

# Comparative analysis: talking about apples and oranges

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# THREE (RELATED) QUESTIONS

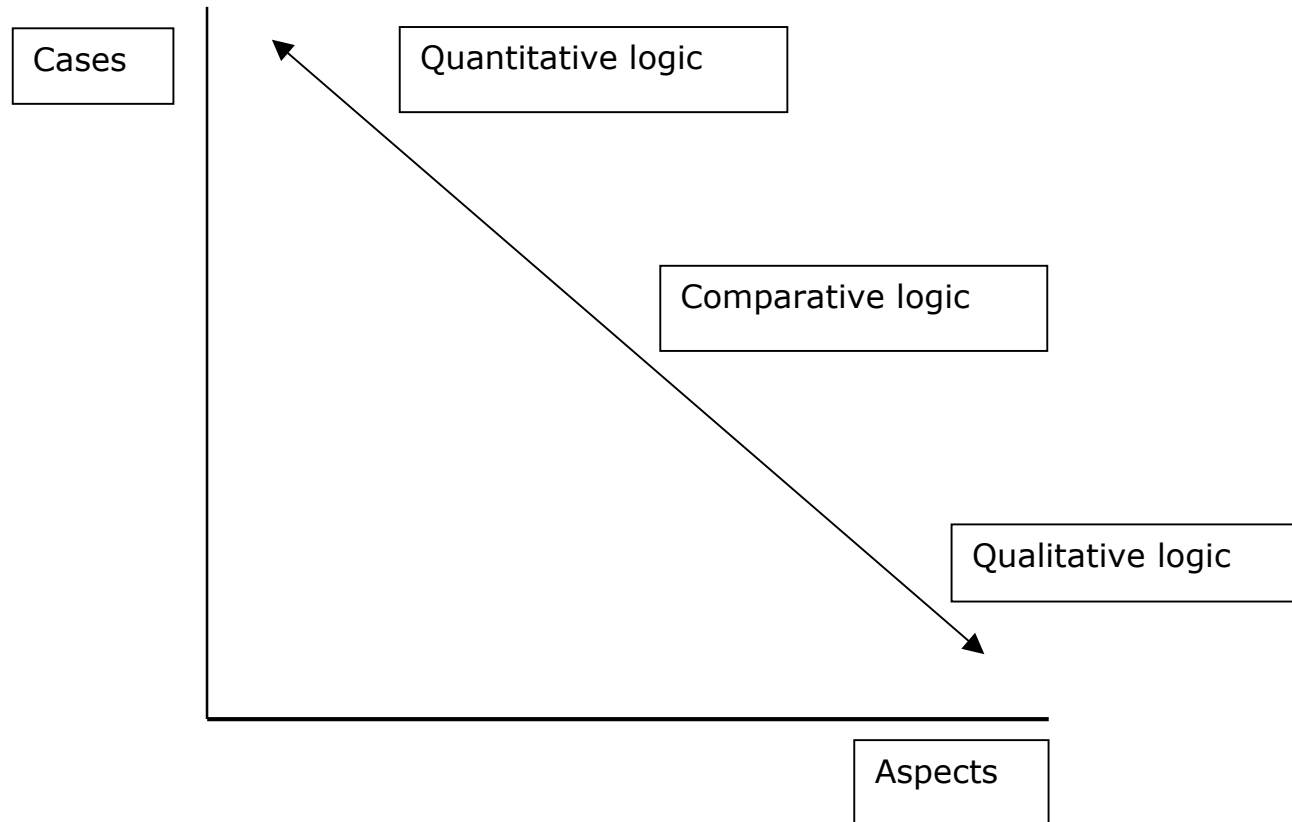
- WHY COMPARE?
- WHAT CAN BE COMPARED?
- HOW TO COMPARE?

