

Helsinki, ESF workshop (26-27 January, 2012)

## **Challenges in Comparative Higher Education Research - Comparing Higher Education Systems, Organisations and Individual Academic Behaviour**

DAY 1, Jan 26 2012

### **1. Lecture: prof. Jussi Valimaa - Challenges in the theoretical development of comparative HE**

#### **Comparative studies contributes to HE studies**

- Clark (1983) - triangle of coordination
- historical comparative studies: different systems of HE (Humboldtian, Napoleonic, Anglo-American)
- Rothblatt and Wittrock - starting point for reflection! similarities and differences
- involves a direct comparison of at least two countries (Bereday, 1957)
- debate in 1996 - debate on comparative studies and two traditions on how we should do comparative studies:
  - 1. looking for causal explanations (),
  - 2. need to describe in comparative deep way the history and traditions of the theme/HE system (rooted in humanist, often qualitative tradition of western science with the interest of knowledge focusing on time, space and the context)
  - basic tension:
    - Goedegebuure and van Vught (1996) - causal explanations are the highest goal for comparative and other social research - if no theoretical framework is available, causal explanations can not be provided!
    - Maurice Kogan (1996) - it is wrong to assume that without hypothesizing there is no theorising; there is no need to direct our research on the basis of pre-structured hypotheses
    - instead of testing hypotheses - thematic comparisons the use of comparative studies of two or more countries, the distinctiveness or similarity of whose policy outcomes is highlighted by the similarities or differences in other respect
- a method is not a solution, it is a philosophical solution (What is a fact? What is knowledge?) - it gives criteria for gathering data and tells how to do it
- Meta hodos...along the way

#### **Types of Comparative Studies in HE:**

(Kogan, 1996)

1. single country studies
2. juxtapositions
3. thematic comparisons
4. causal explanations

#### **On the social dynamics of HE systems:**

- remarkable similarities
- conceptual and theoretical unity
- same global topics

- different mission/goals, structures, external society
- How does a HE system work?
- What purpose does HE aim to serve?

### **What influences the social dynamic of HE systems?**

1. size of the national HE system (and size of language area)
  2. structure of the state (federal/nation state)
  3. power relations of actors (finances, trade unions, student organisations / policy field)
  4. traditions (nation building/social structure/reproduction/colonial heritage - what is the purpose of HE?)
  5. geographical environment and climate (north/south; flat lands vs. mountains; weather/climate is a cultural and social category!)
- historical models of HE are academic constructions

### **Great Challenge: How to make a knowledge of what we see and feel?**

Preporuke za čitanje:

1. [Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences \(Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics\)](#) by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (10 Feb 2003)
2. [Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge](#) by Karin Knorr Knorr (4 Jun 1999)
3. Jeff Jonson (Handbook of Qualitative Analysis) chapter-in depth analysis

### **2nd Lecture: Ulrich Teichler**

- focus on conceptual and operative problems in comparative studies in HE
- knowledge society - a nervous concept
- horizontal mobility - learning from contrasts! you are getting exposed to knowledge about something else, something different - you can not return to primitive, normal way of living after that - that knowledge stays forever
- simple practical comparative activity has an effect of permanent destruction
- **one's intellectual village is not a universe!**
- start learning from the contrast and exposition to different experiences - doesn't mean you understand the differences, but you simple can not get back after being exposed to differences and variations different from your intellectual village
- market / state / academic oligarchy (Burton Clark and three concepts/3 power lines)
- Martin Trow - PROČITATI/web check (era of elite education/mass education/universal education)
  - HE research usually have wrong references upon his work!
- understanding functional equivalence
- researchers are usually missionaries of their own experiences, from their own countries making their intellectual village the universal one, proposing their own national models ad universal
- "home country ignorant missionary" - tries to avoid this concept in the projects he is running/ participating in
- to be challenged in previous convictions, and assumptions (better life if shaken in conviction, instead of going around and preaching only about your own convictions)
- majority of scholars try to collect information by creating high likelihood for approving their own convictions!

