to the society in which we are socialized.

The lectures of this program focus on the value of quantitative cross-national research on the life course and address some of its limitations. We will discuss that research based on longitudinal data from diverse countries provides a promising way for generating, testing and further developing causal theory. This is the case because quantitative longitudinal data
provide a much better handle for *internal analysis* - the *analysis of variations within each country* in a cross-national study. The analysis of cross-national studies of the life course is also made possible by statistical methods such as event history techniques or panel analysis which stress the sensitivity to time as well as place and offer new opportunities for causal analysis.

Since life course research is closely connected with methodological innovations in longitudinal research, first the strength of longitudinal methods is compared to cross-sectional analysis in doing cross-national research. Using selected research examples, we then show how the generality of life course mechanisms can be established in cross-national research.

Based on five projects, the advantages and limitations of the cross-national comparative approach will be then be demonstrated. The six lectures are structured as follows:

- Theory and conceptions of cross-national comparative research
- Causal modelling and observation plans
- Causal inference and statistical models in modern social sciences
- Modelling interdependent processes with event history data
- Example 1: Why do cohabiting couples marry? An example of a causal event history approach to interdependent systems
- Example 2: The diffusion of cohabitation among young women in Europe. A micro-level diffusion model
- Example 3: Finding a partner in the life course: The educational system as a marriage market
- Example 4: What is globalization and how can we measure it?
- Example 5: The impact of globalization on life courses in modern societies

2. Reading list

*Theory, Concepts and Methods of Comparative Life Course Research (lecture 1)*


*Example 1: Why do cohabiting couples marry? An example of a causal event history approach to interdependent systems (lecture 2)*
Example 2: The diffusion of cohabitation among young women in Europe. A micro-level diffusion model (lecture 3)


Example 3: Finding a partner in the life course: The educational system as a marriage market (lecture 4)


Example 4: What is globalization and how can we measure it? (lecture 5)


**Example 5: The impact of globalization on life courses in modern societies (lecture 6)**


