

Social science theory and comparative research, case studies (and measurement and impact assessment)

HUMR 5191: Research methodology and thesis development

February 5, 2016

Bård A. Andreassen



General points regards research methods

- Translate a human rights issue into a researchable question
 - Puzzle: argument, hypothesis (theory-driven, evidence-driven)
- Different types of research methods;
 - Key methodological principles in different disciplinary approaches
 - Mixed methods
 - Method used depend on question asked
- Develop a **research design** and develop skills to carry out a research project
 - From problem/theme through RQ to theory and methods, to inference
- Research vs academic research

Outline 05.02.16

1. Types of social scientific knowledge
2. Groups of social science theory
3. The research process
4. One case studies
 - Single, comprehensive
 - Embedded
5. Comparative approaches
 - MSSD
 - MDSD
6. Heuristic models

Three types of scientific knowledge

- Interpretation
 - Understanding
 - Explanation and causality
-
- Do they all belong to both science and humanities?
 - Distinction between humanities/social sciences and physical sciences, or *unitary science*?

- **Interpretation** (eg., hermeneutics): Intentions and meaning (Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969)

Art 31.(1) A treaty shall be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose

- Understanding: "grasping how pieces of information relate to one another" (Faye, 2014)
- Explanation – answers to the “Why” question:
 - but also “how-, what- and which-questions can be regarded as explanation-seeking questions” (Faye, 2014)
 - Dependent and independent variables

Interpretation

Interpretation is a special form of explanation

*Hermeneutics as a form of interpretative **orientation** –interpretation of written texts*

Hermeneutic consistency refers to analysis of texts for a coherent or comprehensive explanation, in con-text

Hermeneutics in sociological thinking

- Interpretation and understanding of social events through *analysis of their meanings for the human participants in the events*
- Emphasis on the context of social behavior, tradition - Gadamer
- Con-textual understanding may reveal that what is meaningful in one context is irrelevant in another

Explanation

Example:

Relationship between education and spending

Correlation

Causality

Intervening variables - triggers

Groups of social theories

Research is done within theoretical frameworks

“Groups of social theory” for explaining and understanding social action (purposive agency):

- Rationality
- Structuralism
- Culturalism
- Constructivism

And combinations

Groups of social theories and comparative analysis

- Social sciences - research orientation:
 - Empirical: Why, how, when and where (comparative)
 - Normative-empirical: *What should be, what ought to be...*
 - Empirical studies of normative issues
 - E.g. human rights studies, democracy studies
- Diversity in approaches, combinations
 - Rationalism Agency, self interest, calculations
 - Structuralism Structures, institutions, markets: externalities
 - Culturalism Belief systems, traditions, “invisibility”
 - Constructivism Social phenomena – socially and historically constructed

Rationalism

Rational choice, game theory, public choice

- Intentionality, meaningful agency
- Rationality
 - Self interest, preferences, utility maximization, autonomy
 - Calculations in social behavior: LOG frame? Human rights strategies?
 - The role of social norms?
- Social consequences, outcomes of individual choices:
 - Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups (Olson1965)
 - Game theory: Free rider dilemma, yet people organise!
 - Nested games (G. Tsebelis)
 - Why do torturers torture?
 - Regime transition: “Games” of hard-liners and reformers

Structuralism

- How do institutions, and collective units influence developments and conditions for human rights?
 - Social class; conflict entrepreneurs, “state-builders”, the clergy, landowners, peasants workers
 - Other structural factors? Institutions – regime types, geography, culture
 - Focus on social and political power and HR as outcome of struggles
 - Political economy: How do economic interest and power influence political and human rights outcome?
 - Main dictum:
 - Individuals are embedded in relationships, dependencies, social contexts that provide conditions for human rights fulfilment
- Examples: Poverty, climate change, markets, globalisation
- *Longue durée* studies : The classical model of Richard P. Claude

Cultural (3)

