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## Internationally comparative research in Europe: the underutilized resource

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*Suggested Citation:* Berthoin Antal, Ariane; Dierkes, Meinolf (1992) : Internationally comparative research in Europe: the underutilized resource, In: Meinolf Dierkes, Bernd Biervert (Ed.): European social science in transition: assessment and outlook, ISBN 0-8133-1629-4, Campus, Frankfurt/M., pp. 585-610

This Version is available at:

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# Internationally Comparative Research in Europe: The Underutilized Resource

*Ariane Berthoin Antal and Meinolf Dierkes*

Despite a long tradition of internationally comparative research (Deutsch 1987), systematic comparative approaches in sociology, economics, and political science did not emerge until the second half of this century.<sup>1</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, comparative social science witnessed an increase of a hitherto unparalleled dimension. Institutions, groups and individuals in various socioeconomic, political, or cultural settings were studied, and phenomena appearing in different nations or regions were compared. Driven by high scientific and political expectations, this expansion subsided in the 1970s, when weaknesses became visible, when funds became scarcer and when the difficulties inherent in launching and maintaining international activities became more apparent.<sup>2</sup>

Developments in both the sociopolitical environment and the scientific community in the immediate postwar period contributed to the increase in internationally comparative research. On the one hand, as contemporary observers noted, it could be seen as a response to "the

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- 1 A primary resource for this chapter was the systematic review of substantive trends, theoretical developments, methodological issues, and organizational considerations in internationally comparative policy research conducted by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung and Stanford University, the results of which were published in Dierkes, Weiler and Berthoin Antal 1987.
  - 2 For a blunt expert review of the difficulties in launching international efforts, see Rokkan 1987a, 3-8. He observed, "There are certainly many signs of increasing internationalization at the level of theory, in the accelerated spread of new methodologies. But the great bulk of the research projects are still local and national in orientation. The explanation is simple: it is easier to make the grade in the disciplines that way and the research councils and the other funding agencies tend to be reluctant to support studies beyond the domain they know best, their own territory" (p. 4).

accelerated interdependence of the world arena, an interdependence that was shockingly dramatized by World War II, by the bipolarized tensions between the communist and non-communist worlds, and by the anti-colonialist emergence of new nation states in Africa and Asia" (Lasswell 1968, 3). On the other hand, the enhanced analytical self-consciousness of the social science community, notably in North America and Europe, and the resulting appreciation of the analytical potential of more systematic comparisons across different social and political systems were important factors (Rokkan 1968; Przeworski and Teune 1970; Niessen and Peschar 1982). "Among the principal intellectual influences which fed into it [the development of cross-national research] are: 1. the growing body of data on non-western political systems, 2. the introduction into foreign political studies of concepts and methods that had emerged in research on American political processes, 3. anthropological, psychological, and psychoanalytical theories of culture and personality, 4. the concepts and insights of historical sociology and sociological theory" (Almond 1968, 333).

This significant expansion of internationally comparative research after World War II, however, is mainly characteristic for the period until the mid-seventies. Since then, relative stagnation can be observed. This is due partially to changes in the priorities of the funding agencies that supported the earlier post-World War II expansion. It coincided with critical assessments of inherent weaknesses in the research performed thus far, its fragmentation, and its lack of integration into overall theoretical concepts. As Deutsch (1987, 12) observed on the basis of his review and assessment of the field: "In sum, we now have a multitude of data with many middle-range theories, but they are sectoral and some sectors are missing entirely. Moreover, the entire information is out of context, we have no common ground for most of the middle-range theories and no common context for much of the data."

When the demand for more integrated social science theory is high and rapid processes of sociocultural, economic, and political change, as well as closer integration of regions and institutions require a better understanding of each other, when learning from experiences in different cultures for the benefit of political and other decision-makers is called for, systematic, internationally comparative research can play an important role. Key questions for a review process exploring the achievements

of the social sciences in Europe and future opportunities, therefore, are the extent to which social science research in and on Europe has been involved in internationally comparative research, benefited from it, and may intensify internationally comparative research endeavors in the future.

## The Rationale

Researchers have been motivated to use internationally comparative strategies in their inquiries for reasons that fall into two broad categories: the development of theory and the search for policy relevant information.

### *Comparative Research as a Source for Policy Information*

A central motivation stimulating comparative research is to contribute to the development of a relevant knowledge base for policy-making. This was particularly true during the post-World War II boom, when information about foreign countries was sought for foreign policy purposes as well as for domestic policy. A noteworthy result of this impetus was pointed out in the mid-1960s: "[O]ur enemies--if one wants to generalize Loewenstein's term and apply it to the current political situation--are at least quantitatively better researched than are the systems of 'our friends'" (von Beyme 1966, 65, our translation).<sup>3</sup> The most important stimuli behind internationally comparative research oriented to policy-making in recent decades have shifted somewhat to include the increasing recognition of common problems in different countries or regions, the emergence of transnational issues, and the growth of international organizations. Not only have the motivations for conducting policy-oriented cross-cultural research shifted somewhat; the field reflects a gradual learning about the actual production and transfer of policy-relevant knowledge.

