

Lane Kenworthy and Alexander Hicks
(eds.): *Method and Substance in*
Macrocomparative Analysis

Basingstoke, 2008: Palgrave Macmillan,
344 pp.

Macro-comparative analysis, the aggregate-level analysis of spatial units such as countries and regions, represents a major mode of inquiry in contemporary economics, political science, and sociology. Comparative political economists in particular consider it their scientific weapon of choice. At the same time, there is a strong methodological schism in the field as many researchers favour either qualitative or quantitative approaches and have strong convictions about which is to be preferred in general. Since both camps, quantitative and qualitative, rely, with few exceptions, on their own specialised textbooks, there is still little cross-methodological dialogue. This shortcoming is what seems to motivate the editors of this volume. Kenworthy and Hicks have assembled a diverse group of comparativists and methodologists with different methodological backgrounds. The volume promises to offer three things: first, an overview of different qualitative and quantitative methodologies and their application; second, a look at current research with respect to different aspects of labour market performance; and third, a comparison and conversation between different methodologies, highlighting 'the advantages and disadvantages of alternative methodological techniques' (p. 20). Overall, the book does an excellent job delivering on the first two promises, but it falls a bit short with respect to the third.

The methods covered in this volume are panel regression, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and small-N analysis. The general approach taken is quite charming: instead of writing purely methodological chapters, all the authors discuss their techniques by directly applying them to a particular area of research – this is where the 'substance' part comes in. Moreover, all

the chapters in the book focus on the same topic: the determinants of labour market performance. This is a nice idea because concentrating on one substantive issue should, at least in theory, facilitate the comparability of different methods and highlight their respective strengths and weaknesses. However, as it turns out, there is still quite some variety in the issues covered here. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the impact of labour market institutions and policies on employment rates, while Chapter 9 looks at the effect of democracy and autocracy on employment growth. By contrast, Chapters 4 to 7 deal with the impact of family policies on female employment and thus have a distinct focus. Finally, Chapter 8 is somewhat of an odd outlier, as it analyses early retirement from work, so it does not really fit in any of the other two groups of chapters. The fact that there is still substantive variety despite a common focus on labour markets has a positive and a negative side to it. The positive aspect is that the volume offers enough variation with respect to substantive issues to keep it interesting – wading through nine chapters that deal with exactly the same research question might not be that interesting to many readers after all. On the other hand, the negative effect is that the results of the different chapters (with the notable exception of Chapters 5 and 6) are not really comparable. This is unfortunate, since it would have been interesting to see whether, given the same data, a panel regression arrives at the same conclusions as a fuzzy-set QCA when testing, for instance, the impact of unemployment benefits on employment rates. This would have allowed to cross-check the validity of the results and would also have made it easier for the reader to effectively identify the strengths and weakness of different approaches.

Chapter 2, by Bernhard Kittel, and Chapter 9, by Adam Przeworski, are the only contributions that focus primarily on a methodological problem and its solution.

Consequently, the labour market applications serve merely as illustrations of how to deal with these technical issues. All the other chapters either content themselves with explaining a method or simply applying it without much reflection on the approach itself. It is somewhat unfortunate that Przeworski's chapter is the last in the book. His excellent discussion of different selection and identification biases is relevant to *both* quantitative *and* qualitative researchers. It is indeed still often the case that qualitative researchers ignore the fact that many issues that beleaguer their quantitative colleagues pose equally severe problems for them as well. The reason why the editors have decided to put this chapter at the end of the book may lie in the fact that it is far more formal in its discussion than the other contributions (indeed it is the only chapter that derives the empirical analysis from a formal model) and, therefore, not really representative in its style of the rest of the volume.

