

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

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- Comparative research is not a single field of enquiry but is characterised by a pluralist approach. The questions raised are often not whether, but what and how to compare, by whom and why?
- Comparative research performs different purposes informed by the desire to learn (import-mirror view), to explain and understand (difference view), to predict or plan future courses of action (foresight view), to develop theory (theory development view), or to support social change (transformative view).
- Choices in comparative research relate to the themes of convergence and divergence, difference and similarity and the global and local. Comparison may be seeking causality and understanding, be synchronic or diachronic and enabled by quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis.
- Challenges in comparative research including the adequate understanding of cultures which are different from those of the researcher, and generalizing and explaining social relations across varying contexts. Questions of language, appropriateness and equivalence come to the fore, particularly in the context of debates on the decolonialisation of knowledge production.

As the world we live in becomes more complex and inter-related... debates on the place and process of comparative research have multiplied.

(May and Perry, 2022: 227)



DISCUSS

- Why should we undertake comparative research and what should we compare?
- Can a researcher from one culture explain the beliefs and practices of another?
- What are the main differences and similarities between experimental, statistical, case study and comparative methods and when might they be used?
- What are the potentials and pitfalls of collaborating between researchers in different countries to produce comparative work?

DO

You have been asked by the United Nations to design a comparative study on how different local authorities have responded to COVID-19. They are particularly interested in identifying actions that can support those communities most affected by the pandemic, socially and economically. They want a range of different country and city examples to be included in the study.

- What type of comparative study is the funder looking for?
- How will you design and undertake this study? What methods will you use?
- Will you enrol any partners in the study? Who will be involved?
- What other considerations will you take into account in your research design?

This summary has been developed as an Open Access resource to support educators, students and researchers to develop and extend their understanding of the practice of social research. It draws on May, T. and Perry, B. (2022) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. London: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill. To buy the book, please visit [Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process](#), use code OPENUP20 for a discount.