

"New Developments in Survey Methodology" Course Series

Course 2: "Strategies in comparative analysis: Multi-level, multi-group and dummy approaches"

Instructor: **Dr. Bart Meuleman**. Assistant Professor at the Centre for Sociological Research, University of Leuven (Belgium).

Date: February 9-10, 2011, from 09h30-13h00 and 14h00-17h30.

Place: Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Edifici Jaume I, room 20.027. Carrer de Ramón Trias Fargas 25-27 (metro Ciutadella - Villa Olímpica). Barcelona, Spain.

Short description of the course:

Comparative research has proven to be a very effective strategy for gaining understanding in social reality. Making comparisons over countries, cultural groups and/or time points allows researchers to distinguish between universal and particular phenomena. Comparative research also makes it possible to identify how individual values, opinions and behaviours are influenced by environmental factors. For these reasons, it is hardly surprising that comparative research occupies a high position on the international research agenda.

At the same time, comparative research brings along its own methodological difficulties. Comparative data are often characterized by a complex structure, and consequently require specific analytical strategies. Furthermore, comparability of the measurement is a necessary condition for arriving at valid conclusions.

In this two-day course, the strengths and pitfalls of comparative research are discussed, and several strategies to analyze comparative data are presented. Specifically, attention is paid to multi-level, multi-group and dummy approaches. A description of each of these models is given, as well as an overview of their advantages and disadvantages. In hands-on sessions, participants are given the opportunity to put the different analytical tools into practice.

Universitat Pompeu Fabra - Research and Expertise Centre for Survey Methodology

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Detailed course outline:February 9th

09h30-11h00: General introduction

The introductory session gives a conceptual overview of important issues in comparative research. Among others, we look at different epistemological positions (universalist vs. culturalist), possible research questions that can be answered by means of comparative research, levels of analysis, and important sources of unreliability and invalidity.

11h30-13h00: Multilevel and dummy approach (I)

During this session, the multi-level and dummy approaches to comparative research are introduced. By means of a concrete example (using European Social Survey data), the logic of these models is explained, and the interpretation of relevant model parameters is discussed. Special attention is paid to the differences between multilevel and dummy approaches.

14h00-15h00: Multilevel and dummy approach (II)

It is explained how the models discussed during the previous time slot can be estimated in practice. An overview of sources of contextual data is given, and it is shown how individual and context data can be merged into a single data frame. A step-by-step strategy to estimate multilevel models is proposed.

15h30-17h30: Lab session: multi-level modelling

Participants are given the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge that they gained in earlier sessions. Participants are given contextual and individual-level datasets, and are asked to estimate a full-blown multi-level model, using the software package SPSS.

February 10th

09h30-11h00: The multi-group approach

The second day starts by introducing a different approach to comparative research, namely multi-group structural equation modelling. After briefly highlighting the basics of structural equation modelling, the multi-group model and its use for comparative research are discussed.

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11h30-13h00: Measurement equivalence

Comparability of measurements is of special concern in comparative research, especially when abstract constructs (such as attitudes or values) are dealt with. This session focuses on the important notion of measurement equivalence and its different levels. It is also shown how measurement equivalence can be assessed within the multi-group framework.

14h00-16h00: Lab session: multi-group modelling

The students estimate a series of multi-group confirmatory factor model to test the cross-cultural comparability of a measurement scale. For this exercise, the software package Mplus is used.

16h30-17h30: Integration session

This final session highlights differences and similarities between the three approaches discussed during this course. Possibilities to integrate the strengths of different approaches (e.g. via multi-level structural equation modelling) are discussed.

About the Instructor:

Dr. Bart Meuleman is Assistant Professor at the Centre for Sociological Research, University of Leuven (Belgium), where he teaches research methodology. In his PhD thesis, he investigated how macro-sociological factors influence individual attitudes towards immigration in Europe.

More generally, his main research interests involve cross-cultural comparisons of attitude and value patterns, such as welfare attitudes, ethnocentrism, religiosity and basic human values. In his work, he mainly applies multi-level and structural equation models. Recent work was published in *Social Science Research*, *European Sociological Review* and *International Migration Review*.

Participation:

The course is directed to anyone involved and/or interested in comparative research, especially students of political science and sociology. A maximum of 50 people can participate. Participants will be admitted on a first-come first-serve basis: the first 50 people who sign up and pay the registration fee will be accepted.

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Registration procedure:

Please send an email to recsm@upf.edu, indicating your interest in registering for the course and including your name, institution, address, telephone and email address. As soon as this email is received, we will send you information on how to proceed with the payment. Registration will only be considered complete when payment for the course has been received by RECSM.

Costs:

Participants from commercial organizations: € 400*

Participants working at Universities: € 200*

Students: € 50*

*** The course fee includes lunch at Universitat Pompeu Fabra for both days (Wednesday 9th and Thursday 10th).**

Deadline for registration: January 31st, 2011.

Further information: If you have any questions about the course, its program or its registration procedure, please contact us at recsm@upf.edu.