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3 The reference to Loewenstein here is Loewenstein (1944). A more recent review of the field comes to similar conclusions: Schweigler (1977).

Comparative research has helped fill important gaps in knowledge about how institutions or groups in other countries or regions deal with similar situations and about the background and effects of alternative strategies for solving common problems (or avoiding their emergence in the first place). Over time, structured comparison has provided a framework for determining which aspects of a situation are due to unique circumstances and which are more generally applicable--and therefore possibly appropriate to consider transferring to other contexts. Internationally comparative studies can help locate those variables amenable to planned change by policy-making agencies (Berting et al. 1979, 161) as well as those beyond the control of the policy maker. Such research can help specify the conditions under which one country can learn from another. In short, comparison can put our judgments about policy processes and outcomes into a broader and more refined perspective. Identifying the differences among various national approaches to a given policy problem can help specify the structural, institutional, and cultural constraints of public policy. An awareness of alternatives challenges the political and cultural assumptions on which a nation's policies are based. It brings to light underlying, often unquestioned premises and thereby helps "escape ethnocentrism" (Dogan and Pelassy 1984, 5).

A valuable observation made by researchers conducting comparative investigations is that they have learned as much, if not more, about their own country, region, or institution by studying those in other sociopolitical and economic contexts (Vogel 1987, 153-157). Not only does the internationally comparative approach enable them to identify new policy options in other settings, but it also helps them discover latent policy constraints and opportunities within their cultural system.

Another related reason for conducting internationally comparative research stems from the increasing interdependence that characterizes the world today. Problems, policy, and issues cross borders, and the policies of one country or region may strongly affect citizens or organizations in others. In this situation, we need to know how actors in other settings deal with problems, not only to learn how we might be able to deal with them ourselves, but also to estimate what kind of impact their problem-solving strategies might have on our own situation. The attempts by international and transnational organizations--such as the European Community--to harmonize policies or establish common standards in dif-

ferent policy areas has motivated research on the various experiences local organizations, national agencies, or regional bodies have had in addressing common problems.

### *Enhancing Social Science Theory*

Unlike their colleagues in the natural sciences, social scientists can rarely use laboratory experiments to test their hypotheses. Because one of the central goals of social science research is "to develop concepts and generalizations at a level between what is true of all societies and what is true of one society at one point in time and space" (Bendix 1963, 532), it is essential to find an equivalent approach. Such a close approximation to experimentation is the observation and comparison of actors and processes within their "natural environment" in different cultural settings (Lisle 1987, 475).

Researchers seeking to contribute to theory building are motivated to explore experiences in other countries, to discover general patterns and to identify and understand exceptions. The fact that too little internationally comparative research was theoretically guided in the early postwar period was bitterly criticized by Macridis (1955, 7-12), who observed that the field at that time was "essentially non-comparative . . . essentially descriptive . . . essentially parochial . . . essentially static [and] essentially monographic." Although there is still a gap between the theory and practice of theory building, the internationally comparative approach in principle provides researchers with an otherwise unobtainable basis for developing and enriching theoretical constructs. Reviews of literature to date do show improvements in the state of the art and illustrate how some researchers use such research "to reveal the insufficiency and/or inexactitude of hypotheses developed in strictly national contexts" and to "introduce new conditions which specify the validity of earlier hypotheses" (Knoepfel et al. 1987, 180, see also Biervert 1975). It defines the limits of generalization by specifying the conditions under which hypotheses are valid. This task has been approached from two angles: (1) testing macro hypotheses concerning the interrelations of structural elements of total systems and (2) conducting micro replications in other national and cultural settings to test a proposition already

validated in one setting (Rokkan 1966, 19-20). By observing the emergence of issues and institutions in the social policy of different countries, for example, researchers have critically examined convergence, diffusion, and modernization theories. Although definitive theories to explain and predict these phenomena are not yet available, the gradual cumulation of findings in different policy sectors has contributed to refining our understanding of the possibilities and limitations of these constructs.

*Seeking Synergy: Theoretically Grounded Internationally Comparative Policy Research*

The pursuit of the two goals of research, the advancement of knowledge and the betterment of human well-being, is often conceived of as representing very distinct tasks. Past experience has shown how difficult it is to achieve both of these goals independently as well as jointly in internationally comparative research. One of the main criticisms is that the search for policy relevance has been at the expense of theoretical rigor (Feick and Jann 1989). Of equal concern is the difficulty encountered by social scientists in delivering timely advice, because the object of their research is a "rapidly moving target" (Przeworski 1987, 32).