Similarities with structural approaches but focus on

- Shared meanings, inter-subjective understandings and norms that develop between collectives of individuals (groups) and some times states (regional studies)
 - Identities are shaped by culture, customs, traditions
 - Relativism/universalism debate, eg. radical relativisms
 - Uniqueness vs commonality
 - Discourses and the “translation” and interpretation of meanings in contexts: discursive power about the world, incl. rights

- Symbols and production of meaning and identity; “togetherness”, social trust, social capital
- “Micro foundations” of human rights violations
- The Clash of Civilization hypothesis

Constructivism

*John Gerard Ruggie (1998).
"What Makes the World Hang
Together? Neo-utilitarianism
and the Social Constructivist
Challenge". International
Organization (CUP) 52*

*Alexander Wendt, Social
Theory of International
Politics (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press,
1999)*

*Katrine Sikkink (with T Risse):
The Power of Human Rights,
1999/2010*

Social relations are socially constructed and historically situated (situational studies)

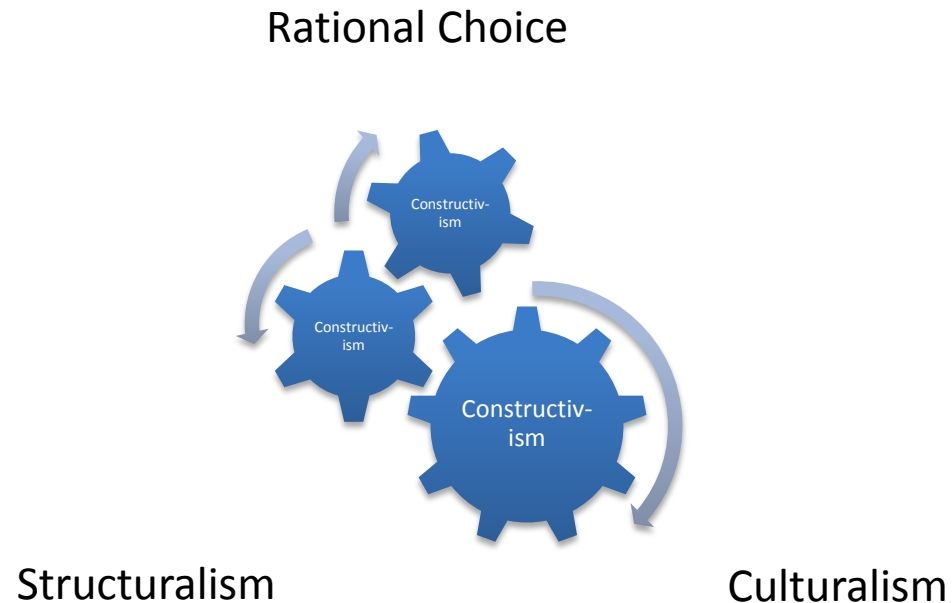
“Structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature”

Examples: “The UDHR – a negotiated package of human rights”

Hand out: *The spiral model of HR change – mixed perspectives*

Social facts: caused or intended? (3)

