



Is there a ‘German school’ of comparative politics? An institutional perspective

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Abstract Looking at scientific research in terms of ‘schools’ marks an established way of evaluating larger research areas. In this paper, we deliberately use a soft concept of ‘school’, designed to capture possible peculiarities of the discipline of Comparative Politics in Germany, and its impact at the international level of political research. The focus of our inquiry is on three major sub-areas of comparative political studies—comparative executive politics, comparative legislative research, and comparative federalism research—which can be meaningfully subsumed under the label of institution-centred comparative political research. Moreover, we focus basically on the developments of the past decade. We find that the size of the German, or German-language, community of comparative politics has long worked to keep the pressure for German or Germany-based scholars to publish their research in English low, though the language of publication alone cannot be considered a valid indicator of either scientific excellence or parochialism. Data collected for the past decade, measuring the share of contributions by German or Germany-based scholars in the internationally leading specialist journals of the sub-areas examined, suggest that the discipline has ‘opened up’ and ‘reached out’ more recently. That said, for the time

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being, the German comparative politics community in the three sub-areas studied continues to be considerably stronger at the receiving end, in terms of paying reasonable attention to the theoretical and empirical developments at the international level, than at actively shaping the international debate. As in other areas, exceptions prove the rule.

Keywords Scientific Schools · Comparative Politics · Political Institutions · Executives · Legislatures · Federalism

Gibt es eine „deutsche Schule“ der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft? Eine institutionelle Perspektive

Zusammenfassung Die Betrachtung wissenschaftlicher Forschung aus einer Perspektive auf unterschiedliche „Schulen“ markiert einen etablierten Zugang zur Evaluation größerer Forschungsbereiche. In diesem Beitrag wird bewusst ein weicher Begriff von „Schulen“ verwendet, der geeignet ist, mögliche Besonderheiten der Vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft in Deutschland und deren Einfluss auf der internationalen Ebene politischer Forschung zu erfassen. Der engere thematische Fokus dieser Untersuchung liegt auf drei zentralen Teilgebieten der vergleichenden Forschung—der vergleichenden Exekutiv- und Legislativforschung sowie der vergleichenden Föderalismusforschung—welche gemeinsam unter den Begriff einer institutionen-zentrierten Komparatistik subsumiert werden können. Der zeitliche Schwerpunkt der Untersuchung liegt auf dem vergangenen Jahrzehnt. Die zahlenmäßige Größe der deutschen bzw. deutschsprachigen Disziplin hat den Druck auf die Mitglieder dieser „Forschungsgemeinschaft“, ihre Forschungsergebnisse (auch) in englischer Sprache zu publizieren, lange Zeit auffallend gering gehalten; allerdings wäre es eindeutig zu kurz gegriffen, die Publikationssprache für sich als verlässlichen Indikator von wissenschaftlicher Exzellenz oder Provinzialismus zu betrachten. Empirische Daten zum Anteil, den deutsche bzw. in Deutschland ansässige Politikwissenschaftler an Publikationen in international führenden Spezialzeitschriften besitzen, suggerieren, dass sich die deutsche Komparatistik in der jüngeren Vergangenheit zunehmend geöffnet hat und international ausgreift. Bis auf weiteres bleibt die Disziplin in den drei untersuchten Bereichen hinsichtlich der gezielten Rezeption der international maßgeblichen Forschung jedoch bedeutend stärker als mit Blick auf die aktive Prägung der internationalen Spitzenforschung. Wie in anderen Bereichen gilt auch hier: Ausnahmen bestätigen die Regel.