Part of the reason for these difficulties lies in the exaggerated expectations placed on such research as well as in simplistic, mechanistic conceptions of the application of knowledge. Part of the reason lies also in the conditions under which internationally comparative research has been conducted. Only with improvements in the theory-building capacity of the scientific community and in the understanding of learning processes in decision making can progress in linking these two goals be achieved. For example, responsibility for the two research goals has to a large extent been separated, as is reflected in institutional arrangements and structures in the research community and publication outlets. A growing number of experts agrees, however, that "the second goal, which is what policy studies are about, cannot be achieved unless those studies are founded on a firm basis of scholarship and knowledge about mankind and society" (Lisle 1987, 473). Internationally comparative policy research can therefore be seen as shaped by a double objective: academic inquiry and the generation of policy-relevant information. It offers



a valuable opportunity to brook the disjuncture in the research community between "pure research" and "pure policy advice."

The importance of treating these research forms and tasks as two sides of the same coin is gaining recognition, for "without theoretically well-founded and empirically well-established concepts and generalizations about social choice situations, advice from the social sciences cannot hope to be of lasting relevance to the world of action" (Knoepfel et al. 1987, 183). In keeping with this view, there is growing understanding of the importance of the "enlightenment" function of research, that is, the provision of basic contributions to the relevant body of knowledge for policy-making. The reevaluation of the "background" rather than immediate "foreground" role of research appears to represent a significant step toward a more realistic assessment of the capabilities of both the research community and the policy-making process. A central premise underlying more sensitive examinations of the conditions for learning is that only when the historically evolved institutional, economic, and political-cultural characteristics of a given context are clearly visible can the possibilities and limits of change be identified and strategies for doing so be designed.

## Europe as a Site for Internationally Comparative Research

The multidimensional diversity of Europe's cultures, institutions, and regions provides rich potential for research for three key reasons. First, within a relatively small geographical area, one finds a variety of relatively "old" nation-states in one broad cultural sphere but with significantly different social and political structures and values. Second, the differences in research traditions and styles also represent a valuable resource for cross-national undertakings. The major transformation processes currently under way in Eastern and Central Europe and the integration being attempted among Western European countries represent unusually rich "natural experiments" for theory building as well as generating a strong demand for policy-relevant knowledge. Third, from a practical standpoint, focusing on a limited area helps minimize costs while maximizing the diversity of the research teams and benefiting from their

familiarity with the cultures, regions, or countries under study (Lisle 1987, 495).

The multidimensional diversity of Europe ranges from life-styles on the level of the individuals and social groups to social and political institutions and varying patterns of interaction between them. It encompasses both highly different and quite similar levels of socioeconomic development and varying rates of cultural, economic, social, or political change. These differences and similarities permit researchers--within a certain range--to apply either the least or most similar systems design for a specific project (Przeworski 1987, 39; Lijphart 1975). They also allow long-term historical studies of the evolution of, say, political institutions, economic structures, or value orientations, and the interrelations between these and other features of modern societies. Because all these different or similar cultures, regions, and institutions are found in close geographical proximity, coordination between research teams or costs of dislocation could be significantly lower than trying to achieve a similar situation in other regions of the industrialized world.

These basic advantages are augmented by the current and future need of decision makers in nearly all social institutions for comparative data. The rapid process of integration of the Western European countries, their economies as well as political and social institutions, and the consequences of these developments for life-styles of the people require comparative information for the management of change and transformation. The opening up of Central and Eastern European countries and their search for political, social, and economic perspectives further enhance the current and future importance of comparative data. Only a profound understanding of each other and of the institutional fabric of societies--their values, aspirations, and goals--provides a basis for effective cooperation and for steps toward political integration.

Looking at the social science research community in Europe, we find that a similar description of historically grown diversity, on the one hand, and basic commonality of problems and perspectives, on the other, holds for the intellectual structures of the European countries. Both features stem from the spatial vicinity of societies highly structured over long historical periods, each in specific ways. "The special position of Europe" (Bendix 1986) is thus crucial not only with regard to the variety of related but unique historical constellations in general, but also more

specifically with regard to the development of the social sciences themselves. The different intellectual features of these countries were long seen as strange remnants from the past, but one can argue that they may well represent an important tradition to draw on in cross-national exchange and research. This variety can be particularly valuable in times of rethinking and transformations.

Although the dominant impetus for the social sciences throughout much of the post-World War II period came from the United States, Europe was the birthplace of the social sciences. The European societies of the late nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of intellectual projects proposing the systematic study of society as part of the academic sciences, devoted to contributing to the monitoring and understanding of societal transformations. This was basically the formative period for the academic social sciences. All these projects were visibly related to their own societal contexts. The early proponents of the social sciences drew on the intellectual traditions in their societies, they tried to relate their approaches to the institutional structures of their countries' academic institutions, and their ways of thinking were tied to the dominant political questions of their time and place.

