

COMPARATIVE METHODS AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO
CROSS-FERTILIZE RESEARCH ON HE

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STRUCTURE

1. International comparisons

- Tilly's different types of comparisons
- Some challenges of international comparison

2. Socio-historical approaches

- Traditional historical perspective as non theoretical approach
- Some ways to theorise change
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I. INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

I.1 CHARLES TILLY: 4 TYPES OF HUGE COMPARISONS OF BIG STRUCTURES & LARGE PROCESSES

Compare to:

- place our own situation in perspective
- help in the identification of causes and effects

→ historical - multidimensional comparison: grasp contextual mechanisms and processes of **social change**

→ past social relations and their residues – material, ideological, etc. – constrain present social relations (ex: May 68 and French Univ)

- Some false postulates important for HE analysis

Society is a separate thing : each is composed of autonomous culture, gvnt, econ, HE...

Social change is a coherent phenomenon, explicable “en bloc”

Social changes go through a succession of standard stages (evolution + advancement)

5 ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF HISTORICAL COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY

1. Comparative historical analyses allow sociology to **proceed to falsification**:
 - Confront theories to empirical evidence from various spatio-temporal contexts
2. **Historical reconstruction** of the phenomena studied is essential : most **social processes** only reveal their **significance ex-post**
3. **Socio-political contexts** are central to the study of **processes** which are always **historically and culturally entrenched**
4. Political and social change in a specific formation impinges on the trajectories of other formations : importance of **synchronic comparison**
5. The trajectories of a social formation influence its subsequent trajectories and the space of ulterior possibilities: importance **of diachronic comparison**
 - Analyse social change by taking into account the role of social and political litigations and not only the strict economic, political or ideological structures
 - Explain how different modes of social construction lead to similar issues in spite of specific spatio-temporal contexts

SYSTEMATIC COMPARISON OF STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

“Big structures, large processes and huge comparisons (...) provide the stanchions to which we lash our historically contingent statements.”

➤ Analyses of structures and processes operate at **four historical levels**, all of them involving comparisons:

1. World-historical level: to fix the **special properties of an era** and **to place it in the ebb and flow of human history** (e.g rise and fall of empires - ex: western schism or Protestant reforms: increase in the number of universities)

2. World-system level : to discern the **essential connections and variations** within the largest sets of **strongly interdependent social structures** → rise and fall of academic circulations

3. Macrohistorical level: to seek to account for **particular big structures and large processes** and to chart their **alternate forms**: how massification took place though diverse restructuring of HE systems depending on countries

4. Microhistorical level: to trace the **encounters of groups and individuals with those structures and processes** - “to explain how people actually experienced them” (p.61) : how some women experienced HE in the Middle Ages helped by specific local configurations of actors

4 TYPES OF STATEMENTS RESULTING FROM COMPARISON

Individualizing :

- Treats each case as unique
- Takes one instance at a time
- To contrast specific instances of a given phenomenon as a mean of grasping the peculiarities of each case:
- Minimize its common property with other instances
 - interrogates the singularity of each society/HE system

A descriptive step towards comparison – selecting the cases to be compared

Universalizing :

- Identifies common properties among all instances of a phenomenon / establishes that every instance of a phenomenon follows essentially the same rule
 - ❖ **Ex:** AA policies first developed where structural discrimination existed in access / in societies that acknowledged ethnic diversity as components of their national identity

Variation-finding: supposed to establish a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining systematic differences among instances.

❖ **Ex:** pioneers societies in Europe / feminisation of access to HE : different processes

Encompassing: places different instances at various locations within the same system, on the way to explaining their characteristics as a function of their varying relationships to the system as a whole (ex: Wallerstein World System Analysis)

→ circulation of women and opening of HE access

→ Increasing number of African students in China as the result of Chinese economic and cultural proactive policies in a context of European relative closing – interdependencies.

→ **One research can articulate different comparisons:**

- universalizing (common properties) – variation findings (distinct features)
- individualizing (get the characteristics of one case / others) – encompassing (focusing on the interdependencies, relative positions...)