Combining perspectives and theories of social action



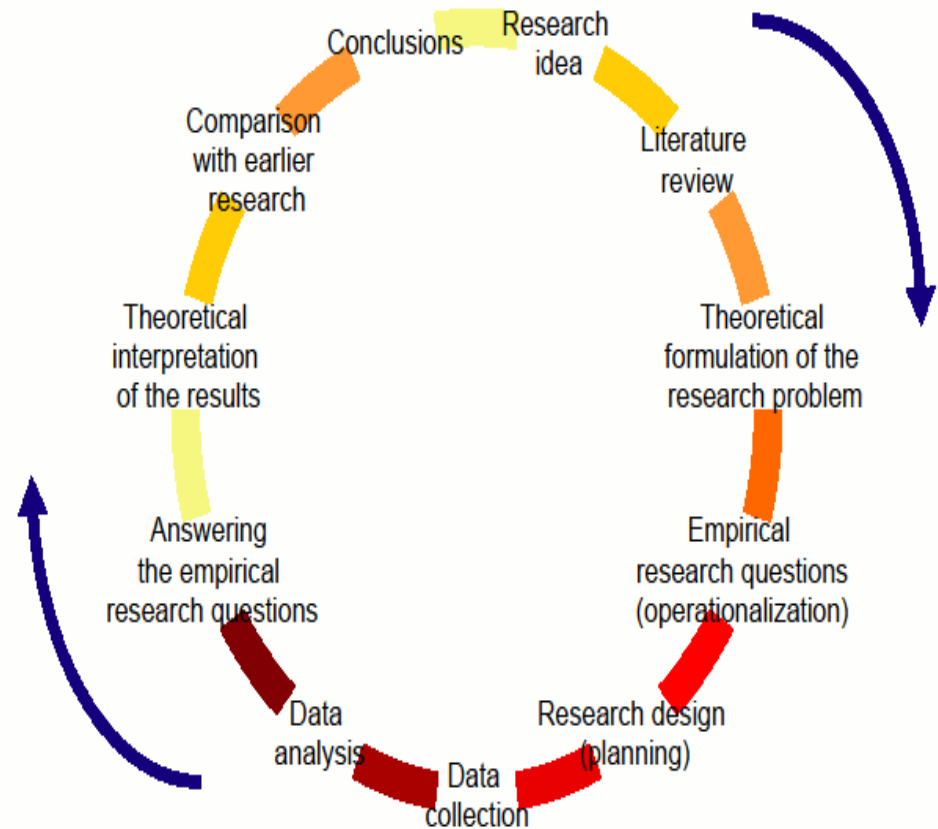
What is the point? (3)

Re- search: Discover new facts, knowledge

Epistemological theoretical traditions and models give direction and methods for doing research

Falsification/testability (Karl Popper): disproving a proposition – our *ultimate aim: possible to negate a statement : All milk is white*

The research process



Quantitative v. qualitative approaches (3)

- Quantitative or statistical:
 - Identifying units that can be counted, compared
 - Formulating hypothesis (theories) about which variables that account for the variations: Causal explanation; dependent and independent variables; intertwining variables
 - Establishing cases of co-variation or even causal links
 - Example: Are there fewer cases of torture in established democracies than in new democracies? Many cases
 - Bivariate analysis: Is there a relationship between level of formal education and level income? Many cases
 - Multivariate relationships: Add age, ethnicity, gender etc. to education and income. Many cases
- Qualitative or interpretative:
 - Identifying social phenomena and their meaning
 - Understand the meaning they acquire as part of social action and in context
 - Example: The role of civil society in country X in reducing use of torture

Structuring research

What questions to study?

What data are relevant?

What data to collect?

How to analyze that data?

- Research question - choice of methods
 - Methodology as choice
- Make explicit the theoretical perspective from which they will approach the case
 - Rational, structural, cultural, constructivist
 - Other way of distinguishing theories: individual, group, process
- Modelling and research design
 - A study's questions.
 - A study's propositions (if any).
 - A study's units of analysis.
 - The logic linking of the data to the propositions
 - The criteria for interpreting the findings
- Mixed methods: typical for human rights?
 - Case studies (example)
 - Qualitative data and description (historical)
 - Quantitative data, updates on the case
 - Legal provisions (interpretations) to be applied
 - Data collection –
 - case law
 - Surveys
 - semi-structured interviews
 - focus groups
 - Illustrative contrasting case

Case Studies

Why case studies?

- In-depth, critical case examination, unique case, revelatory cases (not earlier accessed)

How?

- Holistic vs embedded
 - Embedded – subunits that throw light on the case
 - Grasp of issue?
 - Protocol development (how to og about it, when etc?)
- Process tracking (organizational studies: meetings, role performance)

Comparative analysis

Comparing **VARIATION** on human rights across **countries**

Multiple case studies

- Empirical: Large N, high level of generalisation
 - Problems: Availability, validity and reliability of data
 - Examples: CIRI, Freedom House, Political Terror Scale
- Empirical/interpretative: Small N; quantitative and qualitative data
 - Problems: Explanatory power (level of generalisation), reliability of data
 - Examples: studies of truth commissions
 - The Power of Human Rights (Risse et al)
- Interpretative: One case (single country)
 - Problem: Explanatory power (level of generalisation)
- Choice of method:
 - Depends on purpose of analysis or research question

Comparative analysis

Why comparing?