As a result, specific understandings of the desirable nature and role of sciences of society in various European countries emerged. In part, these sciences acquired an outright cultural dimension, such as the "French school of sociology," as thinking in the Durkheimian tradition was commonly labeled in the interwar period, or "German sociology," as some scholars like Hans Freyer tried to distinguish their intellectual project from the more "Western" counterparts (years before the same label took on a different meaning under nazism).

It has been argued that cultural or even national intellectual traditions have faded away in a long-term process of convergence of social science. Such an argument, which is not fully without empirical validity, can be linked to the idea of progress toward the ultimate aim of a global social science, embracing the concept of universality in theory and methods. This type of reasoning was doubtlessly predominant during the 1950s and 1960s, when empirical-quantitative methods were linked in sociology and political science to functionalist and structural-functionalist theorizing and in economics, to Keynesian-style modified neoclassical thought. At least for sociology, this merger of "modern" theory and method can be

called the "Mertonian synthesis" of methodological sophistication à la Lazarsfeld and Parsonian theorizing. It developed largely in the United States, where the former had perfected his early Austrian organizational-methodological innovation, and the latter had elaborated his own version of the classical European heritage. But it was forcefully reexported and became widespread in Europe. By the 1960s, global social science seemed within reach (cf. Wagner 1990).

But since then, a process of reorientation has started, new doubts have arisen, and old theoretical and methodological queries have been reintroduced. The general rethinking of social science has enlarged conceptual plurality and included a resurgence of national intellectual traditions (Nowotny 1983). There is revived interest in theories of political elites of Italian origins or in political thought of the broad Austromarxian tradition, for instance. Economists strengthen institutionalist theories, often reminiscent of the works of the German historical school. Most important are new blends of basic concerns of classical social theorizing proposed by the leading social theorists of the time. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, who stands clearly in the broad structuralist tradition reaching from Durkheim over Lévi-Strauss to structuralist Marxism, acknowledged his debt to Weber in attempting to tackle the conceptual question of creative human action, unsolvable in the core of structuralism. Anthony Giddens draws similarly consciously on the heritage of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim to reconceptualize the question of the "constitution of society" through the activities of knowledgeable and capable human beings (cf. Wittrock, forthcoming).

The European nations can still provide a diverse intellectual breeding ground for social science. What can be most fertile in the present situation, however, is probably not a revival of the cognitive structures of different cultures, but an interchange that draws on the inherited variety while seeking to overcome the limitations that characterized the more nation-bound activities of scholars a hundred years ago. Such an interchange should be most desired at a time of European political integration and social transformations in Eastern Europe. At the same time, this interchange should itself be stimulated by these very developments once European social scientists again live up to their task of providing a reflective self-monitoring of a coming European society.

## Comparative Social Science Research: Reflections on the Development in Europe

We chose a two-pronged approach to tracing the development of human and organizational resources in this area over the past decades: We examined the available documentation on selected national and international organizations involved in funding, conducting, or coordinating cross-national research.<sup>4</sup> We interviewed key actors (officers of funding agencies and research organizations, as well as researchers) with years of experience in this field with an eye to expanding on the written sources and eliciting emerging trends.<sup>5</sup> The purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive portrayal of institutions involved in promoting cross-national research in Europe over the past forty years (although such a project would fill a large gap), but rather to map the contours of the landscape and changes over time in order to generate a sounder basis for identifying essential next steps.

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4 We are grateful to Birgit Riegraf for her careful examination of available documentation on the following organizations: Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society; Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft; Deutsch-Französisches Institut, Ludwigsburg; Deutscher Akademischer Auslands Dienst; European Science Foundation; European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences; Ford Foundation; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung; Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung; Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung; National Science Foundation (USA); Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; Robert-Bosch-Stiftung; Stiftung Volkswagenwerk.

5 We benefited from the insights of the following experts: Henrik Bruhns, Centre national pour la recherche scientifique; Maurice Godelier, Centre national pour la recherche scientifique; Otto Haefner, Volkswagen Stiftung; Edmond Lisle, Centre national pour la recherche scientifique; Helga Nowotny, on the European Science Foundation; Cyril Smith, formerly Economic and Social Research Council; John Smith, European Science Foundation; Roger Svensson, Swedish National Research Council and SCASS; Nicholas Watts, Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society; Peter Weitz, German Marshall Fund of the United States.

*Sketching the Contours: 1950-1990*

Using broad brush strokes to describe the postwar period, a curve representing the growth of interest in the first decades, stagnation from the mid-1970s through the 1980s, and a current upward swing emerges. A detailed examination of developments would reveal interesting differences between countries and between disciplines.<sup>6</sup> However, at this level of aggregation, a high degree of similarity is indicated both in the documentation and in the historical assessment of the respondents interviewed.