→ ***Depends on the research question addressed***

I.2 CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

CINHEKS AS A CASE

CHANGE IN NETWORKS, HIGHER EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE
SOCIETY (2009-12/15)

OBJECTIVES

- main objective was to understand how HEIs are related to surrounding societies?
- countries: D, FI, PT, Russia, UK, USA
- Methods: 1) institutional profiling (publicly available sources) => 2) institutional case studies, 3) social network analysis (questionnaire), 4) discourse analysis (knowledge society discourses), 5) historical analysis of countries (realized only at institutional level)

RESEARCH STRATEGY

take social dynamics seriously => from lexical similarities to functional similarities;
what does this mean?

- I) trying to find basic units of the same nature (Becher (1989): soft ⇔ pure, hard ⇔ applied) => find the same function in each national HE system
- 2) defining the same kind of HEIs: **local orientation vs. global orientation** (different national systems of HE: **dual system** (fachhochschule) **vs. unified system**, **big vs. small HEIs**, **provincial vs. metropolitan**

SOME OUTCOMES

- all HEIs have the same dimensions:
 - local
 - national
 - global,
 - but they differ in size & importance
- theoretical: networked knowledge society

UNIVERSALISING AND VARIATION FINDINGS
COMPARING THE SOCIAL ORIGIN OF
ACADEMICS

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PARENTS' EDUC: A UNIVERSAL EFFECT ... WITH INTENSITY VARIATIONS BETWEEN COUNTRIES

Group 1 (moderated influence Inf. 3)	Finland ; Norway ; UK ; the Netherlands ; Germany
Group 2 (strong influence, 3 to 8)	Ireland; Austria ; Switzerland
Group 3 (very strong influence, as much as 6)	Italy ; Croatia ; Portugal ; Poland

Table a : groups of countries by range of parental education effect on the probability to be an academic

FATHER OR MOTHER ? VARIATION FINDINGS

- **Mothers' level of education** : **less influence** on access to academic prof. than father in the most unequal countries regarding access to academia (Croatia, Italia, Poland and Portugal)
- **While for the least unequal countries** : relatively **similar** effects of father and mother education.
- In 2 of the 3 countries composing group 2 (Austria and Switzerland), **the education level of mothers influences MORE than the fathers'**

VARIABLE EFFECTS / ACADEMIC GENDER

Everywhere except in Finland, **women academics have parents** (father AND mother) **more educated than their male counterparts**

→ **Women compensate their gender by their social origin**

➤ **Variations :**

- Even more so (compared with men) in countries where social inequalities in access to academia are the strongest (Croatia, Italy, Poland and Portugal, group 3)
- **Mother Education** matters more for women than for men in conservative countries
- *Reduced inequalities in access to the profession (group 1) = less differences between men and women*
- **Finland** : the most equalitarian and where academic men have parents (father and mother) with a higher level of education than academic women.

→ *Interest of synchronic analysis*

What about how this effect evolves between generation?

- General trend : reduction of the hold of parents' education between generations (in 2011, - de 35 years-old, 36-45, 46-66)
- But exceptions : no reduction between 1st and 3^d generation in the UK (father and mother educ.) and Germany (father educ.)
- **And** : a non necessarily linear evolution between generations (ex: Finland, Norway, Poland, Switzerland, Ireland, decrease then increase in the effect of father's educ.)
- **Groups' evolution** : same group compositions for the 2 oldest generations but for the youngest : Ireland and Austria from group 2 to group 1. Conversely, UK from group 1 to group 2.
 - → changes over time.... Importance of diachronic analysis !

2. EXPLORING VARIATIONS

How to explain variations ?

- 2 variables tested :
 - Massification process and its temporality
 - Academic return of the profession

MASSIFICATION – FROM UNIVERSALISING TO INDIVIDUALISING OR ENCOMPASSING

- Increased the number of available positions and the diversity of students (and thus potential candidates)
- Trends of concomitant variations between inequalities in access to the profession and massification
 - Exception: Italy - high level of inequalities / massification
 - *Individualizing comparison*: exploring the specificities of the Italian case.
 - ❖ **Ex**: history of access: local aristocracies' long hold on the profession
- 3d generation : Switzerland - weak massification, middle range inequalities in access to the profession → effect of internationalisation of the profession – encompassing comparison : exploring the interdependencies with other systems

WAGES EFFECT?