Schlüsselwörter Wissenschaftliche Schulen · Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft · Politische Institutionen · Regierungen · Parlamente · Föderalismus

1 Introduction

Thinking about academic research in terms of ‘schools’ has a certain tradition in the political and social sciences, and beyond. For example, there is the well-established notion of an English School of International Relations, which refers to a particular

set of beliefs about the structure of the international system that was postulated by authors affiliated with English universities, though many of its 'members' were not British (see Linklater and Suganami 2006). Overall, distinguishing particular schools of social or political science at the level of whole countries is, however, not very common. While scholars have distinguished particular national profiles of the discipline (see, e. g., Helms 2010; as well as the 'country reports' on the evolution of both research and teaching in different European countries, regularly published in *European Political Science*), such features are not normally considered to amount to a particular school. Generally, it is far more common to distinguish between different schools at the level of individual universities (for Germany, see, for example, Lietzmann and Bleek 1999, Jesse 2016). Most such distinctions relate to basic epistemic and ontological orientations of influential scholars at a given university, but obviously other criteria, such as a commitment to more particular methods, or obvious political leanings, are possible.

To the knowledge of the authors of this article, there is no specialist literature on 'schools of comparative politics' in Germany, or any other major country for that matter. That said, what established German scholars of comparative politics, such as Detlef Jahn (2007), wrote about the nature and the evolution of the discipline, including some distinct side remarks on the state of the art in Germany, comes pretty close to distinguishing characteristic features of 'doing' comparative politics in Germany. For Jahn, writing a decade ago, the single most important characteristic of the discipline in this country was a glaring lack of methodological skills and rigour, and a dominance of largely impressionistic work that failed to qualify as comparative research in the nomothetic tradition (ibid: 10–11). This assessment has been echoed in bibliometric assessments of the contents, and the approaches used, in major German political science journals (see Pehl 2012).

It would require another paper to discuss if approaches designed to 'understand' particular phenomena are generally less useful than those focused on explanation, and if large-*n* analysis is actually a naturally superior way of studying politics from a comparative perspective, as Jahn suggests. However, while such issues are important in its own right, this article has a different focus. We use the notion of 'school' as a starting point for looking at how more recent comparative political research in Germany is linked with the wider international discipline. More specifically, we shall inquire both to what extent international research is adopted in the work of German comparativists, and to what extent the work of German scholars of comparative politics has been acknowledged at the international level, and shaped the work of others. In terms of constituting a 'school', the second dimension would appear to be the more important one. Among the factors likely to shape the performance at this level is the language of publication. While scholars based at German universities, unlike their counterparts in many of the smaller language communities, do not necessarily have to publish in any other languages than German in order to potentially reach a major readership (see Patzelt 2004, p. 117–8), the basis for an international status of visibility and recognition is the publication of research findings in English. In particular publications in the major international, English-language refereed journals obviously mark an achievement in its own right, and the share of representation of German scholars and/or Germany-based scholars at this

level provides a useful measure of, or at the very least a proxy for, international excellence and (possible) impact.

Our focus will be on *genuinely comparative* work only, that is, research analysing at least two ‘cases’. It would be an altogether different task to evaluate if, or to what extent, single-case studies by German or Germany-based scholars on Germany or any other individual country are reasonably linked to the international comparative research literature in a given field (see Lees 2006). Such an assessment would be helpful when it comes to distinguishing a-theoretical and possibly ‘non-disciplinary’ area studies from more sophisticated single-country studies that are firmly tied to, and embedded in, the conceptual and theoretical debates in comparative politics.

Needless to say, a normal-length article cannot provide a substantive, and much less an exhaustive, assessment of all the major established subfields of the discipline. Thus, several self-limitations are in order. A first one concerns the areas to be evaluated: in accordance with the more particular expertise of the authors, this article looks at three institutionally defined arenas: comparative executive politics, comparative legislative studies, and comparative federal systems. Secondly, celebrating the tenth anniversary of this journal, we shall focus on the more recent developments of the past decade or so.

2 Key features and developments in three institutional arenas

2.1 Comparative executive politics

The boundaries of this research field are somewhat elusive and contested. Wider notions of executive politics include the whole area of public administration. However, given the fact that in most countries Public Administration is a distinct discipline, alongside Political Science, many political scientists conceive of executive politics as a field of study that centres on the political executive, including both structure and agency. This also marks the understanding of comparative executive politics we stick to in this article.