- Statistical control
- Rule out rival explanations
- Extensive coverage of cases
- Ability to make strong inferences
- Identification of deviant cases (outliers)

Most similar system design

- comparing very similar cases which only differ in the *dependent variable*, on the assumption that this would make it easier to find those *independent variables* which explain the presence/absence of the dependent variable

Most different system design

- comparing very different cases, all of which have in common the same *dependent variable*, so that any other circumstance which is present in all the cases can be regarded as the *independent variable*

Bringing in power – A Comparative Analysis of HR and power

Research project 2009-2013

Andreassen & Crawford (eds.) *Human Rights, Power and Civic Action: Comparative Analyses of Struggles for Rights in Developing Societies* (Routledge 2013, *Research in Human Rights Series*)

Background

- The missing dimension of power in the human rights and development literature
- Much emphasis on ‘empowerment’, but not on power as an obstacle to securing rights
- Statement: Need for understanding how “deeply embedded power relations and structures are barriers to securing rights” in development

Project aims

To understand the interrelationship between *forms* and *uses* of power and *the impact* (positive/negative) on human rights

Academic: Introduce power analysis into human rights research

Practical: Develop insights and lessons for human rights advocacy

Objectives

- To examine **HR/power/civic action** in differing socio-political contexts
- To identify **obstacles and constraints** on securing rights for people living in poverty
- To explore whether rights promoters have **challenged** and **altered** power structures
- To contribute to debates about the relationship between CPR and ESCR, and between **governance** and human rights