A General trend (youngest generation)

- Inequalities appear inversely proportional to salaries... **until a certain level**

→ less inequalities because access to the profession is less of a social issue?
(less general salaries dispersion as well)

- But the opposite is also true: the most unequal countries are those with the lowest wages - but maybe also the countries where professional alternatives are less interesting

OTHER EXPLICATIVE LEADS TO EXPLORE

- Temporality of women's access to HE
- Gender contracts... (H: mothers' level of education have more influence if they don't work?)
- Political regime depending of the period under scrutiny and political party holding the power - Cf. nazis, communists, social-democrats, conservators....)
- ❖ **Ex** : during the German Nazi regime → democratisation of access to HE studies and the academic prof. 25% of profs of low social origin between 1933 and 1945 (Zneimer, 1978)
- Organisation, structure of careers : long precariousness period before tenure supposes family financial resources (Germany, Switzerland....)

CONCLUSION: BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMPARISONS

- **No linearity in social processes (diminution of social inequalities in access to the profession)**
- Nuanced concomitant variations... and threshold effects
- Configurations of contextual dimensions
- Similar situations resulting from distinct processes
 - Call for a socio-historical contextualisation of economic, political, and social contexts to grasp the place of the academic profession in the social organisation - comprehensive multidimensional approach
 - And qualitative work to study hiring mechanisms and their transformation over time

Type of research	Analysis by cases	Analysis by variables
Method	Contextualised analyses, historical, qualitative	Statistical approach, quantitative analysis centred on variables (often considered independently from their context)
Material	Diverse (interviews, archives...)	Statistics
Number of cases	Small	Large
Level of abstraction	Limited	High
Level of generalisation	Complex, singularity	Higher level of generality
Limits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Little ability to generalize 2. Categories little transposable, too rooted in the fieldwork 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of contextualisation 2. Test of abstracted hypothesis 3. Reliability of data
Research goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formulate hypothesis 2. Test the pertinence of specific theories (counter-example, deviant cases) 3. Nuance a theory 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make hypothesis based on large samples 2. Confirm theories 3. Easier generalisation 4. More synthetic results

(Source: Vigour, 2005)

II. SOCIO-HISTORICAL COMPARISON

2.1 TRADITIONAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AS NON THEORETICAL APPROACH

HISTORY?

- **social phenomenon** (things that have happened in the past)
- **Tradition** (focus on future) & **Legacy** (weight of the past)
- **Academic discipline** / *differences in approaches*: History of Art, Economic History, Social History, Cultural History, History of Ideas, Ancient / Classical history, National (nation state) histories ...

HISTORY AS A DISCIPLINE

- **Periodisation:** 1) historical periods (Ancient history, The Middle Ages; 15th century, 16th century ...) 2) thematically (Renaissance, Baroque, industrialisation)
- construct temporal entities in order to explain a) typical ways of thinking (ideologies) / period; b) main challenges for societies (institutions, individuals), c) modes of production, or dominant fashion / period
- ⇔ semi-theoretical: aiming to understand typical human behaviour of the period (in spatial & material conditions) rather than trying to construct cross-temporal generalisations => often non-theoretical: does not utilise theories / eclectic use of theories

HISTORICAL THINKING

- Focus on **continuities vs. discontinuities**
- **Context:** aims to define which is the relevant context for each case: political, religious, cultural, economic?
- Explains past events as **a process** => understanding & constructing **social dynamics**
- Sensitive to **historical anachronisms**: how did people in the past think? Same ways as us???
- N.B.: **Historical materialism** defined historical development of societies as the history of progress of mankind (based on Hegel's dialectic: thesis - anti-thesis – synthesis)

RESEARCH OF THE PAST (HISTORY)