Compared to several others fields (including legislative studies and federalism research, see below), there is, however, still no internationally leading specialist journal whose agenda would centre on ‘executive politics’, contributions to which could be considered to mark a valid indicator of academic leadership in the field. The major US-based journal *Presidential Studies Quarterly* arguably comes closest, but, as its title suggests, has a focus on presidential politics and leadership. The international journal *Governance* was initially launched as a journal of executive politics, and its early issues did contain some of the best research in the field, but over the years the journal has transformed itself and now has a focus on public administration and policy. Thus, articles on different aspects of comparative executive politics tend to be published in an exceptional wide range of comparative politics and general political science journals, why we refrain from offering any statistical analysis in this field.

As Klaus Goetz has noted several years ago in a similar stock-taking exercise of executive politics research in Germany, it is immensely difficult to provide a clear-cut

assessment of the share, and impact, of German contributions within an increasingly internationalized research community in Europe (Goetz 2004, p. 90). Still, it is not impossible to provide some evaluation.

There is a certain tradition of German scholars being involved in high-calibre international research projects in the field of comparative politics (beyond the contribution of mere case studies on Germany). The work by Ferdinand Müller-Rommel merits first mention in this regard (see, for example, Blondel and Müller-Rommel 1993, 1997, 2001). German scholars, both based in Germany and abroad, have also had a share at the editorial level with more recent international volumes studying executive politics from a genuinely comparative perspective (see, for example, Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2007; Lodge and Wegrich 2011; Keman and Müller-Rommel 2012; Helms 2012; Andeweg et al. o.J.).

However, the early comparative ambition of individual scholars has not really given rise to a broader research agenda of comparative executive politics in Germany. There are strikingly few single-authored book-length studies by German scholars that provide an internationally comparative assessment of different aspects of executive politics (see, however, Helms 2005; Tils 2011; Diermann 2011; Hustedt 2013), and even fewer edited volumes with a comparative focus, such as that by Sebaldt and Gast (2010) on executive leadership in western democracies. The study by Dimitrov, Goetz and Wollmann ('with contributions by Radoslaw Zubek and Martin Brusis'), which looks at core executives and policy-making in post-communist Central-Eastern Europe, falls somewhere in between a co-authored monograph and a closely integrated edited volume (Dimitrov et al. 2006).

It is astonishing to see that many joint-ventures by German scholars in this field have ignored opportunities for adding depth and perspective to their analyses by virtually completely shying away from substantive international comparison (see, for example, Jann and König 2009; Bröchler and von Blumenthal 2011; Egner et al. 2012). The volume edited by Everhard Holtmann and Werner J. Patzelt (2008), which is devoted to the question if executives/governments actually govern, contains just a single genuinely comparative chapter—a comparative piece on Germany and Austria. The *Handbuch Regierungsforschung* (Korte and Grunden 2013) does a better job in this regard, but still even here, there are few chapters with a genuinely comparative focus.¹

Even where executive politics research in Germany has been keen to develop an internationally comparative dimension, it is difficult to identify any broadly comparative work that looks at more than just two or three cases. For example, three-quarters of all genuinely comparative articles of the major special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* on informal governance (Bröchler and Lauth 2014) are paired case-studies looking at just two countries or 'cases'. The inclination of German comparativists, working in the field of executive politics, to

¹ It seems worth noting that at the level of the different Sections of the German Political Science Association the term 'Regieren', as a near synonym to 'executive politics', is reserved for the Section on German politics ('*Regierungssystem und Regieren in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*'), which may to some extent explain the strongly Germany-centred focus of contributions by members of this Section. However, this certainly provides a possible explanation rather than a satisfying justification for the pattern observed.

offer comparative assessments that centre on Germany and just one or two other established Western democracies (usually, the UK or the US) marks a more general phenomenon (see, for example, Fleischer 2009; Glaab 2014), and is even true for scholars from ‘neighbouring’ disciplines, such as Comparative Public Law or Communication Studies (see, for example, Dann 2006; Sanders et al. 2011). Of course, exceptions prove the rule: individual German and/or Germany-based scholars have occasionally offered wide-ranging comparative assessments of political executives in Western Europe and the US, Central-Eastern Europe, and Latin America (see, for example, Helms 2008; Müller-Rommel 2011; Grotz and Müller-Rommel 2015; Inácio and Llanos 2015; König 2016).