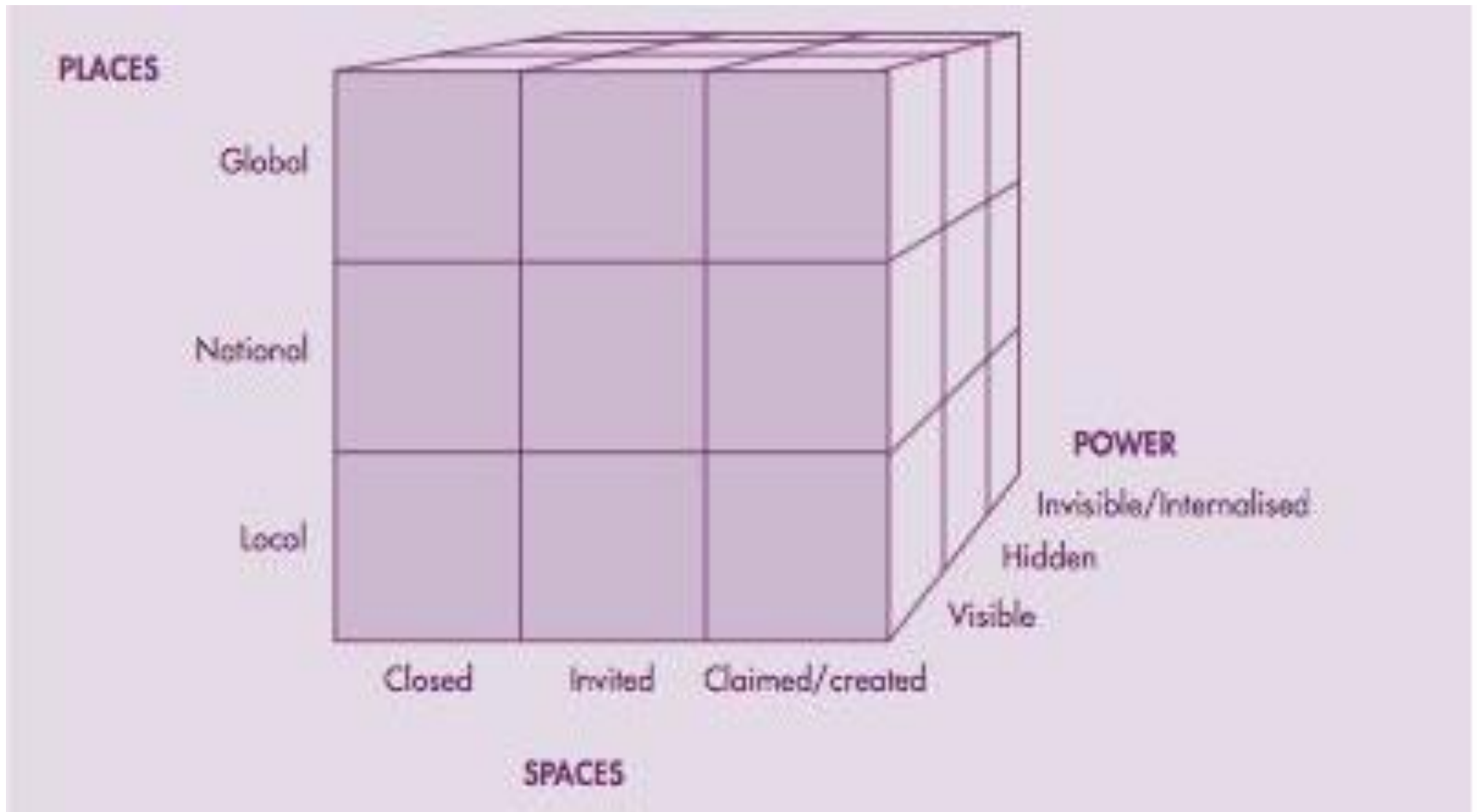
Research Questions

- In what ways have *struggles for human rights* in contexts of poverty been *constrained* by power relations and structural inequalities?
- In seeking to secure rights, how and to what extent have non-governmental human rights promoters been able to build *countervailing power* and *challenge power structures* at both local and national levels?
- To what extent have rights-promoting organisations been successful in *transforming power structures* and *securing rights*, especially for vulnerable groups and people living in poverty?

Qualitative methodology

- **Organisational studies** in 6 countries: i.e. in-depth case studies of selected rights-promoting organisations within distinct country contexts
- **Country selection**: differing political contexts with regard to political regime and degrees of democratisation, and thus varying 'opportunity structures' for civic action
- Adopted '**power cube**' as analytical tool

Gaventa's power cube



A. Giddens' and *structuration*

- Social structures exist, but they are produced, reproduced, challenged and transformed by human agents
- Therefore **continuous cycles or dialectics** in which actors influence structures and structures shape actions – social/political interaction: exchange of power between actors
- **Structuration** as a bridge between structure and agency

Research starting point

- Undertake power analysis to gain critical insight into how power structures limit claims for human rights
- Awareness of coercive power potentially leads to social action to challenge and transform such power structures, thereby enhancing prospects for realising rights
- What did we find regarding power constraints?

Visible power

Widespread explicit or implicit constraining state action, including failure to reform customary practices

Examples

- Opposition to Domestic Violence Bill in Ghana, esp. from Women's Minister.
- Resistance to lobbying for land reform in Kenya – both from government / regime and hidden power of clientelist networks – that is, **nested power**
- In China, ZLAS – women's rights organisation – had to **negotiate** with the **visible power of the party-State** and the All China Women's Federation, a mass social organisation.
- Increasing role of **visible corporate power**

Hidden power

Pulling strings behind the scenes, agenda setting

Examples:

- In Ghana, WACAM up against hidden power of mining companies
 - The mining companies used [financial resources to influence local power structures](#) (local governments, chiefs, community leaders) and gain their support.
- White farm-owners in post-apartheid South Africa were able to secure the collusion (co-option) of local officials in a conflict with farm workers
- Hidden power of [patriarchy](#) in several case studies
- ‘Hiddenness’ vs. transparency – a basic issue in a human rights critique of governance