The first of these periods, the late 1950s and 1960s, was characterized by high interest in internationally comparative research accompanied by the realization that, beyond providing funds for this type of research, institutions had to be created to meet the need. Therefore, institutions were founded during this period with explicit commitments to an international orientation in their charter (e.g., the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences, Vienna, and the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin). The United States played an important role in this process because such major research foundations as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation focused programs on internationally comparative studies. During this period, European countries were usually studied individually and compared with the United States; only rarely were comparisons conducted between Western European countries, and even then the focus was largely limited to Britain, France, and Germany.<sup>7</sup> A certain amount of research focused on Eastern European countries, however, motivated largely by a need to understand the "enemy" (Neumann and Lasserre 1980). (Other than ethnological research, virtually no attention was paid in Europe to comparisons with countries in other parts of the world during this period.)

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6 As Maurice Godelier pointed out in a personal communication, for example, researchers' ability to engage in cross-national work depends largely on the traditions of the specific discipline in each country and on the availability of a strong national data base. The lack of an international orientation in a discipline or the lack of sufficient information on a given matter within the home country can seriously hamper the emergence of cross-national research.

7 A significant exception is the quite strong tradition of cross-national studies among the Nordic countries.

By contrast to the first phase, characterized by a certain euphoria and growth, the second, the mid-1970s and the 1980s, was generally years of stagnation and consolidation. The interest in learning about and from other countries remained high, and a new focus on cross-regional research emerged during this period as processes of internationalization generated new similarities and disparities between regions within and across national boundaries. However, overall these years were marked by funding constraints throughout the social sciences. Because internationally comparative research is expensive to conduct, it was bound to feel the cutbacks; in fact, for some respondents, the very fact of survival during such a time was considered a mark of success. Some programs, such as those launched from the United States, were either closed or significantly reduced. Some funding organizations in European countries (e.g., Volkswagen Stiftung, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) kept on stressing the need for more comparative research, but the total growth in support was more verbal than real.<sup>8</sup> Some institutes and programs planned during the earlier period but not actually started did not take off (e.g., the International Institute for the Management of Technology [IIMT], destined to be created mainly by OECD in Milan). But existing commitments were largely maintained, particularly in the collection of quantitative data (e.g., Eurobarometer), permitting the continuation of longitudinal studies.

There is a strong feeling in the beginning of the 1990s that we are on the threshold of a resurgence in interest in internationally comparative research in Europe. The "spirit of 1992" in Western Europe and the transformation under way in Central and Eastern Europe are key motors in this intensification. There is a sense that the field has matured in several ways. Large studies of methodologies have been made during the past two decades. A body of quantitative data has been built up: We are now "data-rich." The kind of internationally comparative research undertaken now is complex and multidimensional, more sensitive to cultural and historical conditioning, so we are in a better position to interpret the store of data collected. Finally, experience has revealed the difficulties

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the Annual Report of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), 1979, on the attempts to introduce areas of concentration on "Comparative Analysis of Social Structures and Development Processes" in Western European industrial societies.

and limits of such research, causing expectations to become more realistic, especially with respect to policy relevance. Hence, there is an important qualitative difference in the competence ascribed to cross-national researchers between today and the first "boom" in interest thirty years ago.

### *Prevailing Conditions for Internationally Comparative Research in Europe*

Existing institutions playing a role in internationally comparative research can be categorized in four broad groups:

1. Supra- and international agencies funding or using such research
2. National funding programs and agencies
3. Research organizations involved in conducting such research
4. Organizations for coordinating such research

The scope and role of activities in each of these categories can only be briefly illustrated here with selected examples; no comprehensive description or assessment (which would be highly desirable but is not essential for this purpose) exists at this time.

The largest single source of international support for internationally comparative social science research in Europe and also a main constituency group for its results is the European Community. Its activities take several forms. Numerous research projects on specific European issues are stimulated and funded by the various directorates. Most of the research is conducted on a contract basis by researchers in universities or other kinds of institutions in the member countries. The major in-house undertaking is the attitudinal survey Eurobarometer, which, having been run thirty times, now represents the largest data bank of its kind in the world. The community funds research institutions that function more or less autonomously, such as the Dublin Foundation for the Quality of Life and Working Conditions and the European University Institute. A significant function fulfilled by the European Community is the stimulation and integration of networks among researchers in Europe, for which a variety of programs was created in the 1980s (e.g., Erasmus, Brite, and FAST).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development is also an active stimulator of internationally comparative research in the social



sciences, focusing mainly on selected policy fields (e.g., labor market policy, environmental policy). Although its scope is broader, much of its work does focus on Western European countries.