- Based on **historical sources**: written (documents ... letters) physical materials (buildings, clothes, ...), oral
- **Methods**: 1) critical analyses of written sources: who does what? to whom? for what purpose? ⇔ what the author could have done, relation to author's other products, 2) originality? 3) archaeological excavations, 4) critical analyses of visual information (artifacts, art ...)
- Use of **multiple methods** when possible
- Often more interested in **what and how** something happened in each case than in theoretical explanations
- **Dialogue with the past**: modern questions to historical sources opens new perspectives to the past

ON NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM

- *new institutional theory* (Powell & DiMaggio 1983). Aims to explain the tendency of organisations within various organisational fields to resemble each other.
- Basic question: Why organisations have the tendency to converge (*isomorphism*), even though they could diverge: *coercive isomorphism*; *normative isomorphism*; *mimetic isomorphism*
- “**Coercive isomorphism** occurs because organizations are motivated to avoid sanctions available to organizations on which they are dependent. **Normative isomorphism** occurs because organizations are motivated to respect social obligations. And **mimetic isomorphism** occurs because organizations are motivated by their interpretation of others’ successful behavior”. (Greenwood et al. (2008, 7)

PATH DEPENDENCY

- Neo-institutionalism: forces of convergence
- Historical institutionalism: contemporary and future actions of HEIs depend on past experiences and decisions made... contemporary decisions are limited by choices and decisions made in the past
- **Problem:** short historical perspective –often used to explain recent changes (reforms)
- **Historical layers:** easier to start a new function than to discontinue existing ones ⇔ misses historical layers in teaching & research

MAIN CHALLENGE: ORGANISATIONS OR INSTITUTIONS?

- Universities seen traditionally **as organisations** => hierarchical relations, administration & management, schools / faculties; different groups & their interests (professors, other staff & students)
- **social institution:** search for truth (research), education & learning, mental growth (*Bildung*) (teaching & learning); socialization of new generations (institutions are building blocks of social order / Streeck & Theelen 2005).
- HEIs (universities) are **BOTH organisations AND institutions** in a society

HISTORICAL LAYERS AS AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

- **Historical layers:** 1) a **metaphor** (archaeology); 2) a **human experience:** complexity in practices & habits developed over time; 3) **an intellectual device** (Foucault 1969, Giddens 1984)
- **Historical institutionalism:** path dependency; context matters; the conflict between policy reforms and traditional practices (Christensen 2012; Thelen & Streeck 2005)
- **Problems:** teaching & research excluded; organisational structures over-emphasized; historical trends ignored; failing to explain internal processes in HEIs

ON HISTORICAL LAYERS AS AN INTELLECTUAL DEVICE

- Focus attention to the origins of historical layers in teaching, research & administration & their interplay
- Pay attention to structuration of daily practices into social structures
- => co-existence of different layers of practices in order to understand better the dynamics in universities

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM

		<i>Result of change</i>	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
<i>Process of change</i>	Incremental	Reproduction by adaptation	Gradual transformation
	Abrupt	Survival and return	Breakdown and replacement

Figure 1.1 Types of institutional change: processes and results

Streeck W., Thelen K., 2005, « Introduction: Institutional change in advanced political economies »

ABRUPT CHANGES? HISTORICAL EVENTS AND THE LONG-TERM ROAD

When comparing : importance of history to identify processes and causality

➤ How we get there:

- **Braudel**: “the useful agreement should be made (...) on **long term**, this essential road of history, not the only one but the one that **raises on his own all the main issues of social structures**, present and past. It is the only language that links history to present, and produces an indivisible whole.” (Braudel, 1969, p.6)

→ question continuity/discontinuity

→ long term recalls the essential **historicity of social facts**

- Braudel : important events are those “that will have consequences”, / “events as the foam of the sea waves : opposed to long term analysis. Perceived as a unique human act”.
- The return of the event (Ricoeur, 1992) : event as a necessary observation in the structure-event couple

Sewell W. H., 1990

➤ **Course of history:** determined by a **succession of events** that are largely contingents

→ An event opens a plurality of possibilities

- "Events can be defined as a **subcategory of relatively rare facts** that **significantly transform structures**."