Instead, Chapter 2 contains Kittel's critique of the use of panel (or time-series cross-section) data models in cases where the underlying time dimension of the variables does not conform with the time dimension of the available data itself. Whereas economic variables are explicitly based on the behaviour of individuals and thus move according to the changing average behaviour of economic agents, policy, and institutional variables do not possess these micro-foundations. They are decided by collective political bodies and change less often than economic aggregates and in a less continuous fashion. While it is widely known that time-invariant variables are in effect country dummies, Kittel's point goes deeper. Even with slowly changing policy variables that can be estimated alongside country fixed effects, the problem remains that the variable 'with the slowest rate of change determines the pace at which observations can be meaningfully related' (p. 36). Kittel is deeply troubled by the widespread

practice of using annual observations, even if the theoretically relevant policy or institutional variables change only every five or ten years or not at all. Of course, there exist newer fixed-effects vector decomposition estimators (which Kittel does not discuss) that address some of these problems on a statistical level, but it should be clear that the different periodisation of variables still poses a theoretical problem. The chapter ends with an application of his insights to the determinants of employment performance, which highlights the author's solution to the problem: the use of simple cross-section models. This may seem unsatisfactory given the resulting smaller number of observations and the inability to distinguish short- and long-term effects, but there are no easy workarounds for this dilemma.

The volume contains two contributions that apply fuzzy-set QCA. Chapter 3, by Epstein, Duerr, Kenworthy and Ragin, provides a thorough discussion of the application of QCA to the analysis of labour market institutions and policies and their impact on employment. Eliason, Stryker and Tranby (Chapter 5), on the other hand, combine fuzzy-set QCA with statistical tests to analyse the effect of family policies on female labour market participation. Both chapters are to be commended for their thorough outline of the approaches they employ. Even after reading these two excellent chapters some reservations with respect to QCA remain for me, however. One is the lack of discussion of whether it really makes sense to assume a deterministic relationship in a given research situation as opposed to a probabilistic one. This question seems to be particularly pressing here, given that the dependent variables in these two chapters are aggregates of individual economic behaviour. A further concern of mine relates to the re-scaling of variables into fuzzy-set scores. The problem here, it seems to me, is the practice of translating data that contain a certain number of stochastic elements into indices that are sup-

posed to capture fully deterministic relationships. Eliason et al.'s approach of constructing goodness-of-fit measures to account for measurement error is, therefore, quite intriguing and may be a step in the right direction. Their chapter is also notable for combining their QCA analysis with statistical estimations. While certainly innovative, their decision to estimate compliers average causal effects on highly aggregated data should raise some eyebrows though, and warrants a clearer justification. This approach has been developed for experimental data on individuals, where randomisation is key. The data at hand, however, are highly aggregated country data where case selection was non-random.

Interestingly, Hicks and Kenworthy in Chapter 6 use the same data as Eliason et al. but conduct bivariate and multivariate panel regressions. They question some of the previous chapter's results by highlighting a possible omitted-variable bias and the influence of outlier countries. Unfortunately, Eliason et al. do not at any point in their chapter refer to Hicks and Kenworthy's findings. This is clearly a missed opportunity. The methodological discussion would have greatly benefited if the authors had more strongly related their findings to those in other chapters. Hicks and Kenworthy's contribution is followed by Visser and Yerkes' examination of the legacy of the breadwinner model (Chapter 7). This represents a nice addition to the volume, for it is the only chapter that uses survey data and a non-linear (multinomial logit) estimation method. The authors present a careful examination of their data but are somewhat mute in their methodological discussion. Their operationalisation of the breadwinner legacy using cohort effects dummies seems a bit problematic, since they do not control for the age of individual respondents and may thus capture age effects in their cohort variables.