There is a notable inclination among German scholars of executive politics to develop all-German co-authorships. Indeed, even across borders, German scholars tend to stick together. Again, some examples of truly international co-authorships can be found (see, for example, Peters and Helms 2012; Müller-Rommel and Vercesi 2017).

One area in which German or Germany-based scholars have, from early on, been at the forefront of international research is the ‘Europeanization’ of executive politics and governance (Goetz 2004, p. 90; see also Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008). This tradition has been continued (see, for example, Bach et al. 2015) and extended to the complex subject of political and executive leadership at the European level, which is usually at least implicitly comparative (see, for example, Tömmel 2013; Müller 2016; Helms 2017; Tömmel and Verdun 2017).

If German political science has historically been marked by an established focus on comparative government, rather than comparative politics, it were also, and in particular, German scholars who have more recently powerfully defended this tradition in a changing global environment. As Klaus Goetz has argued in a widely cited paper, ‘the oft-claimed shift from government to governance appears overstated. Governance is less widespread and consequential both at national and European levels than its proponents suggest, as a survey of the propellants, conditions and national and European constellations of governance shows. Viewed historically, governance does not so much indicate a shift from government as towards government, as the core institutions of the state build up capacity to deal authoritatively and hierarchically with new governing challenges’ (Goetz 2008, p. 258). Other German scholars of note have echoed this call for not underestimating the importance of political executives in the wider political process (see, for example, Jann 2013).

Overall, however, it would not seem unfair to contend that there has been a limited amount of conceptually innovative work by German or Germany-based scholars that strongly influenced the work of other scholars abroad/at the international level. Again, there are obvious exceptions: Arguably the single most influential contribution co-authored by a German scholar is the concept of ‘presidentialization’ (Poguntke and Webb 2005), which did not really emerge from the field of comparative executive politics, but has had its widest repercussions precisely in this field (see, for example, the special section of *Parliamentary Affairs*, no. 1/2012).

2.2 Comparative legislative studies

In contrast to the study of executives, both Germany and the English-speaking world are well-served with sub-field journals when it comes to the study of legislatures. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (LSQ) and the *Journal of Legislative Studies* (JLS) both publish articles with a wide geographic range, often with an expressly comparative approach,² while in Germany, the *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* (ZParl) has been published since 1969. All three journals cover all aspects of legislative studies.

Despite the long history of studying legislatures both in Germany and abroad (in particular in the US), it has often been noted that research and theories from the US have received a relatively sceptical reception within German academia (Patzelt 2004). However, as academia (both inside and outside of Germany) has become more internationalised in the decade since Patzelt's observations, this special anniversary issue of ZfVP marks a welcome occasion to reassess the extent to which German legislative studies interacts with the study of legislatures internationally, and the extent to which a comparative approach is used in this work.

While ZParl's policy of publishing in German obviously limits the ability of non-German speakers to submit their work there, almost all German scholars can write in English, allowing them to reach an international audience by publishing in journals such as LSQ and JLS. While an impressionistic overview shows that a substantial number of German scholars publish comparative work on legislative politics in international journals (see, for example, Bowler et al. 2016; Bräuningner et al. 2016; Koß 2015; Fortunato et al. 2013; Saalfeld and Bischof 2013; Sieberer 2013; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Willumsen and Goetz 2015, 2017), a more rigorous examination is necessary to establish, first, the extent to which Germany-based (and German-speaking) scholars write solely for their home audience, or whether they engage with an international audience as well, and second, the extent to which German and Germany-based scholars engage in comparative research on legislative politics.

To investigate these questions, we coded the authors of all research articles published in the last five years (covering the years 2012–2016) in ZParl,³ LSQ, and the JLS. In total, 734 author-paper observations were made.⁴ 243 observations come from JLS, 218 from LSQ, and 273 from ZParl. 517 authors published one article in the five-year period under investigation, 61 published two, 16 published three, six published four, one published six, one published seven, and one author published ten. For each author-paper observation, we coded the affiliation of the author at the time of publication, and whether this was in a German-speaking country (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland).⁵ For all the articles published in ZParl, we also coded

² Further, *Parliamentary Affairs* also publishes articles on legislative politics; however, its focus has traditionally been more UK-centric than JLS, although this is rapidly changing.