➤ **Hypothesis:**

- events are "path dependent": what happened at a specific point in time will affect the possible results of a sequence of events happening at a later moment in time
- events can change :
 1. the equilibrium of causal strengths at play,
 2. the logic whereby consequences are being produced by occurrences or circumstances
- Events produce historical changes **by transforming cultural categories** which structure and constrain human action.

→ Because causalities operate in social relations depending at least partly upon the contents and relation of cultural categories, events can transform social causality.
- Structures emerging from events are always the **transformation of pre-existing structures** - thus **continuity and change**.

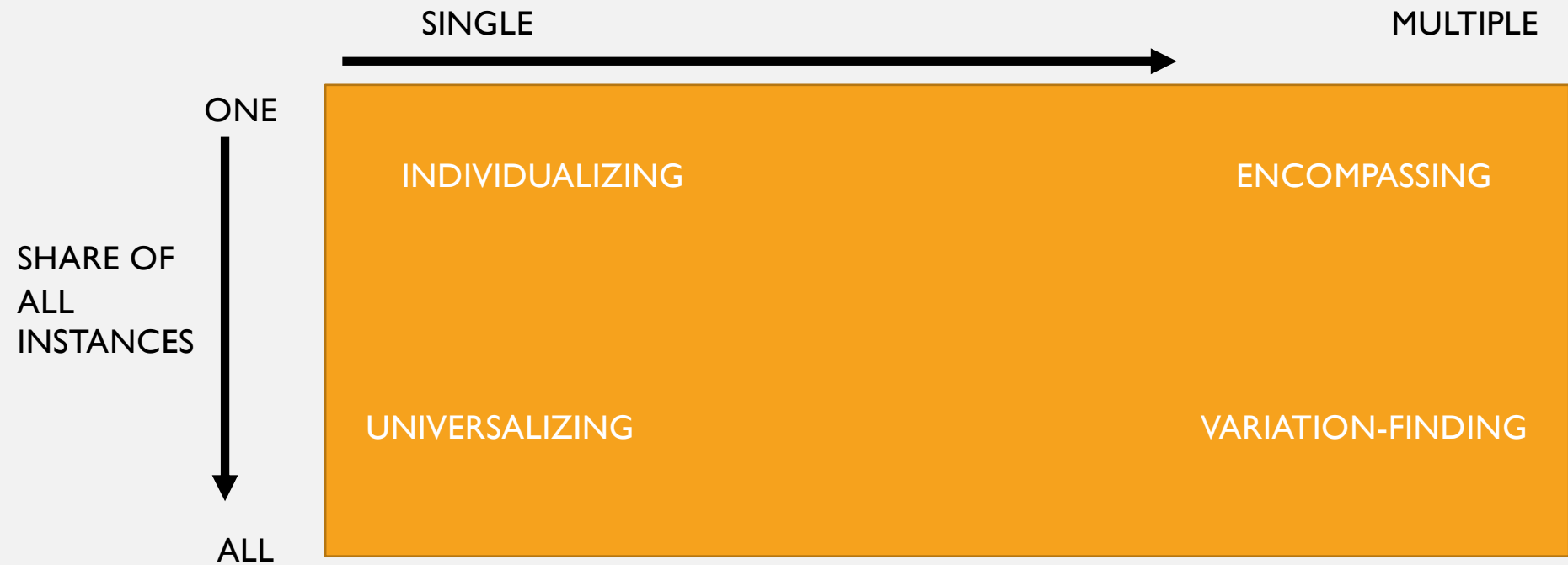
HOW TO APPLY AN EVENT APPROACH TO HE?