Invisible power

Harder to perceive; concerns attitudes, life views, behavioral norms, often embedded in social traditions and customs

Examples:

- Ghana – Bill on Domestic Violence (2003-2009)
- Patriarchal structures, socialization of inequality, found across the cases
- China: ‘Stigmatizing the weak’, e.g. migrant workers, and their ‘internalization of prejudice’, undermining their self-esteem and capacity to mobilize for rights
- Patterns of invisible power – hard to change and also how to strike a balance between critiquing repressive practices without undermining the legitimacy of the entire culture?

General findings on power constraints

Confirmed the significance of dominant power as an impediment to human rights realisation and that, as a result, claims for rights have met with limited success

- Power constraints found in all political contexts
- **Visible power** – operates in more **legitimate** forms (state institutions, parliament) **in open political systems**, but tends to be **exercised in more repressive ways** in closed and **authoritarian** systems (Zimbabwe, China).
- Different forms of power often nested inside each other - reinforcing each other
- **Visible power** – more **prevalent** when used to defend rights related to **elite interests** (e.g. land)
- Hidden and **invisible power** – typically prevalent in constraining claims for **women's rights**

Challenging power and building countervailing power

How did organizations challenge power?

Three dimensions:

- **Civic action strategies**
- **Spaces of engagement**
- **Forms of countervailing power**

Strategies: Cooperation, confrontation, alliance-building

- **Cooperation** in all contexts
- **Pragmatism** – Zimbabwe & China – little scope for opposition
- More scope for success in open and democratic contexts
- **Confrontation** – mobilisation and public protests
 - Abhalali baseMjondolo (shack dwellers movement) in SA
 - WOZA in Zimbabwe
- **Alliances and networks** particularly for small groups (CBOs) who sought shelter among larger groups. WACAM in Ghana – local to national to international linkages and solidarity
 - “Host institutions”

Spaces of engagement: closed, invited, created and claimed spaces

- Strategies depended partly on **political and social spaces** that organizations operate in: trying to prise open 'closed spaces' spurs more confrontation; engaging in invited and claimed spaces leads to cooperation; creating spaces is often related to networking and alliance building
- **Claimed spaces**: Domestic Violence Coalition, Ghana, reclaimed public space through demonstrations, walks/marches etc
- **Invited spaces**: WACAM invited by Newmont Mining Ltd to be an observer on Resettlement Negotiation Committee and Responsible Mining Alliance. WACAM declined both invitations as wary of co-option

Forms of countervailing power

- **Power to** – organization and mobilization of local people (e.g., Abahlali, South Africa against forced eviction)
- **Power with** – alliances
- **Power within** - individual capacity to act, enhanced self-esteem

Transformation of power structures?

Some successes but limited:

- *Legislative changes*, e.g. Domestic Violence Act in Ghana, Kenyan Constitution of 2010
- *Changes in public policies*, e.g. KLA and land reform policy
- *Institutional changes*, e.g. Domestic Violence Secretariat and Victims of Domestic Violence Management Board in Ghana
- *Cultural changes*, e.g. greater awareness of women's rights in both autocratic (China, Zimbabwe) and democratic (Ghana, Kenya) contexts

Qualifications

- Not all organizations sought transformative change, but rather supported victims of injustices or were issue-based
- Where organizational mobilization has contributed to some changes, exact impact and attribution are difficult to assess
- Changes have been limited, and power imbalances remain which continue to constrain HR advocacy

Concluding thoughts

- Human rights-based approach – rise and decline? Another failed strategy? The normative debate
- Significance of coercive power as impediment to human rights realisation is confirmed
- If not addressed, then HRBA becomes ‘tamed’ and ‘depoliticised’
- Non-governmental rights promoters shown awareness and determination to challenge powerful interests
- Bringing power back in and recognising HR struggles as power struggles, i.e. re-politicisation of rights-based approaches