The United Nations agencies play a more limited role in European research due to their much larger and more diverse membership. The Economic Commission for Europe provides a framework for coordinating data collection and networking between Western and Eastern European countries in a number of policy fields.

A good example of a particularly active international organization for a European region is the Nordic Council, which has stimulated a range of internationally comparative work in the area. Several significant efforts have been undertaken by the Council on Europe.

Within each European country, there are governmental organizations for funding and coordinating social science research (e.g., the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [DFG], the Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique [CNRS], the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC]). Although they have sometimes explicitly recognized the need for internationally comparative work, their actual contribution to such research has been rather small, partially hampered by the fact that each has traditionally funded only researchers in its own country. One of the most important developments in the 1980s was the increase in coordination between such national organizations and the step forward taken by CNRS creating some bilateral programs (e.g., the Franco-British, Franco-German, and Franco-Spanish programs).

In addition, there are nongovernmental foundations in the various European countries that support internationally comparative work by funding research projects or international conferences.<sup>9</sup> A handful is dedicated explicitly to funding internationally comparative research in the social sciences. Possibly the most visible among these is the Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society, which is one of the very few organizations in Europe that funds teams in more than one country. Although its charter is focused on Britain and the Federal Republic, it promotes broader cooperation by allowing teams from other countries to join existing bilateral projects if they can obtain their own

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<sup>9</sup> The role of nongovernmental foundations in Europe cannot be compared to that in the United States either in terms of size or of numbers.

support. Other research foundations are broader in scope but consciously include international perspectives in their programs (e.g., the Volkswagen Foundation).

The third category of actors is the research organizations at which internationally comparative research is actually conducted. Perhaps no more than twenty institutions in all of Europe focus primarily on such research. Among the most visible are the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences (Vienna Centre), the Max-Planck Institutes for Comparative Law and for Social Research, the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (SCASSS), the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Some smaller institutions also exist, such as the Italo-German Historical Institute in Trento (ISIT) and the Deutsch-Französisches Institut in Ludwigsburg; the latter is dedicated to bilateral relations but includes a research component, for which, however, it requires external funding, illustrating once more the level of dependence on external sources of finance.

Many universities throughout Europe have departments or institutes with an international or regional focus at which comparative research is conducted. For the most part, however, they are limited to promoting the study of a particular foreign region or country rather than actually undertaking comparative analysis. Within the individual social science disciplines at most universities, there are individual faculty members working on internationally comparative projects, but estimating the size of this sector is impossible because they tend to work independently rather than in coordinated research programs. Among the institutions also worth mentioning in this context are the numerous European business and management schools because, in response to increasing demands from business for students and concepts that can cross borders, they are playing a significant role in promoting internationally comparative perspectives in research.

Research coordinating organizations are playing a growing role in the development of cross-national research competence. The most important of these with a specifically European orientation is the European Science Foundation. It was founded in the mid-1970s with a view to promoting cooperation between member organizations throughout

Europe. Although it originally focused largely on the natural sciences, it recently significantly expanded its interest in social science research and engages in organizing and funding international research projects and research networks. The professional disciplinary organization most actively coordinating internationally comparative research in Europe is the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), which has developed numerous networks among members throughout Europe and contributed significantly to clustering competencies and feeding results back into the "mainstream" professional community. The European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) fulfills a similar function. Other disciplines have national and international associations, but no specifically European focus; missing, too, are effective interdisciplinary professional organizations capable of coordinating cross-national research undertakings on a European scale.

### *Assessing the Potential*

The groundwork has apparently been well prepared for the current resurgence in interest in cross-national research because there are quite a few different types of institutions with experience in promoting and conducting such activities throughout Europe. There are institutions to build on and models to learn from. Some organizations already have years of experience; others are relatively new and should be producing results in the upcoming decade.

The capacity for cross-fertilization, for benefiting from the multi-dimensional diversity Europe represents, and for pooling resources and experience is underdeveloped at best, however. Despite the large number of institutions, the landscape of international comparative research in Europe is extremely fragmented. Especially the infrastructure for developing and maintaining the necessary skills work over a significant period of time is in no way commensurate with the size of the tasks ahead. Though it is impossible to measure exactly the scale of funds committed to internationally comparative research, they are only a small fraction of the total budget for social science research. Much of this funding is unstable, relying on the support of individual projects rather than on a solid institutional base.

Certain improvements have been made in consolidating competencies for binational undertakings, but multinational research remains largely homeless. Informal networks of researchers involved in this type of work have emerged, but not on a comprehensive and strategically viable scale. For the most part, the integration of results and experiences from the cross-national perspective into the body of knowledge of traditional disciplines is the by-product of the return of researchers from international work into more traditional tasks after project funds expire. Only rarely is a transfer into the mainstream an integral part of a project design or supported as a separate activity. Only minuscule stepping-stones exist toward cooperation in conducting cross-national research with Central and Eastern European countries. Clearly, multiple approaches must be developed in the immediate future to correct these weaknesses and build on existing strengths.