³ All articles appearing in the section 'Dokumentation und Analysen'.

⁴ Each time an author appears was counted as a new observation. An article thus leads to a number of observations equal to the number of authors it has.

⁵ In some cases, the journal did not provide information on the affiliation of an author; where this could not be established, the observation was dropped (15 cases).

(based on the authors' websites) whether they spoke German as a native language. This was also done for all authors based in one of the German-speaking countries for publications appearing in the JLS or in LSQ.⁶

Starting with the authorship publishing in ZParl, it is almost entirely a journal for scholars based in German-speaking countries, and in particular in Germany itself. Of the 259 articles for which the affiliation of an author could be established, 252 were based in a country where German was the local language (242 in Germany, five each in Austria and Switzerland), and only seven were not. Of these seven observations, three were by German scholars working abroad.

As expected, the linguistic barrier put up by the German language was very strong. Only six paper-author observations in ZParl (out of 249 where the author's language could be determined) were of individuals who did not speak German as a native language. Of these six, three had either worked or studied for extended periods of time in Germany, one worked at a German university, and for only two author-paper observations (who co-authored with an author who had worked for ten years in Germany) was no evidence of German-language ability found. As such, co-authorship between German and non-German-speakers to allow the latter to communicate with the German scientific community in its native tongue was essentially non-existent. ZParl is thus clearly almost exclusively a journal for the German scientific community. More than 93 per cent (240 of 259) of paper-author observations were of German-speakers working in Germany, and the frequency of international scholars publishing in ZParl was found to be negligible.

This very strong Germany-centred tendency of ZParl should not, however, be taken to mean that German-speaking and Germany-based scholars do not publish in international journals.

In LSQ and the JLS, more than 10 per cent of the 460 paper-author observations in the period covered by the data were by authors based in German-speaking countries (Germany 27, Austria 12, and Switzerland 8). This indicates that within the field of legislative studies, the international presence of authors based in German-speaking countries is significant. Focussing solely on scholars based in Germany itself, these accounted for around 6 per cent of all articles published in two leading English-language field journals of legislative studies. Looking at authors from all three German-speaking countries combined, as well as from Germany by itself, in both cases more than 80 per cent⁷ of authors are native German speakers. Clearly, the presence of Germany on the international stage in terms of legislative studies is not driven by non-German-speakers working in Germany (or in German-speaking countries).

However, while Germany and the German-speaking world is thus well-represented on the international stage when it comes to the study of legislatures, the question remains regarding the extent to which this presence was driven by authors who also see as their audience the German-speaking academic community, or

⁶ Authors who did their undergraduate degrees in a German-speaking country were coded as being native speakers.

⁷ Austria, Germany, and Switzerland combined: 35 out of 43 (81.4 per cent). Germany only: 22 out of 27 (81.5 per cent).

whether they primarily (or exclusively) focus on the international academic community.

When looking at the extent of overlap between those scholars who publish in ZParl and those who publish in LSQ and JLS, it is clear that the extent to which authors publish in both the Germany-based journal (ZParl) and in either of the international ones (LSQ and JLS) is quite limited over the five-year period covered. Only three authors published in both ZParl and LSQ, and only four published in both ZParl and JLS. Further, one (Germany-based) author published in all three journals. Overall, then, out of 226 authors who published in ZParl, and out of 42 scholars based in a German-speaking country who published in either JLS or LSQ, only eight published in both ZParl and an international journal in the five years under study.

These eight authors should be contrasted with the 34 scholars based in German-speaking countries who published either in the JLS or LSQ, but not in ZParl, in the period under study. When looking only at scholars based in Germany, there were eighteen authors who published in either the JLS or LSQ, but not in ZParl. Here, it should also be noted that of those scholars who published in international journals in the period looked at, only Germany-based ones also published in ZParl; in no case did a scholar based in either Austria or Switzerland publish in both an international journal and in ZParl, suggesting that the perceived "value" of publishing in ZParl is lower in those two countries.