- Events are only possible to identify ex-post
- Long-term... identifying changes – the context of changes – possible events pushing in this direction
- ❖ **Ex:** access to HE - appears to be:
 - Facilitated when number of HEI's are increasing
 - In the long-term: effect of the multiplication of instituted powers regarding the creation of HEIs (competition to produce an administration to sustain those who govern – competition to produce skilled work force to compete in production and innovation)
 - **Effect of Schism, Protestant reform, revolutions... transformed the configurations of actors in which HEIs are embedded**
 - **And the characteristics of the student body called in...**

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MULTIPLICITY OF FORMS



TILLY, p.81

WHAT THIS CLASSIFICATION CLASSIFIES

It does :

- Not depend on the strict internal logic of the comparison
- Nor on the nature of the structures and processes compared (large/small scale, simple or complex, dynamic or static, etc.)
 - But on the relationship between observation and theory: the design of the comparative method chosen depends on what one seeks to explain

Comparisons are :

- General to the extent that their users are attempting to make all cases in a category conform to the same principle
- Multiple to the extent their users are trying to establish that the cases in a category take multiple forms:
 - classification of comparison strategies !

Table 1.1 Institutional change: five types of gradual transformation

	<i>Displacement</i>	<i>Layering</i>	<i>Drift</i>	<i>Conversion</i>	<i>Exhaustion</i>
Definition	Slowly rising salience of subordinate relative to dominant institutions	New elements attached to existing institutions gradually change their status and structure	Neglect of institutional maintenance in spite of external change resulting in slippage in institutional practice on the ground	Redeployment of old institutions to new purposes; new purposes attached to old structures	Gradual breakdown (withering away) of institutions over time
Mechanism	Defection	Differential growth	Deliberate neglect	Redirection, reinterpretation	Depletion
Elaboration	Institutional incoherence opening space for deviant behavior	Faster growth of new institutions created on the edges of old ones	Change in institutional outcomes effected by (strategically) neglecting adaptation to changing circumstances	Gaps between rules and enactment due to: (1) Lack of foresight: limits to (unintended consequences of) institutional design	Self-consumption: the normal working of an institution undermines its external preconditions
	Active cultivation of a new 'logic' of action inside an existing institutional setting	New fringe eats into old core	Enactment of institution changed, not by reform of rules, but by rules remaining unchanged in the face of evolving external conditions	(2) Intended ambiguity of institutional rules: institutions are compromises	Decreasing returns: generalization changes cost-benefit relations
	Rediscovery and activation of dormant or latent institutional resources	New institutional layer siphons off support for old layer		(3) Subversion: rules reinterpreted from below	Overextension: limits to growth
	'Invasion' and assimilation of foreign practices	Presumed 'fix' destabilizing existing institutions		(4) Time: changing contextual conditions and coalitions open up space for redeployment	
		Compromise between old and new slowly turning into defeat of the old			

2. MOTHERS AND FATHERS LEVEL OF EDUCATION: VARIATION FINDINGS

COUNTRIES	Odds-ratio for fathers	Odds-ratio for mothers
Finland	2	1.8
Norway	2.2	1.9
Germany	2.4	2.5
the Netherlands	2.5	2.5
UK	2.9	2.3
Austria	3.9	6.9
Ireland	4.3	3.3
Switzerland	5	7.3
Poland	12.3	8.5
Croatia	13.5	11.7
Portugal	14.2	10.3
Italy	16.3	12.3

Table 4 : odds-ratio – effects of father and mother educ by country

3. VARIABLE EFFECTS DEPENDING ON THE ACADEMIC GENDER

Countries	Odds-ratio men father	Odds-ratio women father	Odds-ratio men mother	Odds-ratio women mother
Norway	1.9	2.9	1.4	3
Germany	2.1	3.2	2.1	3.6
the Netherlands	2.2	3.2	1.8	3.8
Finland	2.4	1.6	2	1.6
UK	2.6	3.3	1.9	2.7
Ireland	3.7	5	2.6	4.4
Austria	3.9	4	6.1	8.5
Switzerland	4.7	5.6	6.4	8.8
Poland	11	15.4	7.2	11.8
Croatia	11.3	16.2	10.9	12.6
Portugal	12.2	16.9	8.7	12.4
Italy	14.6	20.4	10.7	15.8

Table 3: odds-ratio academic's father and mothers educ by sex and country