### Strengthening Cross-National Research in Europe: An Action Agenda

At first glance, the landscape described so far can be seen to contain a remarkable number and variety of structures, but a closer look reveals how few institutions take Europe as a whole into account. As Maurice Godelier points out, "Europe is a weak point for Europeans" (personal communication, February 1990). It is striking how small the budgets are and how fragile most of the structures are institutionally and financially. It also reveals that some of the elements of the cross-cultural research process, such as training social scientists in this art, maintaining a semistable structure to preserve the skills, and organizing a structural integration of results from this research into the mainstream of social science knowledge are not sufficiently provided for. Therefore, greater efforts must be made to strengthen and expand the existing structures, to put them to better use, and to fill the shells with life. In order to understand the nature of the task at hand, researchers must see the danger of taking a mechanistic approach to developing competencies. If, instead of seeking to be architects, the various actors involved—funding agencies, research institutions, and individual scholars—perceive the challenge as

one of growing a garden, the definition of their respective roles is more likely to fit the long-term developmental character of the process. The diversity of Europe provides a particularly rich soil for such an effort.

### *Nurturing Seedlings into Communities*

The most striking deficit that emerged from our review is the paucity of institutional structures dedicated to conducting cross-cultural research.<sup>10</sup> There are quite a number of individual researchers dedicated to this task. They sometimes work together as teams in the framework of larger projects for which they apply to one or more sources of short- or medium-term funding. But there is a great need to create clusters within existing research institutions, including universities, to bring them together and provide them with the appropriate organizational environment. Those clusters should also train and integrate more young scholars in comparative research, with a view to building a community committed to this task.

### Creating centers of competence

An essential prerequisite for the development of the field beyond more fluid organizations like these clusters is the provision of a long-term institutional commitment to international undertakings because "conducting comparative research is to a large extent not a technique that can be mechanically applied, but rather an art that requires stable attention and investment over time" (Berthoin Antal 1987, 499). Particularly large research projects, major international conferences, study exchanges and the like can be funded through project-related sources, but the central program of internationally comparative research cannot depend on case-by-case funding.

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10 This is in stark contrast to the institutionalization of quantitative research, including surveys, to which much more attention has consistently been paid since the 1960s. For an analysis of institution-building processes for this purpose, see Rokkan (1979b). This report also stresses the importance of training in internationally comparative research.

There are several reasons for this. The most important is that a group needs a stable core, a critical mass in order to develop an identity and nurture competence through shared experience (Feick 1983). An aspect of this is a matter of respecting human capital: Researchers need a "home base" to return to in the course of their international research careers, a place they feel is worth investing back into. The tendency is otherwise for scholars to move on to a more stable institution, and their experience and contacts are lost to the organization of origin.

Second, only with the "power of the purse" can institutions establish research foci. Competence cannot be developed devoid of content, so centers need to orient themselves to selected substantive areas of research for a limited but long period to attract top quality researchers and to generate valuable results. This cannot be done without solid institutional funding.

Third, quite pragmatically, writing proposals to obtain funding is a skill that must be learned and a process that is generally very time-consuming. In order to be managed efficiently, it requires a certain initial institutional investment. Therefore, more funds must be made available for the entire range of activities involved in internationally comparative work. This can be done in two ways: by creating or expanding budgets designated for all forms of cross-national work and by ensuring that internationally comparative projects are given priority within existing areas of concentration.

A further essential step toward promoting international collaboration and exchange among researchers lies in increasing communication between national funding organizations. Some moves have been made in this direction in recent years in Europe, but a great deal remains to be done. The attempts to build bilateral programs have been particularly successful because they allow organizational accommodations to be made to the particular cultural context. Clearly, multilateral undertakings are much more complex and risk foundering under bureaucratic hurdles.<sup>11</sup> It might therefore appear most effective and pragmatic to

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11 The fact that several of the recommendations discussed here were equally clearly stated by Stein Rokkan as tasks for the International Social Science Council in the mid-1970s indicates the difficulties involved in achieving progress through international bureaucracies and is eloquent proof of the need for bilateral and bottom-up processes.

focus more attention on building further bilateral agreements in such a flexible manner as to allow multilateral projects to link in whenever there is a demand for them. Lastly, bureaucratic hurdles to supporting international teams must be reduced, both in national and international funding organizations.