Further, the diversity of affiliation of the internationally oriented scholars was quite limited. Only scholars based at the universities of Mannheim and Konstanz published in both ZParl and LSQ, and only scholars based at the universities of Bamberg, Bremen, Hamburg and Stuttgart published in both ZParl and JLS. To put this in perspective, scholars affiliated with 72 universities and research institutes published in ZParl during the same period.⁸

In other words, the vast majority of research conducted on legislatures in Germany (as well as in the German-speaking countries) appears to be done by native German-speakers writing for their domestic audience, and most of the authors based in German-speaking countries who publish internationally do so exclusively. The dissemination of ideas between the German (-speaking) and the international political science communities thus remains severely lacking.

As this article deals with the study of comparative politics in Germany, the focus of the research discussed above should also be investigated. To what extent do Germany-based scholars publish explicitly comparative work in international journals, and to what extent is this the case in ZParl? To investigate this, we coded the extent to which the focus was on Germany or other countries of the all the articles published in ZParl, as well as with those articles published by Germany-based authors in JLS and LSQ, in the five-year period analysed above. Four categories were used, namely, whether the research analysed: Germany; one country, which was not Germany; two countries, of which one was Germany; or two countries (or more)

⁸ In addition to this, twelve different non-research affiliations, such as the Bundestag and Bundesrat, were also represented.

Table 1 Geographical focus of articles in the area of comparative legislative politics

	Germany	Single-country	Germany + one	Two + countries	Total
ZParl	159	26	3	12	200
JLS	3	4	1	5	13
LSQ	2	4	0	1	7

which were not Germany.⁹ The results are shown in Table 1. Two caveats should be noted. Firstly, it is of course possible to study a single country using a comparative approach; as such, looking solely at the number of countries studied most likely somewhat understates the number of comparative works. Secondly, focussing on the country level as done here may also undercount the number of comparative articles by coding work comparing two or more sub-national units (such as the German *Länder*) as studying only a single country. However, given the large number of articles studied here, it was not feasible to code the content in a more detailed manner.

As can be seen in Table 1, of the 200 articles published in ZParl in the period under study, almost eighty per cent (159) were focussed on Germany, while a further twenty-six analysed a single country which was not Germany. The focus of these twenty-six articles was geographically quite broad, albeit with a stronger focus on European countries. Four articles analysed the US, while Austria, Denmark, the EU, and Turkey each were analysed in two articles. Australia, Canada, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK were analysed in a single article.¹⁰ In other words, more than 90 per cent of the research articles published in ZParl in the period under study did not explicitly compare phenomena across different countries, but rather focussed on a single country. And of these single-country studies, 86 per cent analysed Germany.

Only three articles compared Germany and another country,¹¹ while twelve were fully internationally comparative, that is, analysed at least two countries which were not Germany. These articles analysed Eastern Europe in five cases, had no region-specific focus in four cases, and compared the member states of the EU in three cases.

While the relatively low number of articles published in JLS and LSQ by Germany-based scholars makes direct comparisons difficult, it can also be seen from Table 1 that the geographic focus of the work published there is quite different from that published in ZParl. Just under a quarter of articles published in JLS by Germany-based scholars analysed only Germany, while in LSQ, the figure was just

⁹ An article analyzing three (or more) countries, one of which was Germany, would thus be coded in the last category.

¹⁰ A number of these articles were election reports, meaning that the number reported here somewhat overstates the extent to which the research ZParl publishes is internationally oriented.

