

Editorial: Comparative Survey Analysis – Models, Techniques, and Applications

*Bart Meuleman*¹, *Eldad Davidov*² & *Daniel Seddig*²

¹ KU Leuven

² University of Cologne and University of Zurich

The use of comparative data is of paramount importance for the understanding of societies and their change patterns. Fortunately, today more than ever, social researchers are equipped with a large number of national, international, and longitudinal comparative survey data, some of which contain repeated cross-sectional data whereas others include panel data. These data allow social scientists to test theories, generalize them across cultures, and address diverse topics of major social relevance such as attitudes toward the state and its functioning, democracy attitudes, trust in people and institutions, immigration and integration, values, and behavioral patterns, just to name a few.

However, comparative data is often characterized by a high level of complexity. The presence of multiple countries or time points can lead to complicated data structures that offer great opportunities for research but also require special methods of analysis (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997; Davidov, Schmidt, Billiet, & Meuleman 2018). This special issue is devoted to studies that demonstrate advanced techniques for analyzing comparative survey data and present applications of comparative analysis on a diverse range of topics. The special issue includes five studies. Some analyze comparative cross-sectional data, while others examine longitudinal data or a combination of both types of data. Below we provide a short overview of the studies.

The first paper, '*Modeling multiple-country repeated cross-sections: A societal growth curve model for studying the effect of the economic crisis on perceived ethnic threat*', by Bart Meuleman, Eldad Davidov, and Jaak Billiet demonstrates how to exploit the richness of comparative data which cover both multiple countries and multiple time points. It presents a novel application for cross-national time series survey data using societal growth curve modeling. While growth curve modeling has been often applied to individual data, this study shows how it may also be employed for contextual country-level data. The method is illustrated using six rounds of data from the European Social Survey (2002-2012). It inquires whether

indicators of economic downturn are systematically related to increased levels of economic and cultural threat due to immigration. The societal growth curve modeling approach makes it possible to differentiate longitudinal effects from cross-sectional differences thus overcoming the weaknesses of analyses relying on single-shot cross-sectional data.

The second study, *‘Demonstrating how to best examine group-based segregation: A statistical and conceptual multilevel approach’* by Christoph Spörlein and Elmar Schlueter addresses the topic of segregation between ethnic or sociodemographic groups from a comparative perspective. The authors claim that segregation has been often studied by researchers from a descriptive perspective and, consequently, these studies lack an inferential statistics approach. In their paper, they present the multilevel binomial response approach that provides a particularly flexible framework for describing and explaining segregation to better understand the role of individual- and contextual-level drivers of segregation. The authors employ three case studies using survey data from urban, national, and cross-national settings: the German urban monitoring survey, individual data from the European Labor Force Surveys in 15 EU member states, and a single wave from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study. They focus on different manifestations of ethnic and gender segregation.

The third study, *‘Surpassing simple aggregation: Advanced strategies for analyzing contextual-level outcomes in multilevel models’* by Dominik Becker, Wiebke Breustedt, and Christina Isabel Zuber introduces two advanced analytical strategies for analyzing contextual-level outcomes in multilevel models: the multilevel SEM and the two-step approach. The authors first discuss the methodological and statistical advantages of the two approaches and then illustrate their advantages in a substantive study. Their substantive study examines the effect of citizens’ support for democratic values on the persistence of democracy, drawing on data from the World Values Survey and the Quality of Government project.

The fourth paper, *‘Simultaneous feedback models with macro-comparative cross-sectional data’* by Nate Breznau addresses advantages and limitations of comparative cross-sectional data from a different angle. The author argues that while many authors do not have access to longitudinal data, they are nevertheless interested in assessing relationships of reciprocal causality that are postulated by their theories. The paper discusses the conditions that make it possible to assess simultaneous feedback models of reciprocal causality using cross-sectional survey research. The author shows how to construct simultaneous feedback models using a structural equation modeling perspective. The method is exemplified using three commonly used software packages (MPlus, Stata, and R) and data from the International Social Survey Program covering 70 country-time points (between 1985 and 2006) to model simultaneous feedback relations between public opinion and social spending.

Finally, the fifth paper, *'Blaming the young misses the point: Re-assessing young people's political participation over time using the "identity-equivalence procedure"*, by *Christian Schnaudt* and *Michael Weinhardt* addresses the topic of construct equivalence when comparing data over time and across age groups. They suggest that construct equivalence is more important for a meaningful comparison than identical instruments that are in fact not equivalent. They exemplify the application of construct equivalence on the topic of political participation of young and older people. Specifically, they apply a procedure that they name "identity equivalence" on the measurement of political participation across three different age groups and over the time period between 2002-2014 using data from the European Social Survey.

References

- Davidov, E., Schmidt, P., Billiet, J. & Meuleman, B. (2018). *Cross-cultural analysis: Methods and applications*. New York: Routledge.
- Van de Vijver FJR & Leung K. (1997). *Methods and Data Analysis for Cross-Cultural Research*. London: Sage.

Acknowledgment

The second author would like to thank the University of Zurich Research Priority Program "Social Networks" for their support during work on this study and on the special issue. All authors of the Editorial would like to thank Lisa Trierweiler for the English proof.