- if you go into the comparative research you must like to improve your knowledge by surprises, by being shaken, by acknowledging differences, by believe in variety of ways, thoughts - be happy to learn something new:)
- from his point of view comparative study is already when you collect the available knowledge, published something in your own language, for the audience from your country appointing them the differences on various element considering national HE system
- comparative studies dramatically extend the knowledge on the subject
- world of comparative projects is full of drama:)
- great start for comparative research: people addictive for opening the eyes for diversity; challenge: competitive elements, misunderstanding, miss-colaboration, communication in an environment full of traps:)
- you research and explore phenomena in areas you were ignorant before -that is the challenge of science and scientists/HE research
- what kind of knowledge would be the more salient one for explaining/understanding the phenomena - you need some kind of simplicity for broader exploring, but minimum explaining

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### **The system level - important/crucial elements (Emanuela Reale)**

- research design
- concept and theories
- methodological problems (recognize limitations)
- data issues
- country specificity, filed/sector/discipline specificity
- research and research team dynamics

### **prof. Jussi Valimaa**

How does your system of education work?  
 What purpose does HE aim to serve?  
 what are the intentions of legislators?  
 sources of legitimacy  
 HE ideology?

In relation to:

1. the size of the national HE system
2. the structure of the state
3. power relations of the actors
4. traditions
5. geographical environment and climate

### **Small groups:**

#### **Gaëlle presentation:**

- US (California) - Indonesia - France (student experience)
- rational for country elections: contrast/different societies
- link of students identity with admission (selection) process to the HE system
- stimulating process
- inductive approach
- interviewing students

- exploring students' experiences, what was important to them? their identities
- "if you do not start with the field work, you just miss it all"
- collecting data, giving meaning to the data
- scientific implications vs. practical implications (for university leaders, or policy makers) vs. policy implications
- providing new knowledge
- link with HE research and policy field
- transmission of knowledge to policy makers - very limited way of knowledge transmission
- how HE can enrich the 'ideal society'
- not policy driven research in starting position
- massification lead to a diversification, to different stakeholders looking up t university and expecting different inputs
- theory of function of the modern university? - it has been addressed from the organisational perspective - they just give the answer on how should universities be organised? they do not discuss the importance of HE, the role of HEI in the society
- university - institution or organisation?
- functional perspective is needed - universities try to meet various stakeholders' expectations
- historical perspective - Parson (60s and 70s) (pročitati)
- what differences are discovered under the same element of mission/construction?

### **Filipa presentation:**

- knowledge studies
- discourse analysis and social network analysis
- how does knowledge merge toward emerging and absence knowledge?
- curriculum analysis and policy - power relation - which knowledge is being taught?
- how have universities contributed to knowledge transmission over time (to knowledge emergence and absence)
- why is some knowledge more present in some universities and not in some others?
- benchmarking and 'best practices' driven out of comparisons - usually misused
- 'knowledge based policy' - what is behind? how HE researchers contribute to it?
- how knowledge is translated into curricula?
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### **Challenges:**

- criteria to choose universities?
- criteria to choose actors?
- rationals?
- social function as a criteria?

### **Ivar Bleiklie - Comparing organisations**

What implications do conceptualizations in projects have on your research projects?

### **Open questions:**

- What is the rationale for comparative research in HE? / what are the rationales...?
- Are we only doing it because money is available?
- Lost between a lack of information and extreme complexity? - surviving strategies in the final stage of projects
- How to take history into account to understand path dependencies?

DAY 2 - Jan 27, 2012

prof. Ulrich Teichler

## **The Daily Life of Comparative Higher Education Research: Experiences from Six Surveys on the Academic Profession and UNiversity Graduates**

### **5 main points...**

1. The world is more complex - we need more complex mindset
2. Richness of information which can be really overwhelming
3. You need a (survival) strategy to deal with the overload of information (to survive the complexity of research)
4. All the problems which we have in research are magnified in collaborative international research (international comparative research is full of drama:)
5. In comparative research you are full of value judgment

- intentionally accepted limitations on scope, methods, resources...
- heterogeneity of researchers' motivation, interest, expertise, experiences, lifestyles...you can not overcome this heterogeneity
- comparative enlightenment
- making friends (and family:)
- creating necessity for collaborative activities between members, as well as creating enough pen space for researchers to focus on their areas of interest
- international comparative research is more a mindset than a group of methods

Theoretical perspective prior entering international collaborative project: What do we know about the XY subject before we enter this crazy dramatical experience? :) Later on make a connection - Are we on the same level of knowledge? - this is what is important!!!

### **Working groups:**

- what is the main issue of logic of the comparison?
- highlights on the logic of comparison

sarah:

- Science Europe - nova organizacija, počeli raditi na uspostavljanju, vjerovatno će zadržati 20ak ljudi is ESFa, za sada je jedno 7/0ak ljudi dobilo otkaz, ocekuje se do kraja godine da ce otpustiti jos 30 ljudi
- ideja je nove organizacije raditi forward look...što bi se trebalo istražovati i financirati? a nacionalne agencije i fondacije bi trebale imati dominantnu ulogu u financiranju