¹¹ These articles compared Germany with Austria, the Netherlands and the UK, respectively.

over a quarter; in both journals, four articles were published which analysed a single country which was not Germany.¹²

As in ZParl, work analysing Germany and one other country was quite rare, with only one such article in JLS, and zero in LSQ. JLS in particular had a strong internationally comparative focus in terms of the articles published by Germany-based scholars, with almost forty per cent of articles studying at least two countries which were not Germany. While these numbers are small, they clearly indicate that the focus of internationally published articles is quite different than those published for the German domestic academic audience. Research on Germany as such is much rarer in the international journals, and single-paper articles on countries other than Germany much more common. Fully comparative work is also much more likely to be published in the international journals. Only eight per cent of articles published in ZParl analysed two or more countries which were not Germany, while this was the case for thirty per cent of the articles published by Germany-based scholars in JLS and LSQ. It thus appears that, in addition to the tendency for Germany-based scholars to publish primarily in German, the research published in German is also much more focussed on Germany itself, and much less comparative in nature than the internationally published work. Both the audience and the content of legislative research in Germany is thus heavily Germany-focussed.

While this analysis of the work published by Germany-based scholars is thus rather pessimistic in terms of the extent to which the study of legislatures in Germany is international in approach, outlook, and visibility, some key works do stand out. While broadly comparative research monographs covering a wide sweep of both history and countries are, by their nature, quite rare, the continuing influence (and updating) of von Beyme's (2014) German-language monograph is worth noting. More recent single-authored comparative book-length studies, such as those by Sebaldt (2009) or Höpcke (2014) have found it difficult to secure a wider readership in an article-centred age of academic publishing. Comparative excellence, of course, can also come in smaller formats: Some broadly comparative German-language articles, such as Manow (2004) and Patzelt (2006) could clearly also have been published in leading English-language journals had they been written in English.

A classic volume along the lines of Döring (1995), which remains a key reference source for the comparative study of legislatures, and in which scholars from Germany played a large role (including the editor), has not appeared in recent years. However, the *Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies* (Martin et al. 2014) in part plays a similar role, setting out the state of the art on all aspects of legislative studies. As with the Döring volume, Germany-based scholars play a prominent role, with four out of forty-seven authors being based in Germany (including one of the editors), and an additional three authors based in Austria and Switzerland. Several other edited volumes with a broad international focus of comparison can be found, such as the volume by Helms (2016) on parliamentary oppositions in old and new democracies, which also features a truly international cast of scholars (including a German editor).

Further, while not always explicitly comparative in nature, edited volumes written in German including a large number of country chapters play a key role in providing

¹² JLS: France, Greece, Portugal and Romania. LSQ: Belgium, the UK, and the EU (twice).

an overview of (aspects of) legislative politics in multiple countries to German students of legislatures. For example, Ismayr (2008) covers fifteen Western European countries, while Bos (2017) covers a similar number of countries in Eastern Europe. A more thematic approach, which lends itself well to comparative work, is provided by Oberreuter (2013; see also Brandt 2016).

Also worth mentioning is the research focus in German legislative research on the role of parliaments in relation to the EU in a so-called multi-level parliamentary system. A vigorous debate on the topic exists (Maurer 2002; Benz 2017), in particular regarding whether parliaments in such a system cooperate to meet their representation function and to deliberate ideas (Crum and Fossum 2009), or to get information and enhance their control activities in a two-level game (Eppler and Maurer 2017). Similarly, a substantial body of research examines how European integration affects national parliaments (Auel and Raunio 2014; Auel et al. 2015; Gattermann et al. 2016).

A promising route to comparative research is provided by the study of subnational parliaments (see, for example, Höpcke 2014; Abels and Eppler 2015, as well as the section on Federalism research in this article). By increasing the possible number of cases, and, within single countries, allowing for the holding constant of a large number of contextual factors, this approach can provide key insights into the functioning of legislatures (Stecker 2010, 2015a, 2015b).

2.3 Comparative federalism research

Regarding this final key area of comparative politics to be examined two main points are worth mentioning at the outset: there are five major content-related strands of (comparative) federalism research in Germany, and three overlapping methodological waves of comparative federalism research. This section, seeks to assess these different strands and waves distinguished in light of the overarching question as to how German comparative federalism research is linked with the wider field of international federalism research.

The first thing to note in this context is the fact that the main stimuli for German federalism research, in contrast to the driving forces behind the evolution of comparative executive and legislative research, emerged from real-world political challenges in post-war Germany. Until the mid-1990s, they gave rise to distinct major strands of German federalism research which, although not being completely clear-cut and with many authors figuring prominently in more than one strand, are still visible in comparative federalism research today.