The final approach covered in this volume is small-N analysis. Chapter 4, by Mis-

ra and Jude, conducts a comparative historical analysis of the factors shaping women's employment in France and the Netherlands. On the other hand, Chapter 8, by Ebbinghaus, provides a comparative regime analysis of how welfare states, production regimes, and labour relations affect early retirement patterns in different countries. Both contributions are very short on methodological reflection and focus strongly on their applications. This is unfortunate because both chapters are faced with strong methodological challenges. Misra and Jude have great difficulty in identifying the direction of causality between women's public employment and the provision of family policies. Moreover, spuriousness is certainly an issue given the fact that explanatory factors are analysed in isolation over time through a historical tracing process which is quite coarse given the continuous character of the dependent variable. In a similar vein, Ebbinghaus is correct in pointing out that the non-stationarity in the data poses serious problems for panel regression approaches. However, he does not sufficiently explain how moving to a qualitative approach employing an 'ordinal comparison' could solve this problem.

In sum, this volume is well suited for graduate students and social science scholars with at least a basic training in quantitative and qualitative methods. It is clearly not meant to be a textbook or a refresher on different techniques. It rather delivers a snapshot of current empirical practices in qualitative and quantitative research. The book succeeds in providing an overview of the differing approaches used in contemporary macro-comparative analysis and offers substance insights into how policies and institutions affect labour market performance. It should therefore be of great value to all those who plan to conduct a macro-comparative analysis of their own but are unsure about which research design and technique to use. Unfortunately,

the book does not fully deliver on the promise of highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of different qualitative and quantitative methods. For the most part, this assessment is left for the reader to make. It clearly would have helped if there had been a stronger dialogue between the chapters. Alternatively, every chapter could have been followed by a few pages of commentary provided by a contributor of a different methodological bent. Despite these minor issues, the book is one step in bridging the schism between quantitative and qualitative approaches to empirical research. Let us hope there are more volumes like this to come in the future.

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Mathieu Deflem: *Sociology of Law:*

Visions of a Scholarly Tradition

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Some books inspire their readers with new insights and original ideas, while other books mainly repeat and summarise common knowledge in the field of the social sciences. Some books thus illuminate us by shaking and changing our knowledge, while other books aim to organise and turn it into a kind of canonical knowledge. This 'canon' subsequently contributes to the legitimisation of particular fields of the social sciences by re-telling their history and highlighting their major theories and themes. Mathieu Deflem's *Sociology of Law: Visions of a Scholarly Tradition* certainly belongs to this category of books. It does not tell you something you always wanted to know about the sociology of law but were afraid to ask. It does not reveal anything original about major historical developments, theories, and prominent scholars in this field of social science, nor does it give information about the most recent currents of socio-le-

gal research and their theoretical contexts. Nevertheless, it still represents a highly valuable text that will be enjoyed by undergraduate and postgraduate sociology of law students but also by the diverse community of sociologists of law and socio-legal scholars in general.

One of the most valuable aspects of Deflem's book is its summarisation of the historical developments and theoretical foundations of the sociology of law. After obligatory comments on Montesquieu, Tocqueville, Maine, Marx, Spencer, Sumner and Simmel, in the first part of the book entitled 'Theoretical Foundations of the Sociology of Law' Deflem predictably outlines and contrasts the Weberian and Durkheimian traditions and their foundational role in the sociology of law. Paying the same attention to both the Weberian tradition of 'the rationality of modern law' (pp. 43–48) and the Durkheimian tradition of 'law as an indicator of moral solidarity' (pp. 61–66), Deflem joins the growing number of scholars revisiting and reassessing Durkheim's sociology and recognising its importance for the sociology of law.

In the second part, 'Developments and Variations of the Sociology of Law', Deflem responds to the growing interest in continental European sociologically minded legal theorists and sociologists of law. The fourth chapter sketches small portraits of individual scholars, such as Eugen Ehrlich, Theodor Geiger, Leon Petrazycki, Nicholas Timasheff, Georges Gurvitch and Pitirim Sorokin. In this context, Czech readers may be surprised that the last three scholars lived and worked in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. Unlike Roman Jakobson and other Russian linguists, who actively participated in the formation of the Prague Linguistic Circle and thus fundamentally influenced structuralist linguistic theory, Timasheff, Gurvitch and Sorokin, unfortunately, did not have the same influence on developments in Czech social and legal sciences and their work has yet to be discovered