

Outcome of Round Table 1 on “The Methods of Political Science on both sides of the Atlantic”

First many thanks to you all for participating in this round table, accepting to play the game, take part in the discussion, many of the French participants making the effort of presenting their paper in English. A special thanks to our American colleagues who accepted to cross the Ocean on this occasion, to our discussants, Sophie Duchesne, Marie-Claire Lavabre, Mathieu Brugidou, who managed to frame the debates and find common threads running through the presentations in spite of their apparent heterogeneity, to Andrew Appleton, improvised but how efficient a transcoder. Thanks to you this meeting allowed us to make an inventory of methods on both sides of the Atlantic and start a dialogue between qualitativists et quantitativists.

The round table enabled us first to question the exact borders between « quali » et « quanti », in political sociology as well as in the public policies field, as shown by Yannick Rumpala. What basically differentiates these two approaches? Is it the fact of counting, those « who count » opposing those who « give account » (sounds better in French, “compter” vs “raconter”)? Is it the number of cases ? The use of mathematics, statistics, arithmetic? Where should one put the logical models such as Ragin’s, which do not « count » but put a phenomenon into an equation in relation to the presence or absence of certain elements, and the way they combine ? Is it legitimate to oppose *survey research* and comprehensive interviews, when one can deal with survey answers with qualitative methods and do lexicometric analysis on the text of the interviews?

Philippe Blanchard insists on the necessity to go beyond this opposition, Gary Goertz on the contrary sees two distinct epistemologies, two different conceptions of causality. Both are right in their own way. The divide between qualitative and quantitative methods appears far more institutionalized in the States than in France, embodied in distinct academic departments and recruitment procedures, represented by two different methodological *standing groups* at APSA. One finds there indeed « two cultures », founded on different epistemological grounds. But « quanti » is predominant in the States, those who feel closer to « quali » methods have a basic formation in quanti, they know how to read an equation, a regression line, a factor analysis. It’s not, as we saw, the case on this side of the Atlantic, where terms such as OLS » or « *probit* » don’t ring a bell for the majority of participants, where one gives more importance to the historical and philosophical positioning of a problem than to the way to put it into an equation and its methodological «cooking process ». But precisely because the qualitative approach is dominant here, and « *survey research* » rare, those who do it usually see it as quite complementary to the first, as shown in the papers of Yves Schemel about political sophistication, of Pierre Lefébure on the relation of ordinary citizens to referenda. In other words, the fact that the divide between these two approaches is less rigid here could be an asset, as

shown by the development in Europe of « quali-quantitative » studies, combining comprehensive and explicative approaches in the perspective opened by Charles Ragin and pursued in the methodological group of Benoît Rihoux and his colleagues at ECPR (cf. his workshop scheduled for the next ECPR session in Rennes in 2008, « Methodological Pluralism? Consolidating Political Science Methodology »).

The round table also allowed us to think about the necessary contextualisation of data, in time and space. As Rodolphe Gouin reminds us there are many ways to define and measure the effects of time, and the advantages and limitations of several methods were compared. There is the timing of the electoral decision, tackled by Janet Box-Steffensmeier in an original way inspired by epidemiological models (*survival analysis*), the time as interval between a first and a second order election (Raoul Magni Berton), biographical time among AIDES's activists, modelised as career sequences by Pilippe Blanchard and Olivier Fillieule (*Optimal matching analysis*), time-event studied by Jean-Gabriel Contamin's work on petitions outlining the biases of *protest event analysis* (PEA) and the way to get round them. But also the time of the survey, in the long run, the time spent in the relation between interviewer and interviewee, as Djamel Mermat in his analysis of activists in the their process of rallying the National Front, or Alexandra Oeser studying how German relate to the Nazi past. Both insist on the limits of the « one shot » interview to pour grasp the subjects with their contradictions, their evolutions, and their interactions.

A large debate opened more generally on the very notion of « context ». At the beginning we had in mind ecological analysis, as the one proposed by Mattéi Dogan in an original approach (decilization) of correlations between religion, class and votes measured at the level of the 'cantons'. As for Guillaume Roux he suggested instead to take into account the subjective context, the way the people interviewed feel about insecurity at the local level and with what effect on their electoral choice. But the context can also be manipulated by the researcher in order to test the effect of the variables, in or out the laboratory, as for the electoral experimentations presented by Jean François Laslier, Nicolas Sauger and Karine Van Der Straeten. The context can also refer to the scale of analysis as in the study by Geneviève Genicot, Delphine Deschaux Beaume and Séverine Germain on networks of actors, observed at three different levels –local, national and European. Lastly it can be a new type of context, the Web, asking for a radical change of perspective to grasp the relations between actors and the dynamic of opinions, both in the instant and in the long run. Gary King proposes an original method of automatic coding to infer, from a sample of bloggers, the way Americans feel about George Bush. While Dario Colazzo, François Xavier Dudouet, Iona Manolescu, Benjamin Nguyen, Pierre Senellart and Antoine Vion, propose a sophisticated network analysis to deal with relational data bases (actually mailing lists).

Many questions were asked, many research tracks opened during these three days. Mathieu Brugidou's little graph gives us a suggestive condensed presentation of part of our debates (seer infra). And if no method can be dissociated from its implementation, the round table was a success, for all participants played the game fairly, disclosing their recipes and their results. We hope it will be followed by many others.

Nonna Mayer

TR1(s3) : Inference, context, new approaches : a common space of discussion ?