(Major source of inspiration:  
Giovanni Sartori)

# WHY COMPARE?

- ALL THINKING IS IMPLICITLY COMPARATIVE
- SCIENTIFIC THINKING MUST BE EXPLICITLY AND CONSCIOUSLY COMPARATIVE
- COMPARISON ALLOWS *TO CONTROL*
  - EXPERIMENTS ARE (ALMOST) IMPOSSIBLE
  - STATISTICAL CONTROL ONLY POSSIBLE WITH LARGE NUMBERS

# MANY VARIABLES, SMALL N



# WHY COMPARE?

- OFTEN NECESSITY BECAUSE SMALL N OF CASES
- CAN BE PURPOSEFUL CHOICE FOR REACHING SPECIFIC GOALS
  - EXPLORING DIVERSITY
  - UNDERSTANDING SPECIFIC PHENOMENA
  - ADVANCING THEORY
  - (RATHER THAN TESTING LAW-LIKE THEORIES)

# WHAT CAN BE COMPARED?



<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/boy-with-a-basket-of-fruit>

# SHARED PROPERTIES

- ALL OBJECTS ARE COMPARABLE WITH RESPECT TO THEIR SHARED PROPERTIES
  - APPLES AND ORANGES: FRUIT, EDIBLE, GROW ON TREES
  - PARTIES AND PRESSURE GROUPS: ORGANIZATIONS, CARRIERS OF INTERESTS AND IDEAS
  - EUROPEAN UNION AND GERMANY: JOINT-DECISION MAKING (BUT EU IS NOT A STATE)
  - THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM: MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM, CONSOCIATIONALISM, ... (BUT BELGIUM HOMOGENEOUSLY CATHOLIC)
- COMPARING ASSUMES PRIOR CLASSIFICATION

# CLASSIFICATION

## ORDER OBJECTS IN CLASSES

- SAME CLASS MEANS MORE SIMILAR (ACCORDING TO CRITERION OF THE SORTING) THAN DIFFERENT CLASS
- LARGE CLASS MEANS MORE INTERNAL VARIATION (DEMOCRACY OR NOT)
- LARGE CLASS IS HIGH ON LADDER OF ABSTRACTION (COVERS MORE BY SAYING LESS IN A LESS PRECISE MANNER)

# CORRECT CLASSIFICATION

- BUILDING CLASSES FOR COMPARISON IS CRUCIAL EXERCISE
- BUILDING CLASSES MEANS 'FRAMING' OF THE QUESTION
  - FRAMING BY CASE: THING TO BE RESEARCHED IS A CASE OF SOMETHING
  - FRAMING BY ASPECT: KEY FEATURES THAT SPECIFY CASE WITHIN CATEGORY

# COMMON PROBLEMS

## CLASSIFICATIONS EASILY PRODUCE 'CATDOGS'

- CONCEPTUAL STRETCHING (THE EU AS A CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY)
- MISCLASSIFICATION OR PSEUDO-CLASSES (TWO-PARTY SYSTEM)
- DEGREEISM (DEFINING COMES BEFORE MEASURING)

# HOW TO COMPARE?

## COMPARISON BUILDS ON WELL-THOUGHT RESEARCH DESIGN

- WHAT DO WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN (DEPENDENT VARIABLE)?
- WHAT ARE THE (THEORETICALLY) POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS (INDEPENDENT AND INTERVENING VARIABLES)

# MOST COMMON: MOST SIMILAR

## MOST SIMILAR SYSTEM DESIGN IS MOST COMMONLY USED

- COMPARE CASES WITH MANY (RELEVANT) ASPECTS IN COMMON
- COMPARE CASES FOR WHICH THE OUTCOME (TO BE EXPLAINED) IS DIFFERENT
- COMMON CHARACTERISTICS CAN BE IGNORED

# MOST DIFFERENT DESIGN

SELECT CASES THAT ARE VERY DIFFERENT, EXCEPT FOR ASPECT TO BE EXPLAINED

EXPLORATIVE RESEARCH (NO CLEAR IDEAS OF OUTCOMES OR EXPLANATIONS) CAN STILL KEEP SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN MIND (EXPLORING DIVERSITY)

# DOING IT WRONG ...

- F. SCHARPF (1988) COMPARES GERMANY AND THE EU TO ASSESS EFFECTS OF JOINT-DECISION MAKING
- BOTH CASES ARE SELECTED BECAUSE OF THEIR SIMILAR RULES AND INSTITUTIONS
- BOTH ARE CONFRONTED WITH JOINT DECISION TRAP

# REACHING CONCLUSIONS

“IF ... THEN ...”

- WHICH ARE THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS (NEVER OUTCOME WITHOUT IT)
- WHICH ARE THE SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS (ENOUGH TO PRODUCE OUTCOME)
- EXCEPTIONS DESERVE TO BE ANALYZED
  - INCLUDE THEM IN THE THEORY
  - REDUCE THE RANGE OF APPLICATION