### Fostering networks

Conducting truly internationally comparative research is a highly interactive undertaking. Besides the skills of scholarship required of all researchers and the expected expertise in the issue under investigation, researchers involved in internationally comparative studies need to be able to draw on the knowledge of experts in other countries (for a more detailed discussion, Lisle 1987, 494-495). Whether it be at the earliest phases of the birth of a project idea, when researchers are exploring the contours of the issue as it is posed in a different culture, during the fieldwork, when culturally sensitive forms of information collection need to be devised, or in the final phase of analysis and interpretation of results, researchers need to be in close communication with experts in the target countries. International networks represent an essential mechanism for researchers to find such experts in other countries with whom to share ideas and research agendas, compare notes on appropriate research strategies, and build relationships that can lead to closer collaboration.

Networks are a special kind of institution that require particular attention in developing and maintaining. Unlike more fixed institutions, they live from a certain openness and fluidity, allowing new members to enter the community easily. In order to maintain viability over the long run, they must generate information, not just diffuse it. They have the potential of providing a fertile breeding ground for new ideas if they succeed in drawing together an appropriate mix of people. The exchange of ideas is predicated on a substantive orientation, however, so it would be misleading to conceive of international networks of researchers as primarily methodological in nature. Because there is no "pure methodology of international comparison," a network based exclusively on methodological exchange (as is the case in some quite powerful and important professional networks among survey researchers, for example) would

most likely fail in the comparative research field. Thematic or disciplinary bonds, as well as sharing the basic understanding about the importance and relevance of internationally comparative research, are needed to link the members. A strong argument should also be made for the growth of interdisciplinary networks at an international level because so many of the issues confronted by internationally comparative research requires input from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

A factor that tends to be constantly overlooked is that networks, like other institutions, require funding. Little in the manner of organized funding is provided for such activities at this time. The creation of new networks requires seed money, and the active participation of members in international networks requires support for travel. Because many of the most important products of networks are intangible and indirect, traditional criteria for funding are often inappropriate for assessing the value of these investments. A more flexible and developmental approach on the part of funding organizations is needed in such cases. A useful example of the feasibility of such an investment is provided by the European Science Foundation, which started providing seed money for international networks in 1985. The ESF has found that "the contacts and cross-fertilization of new ideas which occurs in these networks activates researchers to undertake joint research projects both within and outside the ESF" (Smith 1989, 806).

### *Enhancing the State of the Art: A Challenge to the Research Community*

The successful integration of research results into the existing body of knowledge in order to achieve cumulation is a problem faced in all social science undertakings, but it is a particularly critical point in the development of internationally comparative research. Two of the most important difficulties that need to be overcome in the upcoming years are the fragmentation and mutual isolation of research activities and the division within the academic community between scholars committed to internationally comparative work and those focusing on research within a single context.



### Identifying areas of concentration

Much of the fragmentation in orientation results from many researchers, for lack of sufficient centers dedicated to internationally comparative perspectives, working in isolation. The creation of clusters around areas of concentration would contribute significantly to overcoming fragmentation. A key challenge is to identify such areas by linking the interests and competencies of researchers with acknowledged gaps in information. Such a process needs to be organized with an eye to avoiding the twin dangers of being either totally arbitrary and possibly irrelevant on the one hand or overly bureaucratic and clumsy on the other.

An effective definition of areas of concentration for research has to have an important bottom-up component, and it requires a deep involvement by a larger number of researchers. There are two fields of research, however, in which the establishment of a variety of clusters for comparative work could be strongly suggested to the European social science research community and funding institutions: (1) the different aspects of the process of closer integration of the Western European countries in the context of the creation of the "internal market" and (2) the rapid political, social, cultural, and economic changes in the Central and Eastern European countries. Concepts and themes of rapid change, of institutional adaptability or inflexibility, and of mobility or immobility, for example, can be tested by describing, monitoring, and analyzing the processes going on in Europe in the forthcoming years and decades. Here, Europe poses another unique challenge to comparative research; trying to understand these processes requires a quantum leap in the intellectual, organizational, and financial investment in such research.

### Organizing for cumulation

The cumulation of knowledge does not happen on its own; it must be consciously organized, particularly when the communities generating different kinds of knowledge tend to be distinct. To prove the value of internationally comparative research, greater efforts must be made to assess its contributions to theory building. Such assessments need to become standard operating procedure to allow the academic community

to distill those elements of the results that are generalizable beyond national boundaries and those that are culturally specific.

The more regular and natural the flow of ideas from internationally comparative research back into "mainstream" scholarship, the faster the artificial divide between "cosmopolitan" and "ethnocentric" academic communities can be overcome. The institutional steps previously outlined need to be implemented in this spirit. The conscious strengthening of a community of scholars involved in comparative research must go hand in hand with diffusing the values of the centrality of the cross-national enterprise. The most important step in the upcoming years is to communicate more clearly that "science that is not international is not science," as Edmond Lisle (personal communication, February 1990) so succinctly puts it.

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