A first strand is linked to the understanding of federalism as a supporter of democracy, which came up already with the stipulation of the federal principle in the *Grundgesetz* prescribed by the Allies. Having originally started with a focus on political education, it was driven and shaped by a long international tradition of (partly) normative federalism research, which has long been associated in Germany with Winfried Steffani¹³ and in the more recent past with Roland Sturm (2004). Over

¹³ References are provided for the last 15 years, the period for which the journals analysed in this section were coded. Earlier, 'classic' works are mentioned, but not cited.

the past 15 years, such research has gained new importance: A first new 'sub-strand' is dedicated to studying decentralization. In the course of the Eastern enlargement of the EU, it dealt with decentralization dynamics in Central and Eastern European states (Sturm and Dieringer 2005; Pitschel and Bauer 2009) and is now moving towards studying decentralization in developing countries (Demmelhuber and Sturm 2016; Harbers 2010); it has increasingly come to include also comparisons of secession trends in Europe (Sturm 2014; Petersohn et al. 2015; Eppler et al. 2017) and in developing states (Heinemann-Grüder 2011; Keil 2016). A second 'sub-strand' has developed a comparative focus on the attributes associated with democracy, such as parties, elections and participation (Detterbeck and Hepburn 2010; Oberhofer 2011; Fraenkel-Haeberle et al. 2015), and on identity-issues (Beyme 2007; Sturm et al. 2010). However, while the democracy-federalism link is alive and well in German comparative federalism research, the established idea that federalism and democracy naturally, or even necessarily, go hand in hand with one another has been challenged more recently in a comparative study (Benz and Kropp 2014).

The ignition for a second major strand of German federalism research can be found in the 1960s and 1970s, when Konrad Hesse realized a strong drive toward centralization and 'unitarization'. This triggered a wealth of different, yet related, research questions concerning the functioning, efficiency and problem-solving capacity as well as the reform capacity of the German federation, with the University of Konstanz and the Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne quickly establishing themselves as hubs of German federalism research. This research is widely associated with Gerhard Lehbruch, Fritz W. Scharpf, Arthur Benz and Heidrun Abromeit. The questions raised were somewhat reminiscent of the old US-American tradition of tracing and analyzing the evolutionary dynamics of established federal systems. Several conceptual approaches developed in this context, such as and in particular 'actor centered neo-institutionalism' (Mayntz and Scharpf), gained major international recognition as a bargaining theory, extending well beyond the core areas of federalism research. With the resumption of wide-ranging 'federalism reform' agendas shortly after the turn of the century, questions of options and ability of federalism reforms are back on the table. Virtually the whole federalism research community in Germany got involved in discussing and analyzing the federalism reform. One of the major research projects dedicated to the topic was conducted at the *Fernuniversität Hagen* and provided a systematic international comparison (Behnke and Benz 2009; Behnke et al. 2011; cf. also the large-*n* study by Lorenz 2010). The research soon came to encompass also international debates on federalism reforms (Benz and Colino 2011) and more particular issues, such as asymmetry in federalist regimes (Nagel and Requejo 2009). This second major strand continues in (if only partly comparative) analyses of the results of the German reform (Behnke and Kropp 2016; Schneider 2013), in more general inquiries into, and explanations of, federal dynamics (Benz and Broschek 2013) and, responding to the current international fashion of building indices on federalism issues, in an index to sequence federal dynamics (Dardanelli et al. 2015).

A third strand emerged in the wake of the gradual intensification of European integration (Single European Act 1987, Treaty of Maastricht 1993), which led to questions about the embedding of the German federation in the EU multi-level sys-

tem analyzed e. g. by Fritz W. Scharpf, Rudolf Hrbek, and Joachim J. Hesse and Vincent Wright. Another question raised concerned the role of subnational regions within this novel transnational European order, analyzed first by Rudolf Hrbek and Sabine Weyand. In contrast to the other strands, there is no US-American research tradition on the integration of national multi-level systems in a supranational multi-level system, and thus German research interrelated with the formation of a new international field. At that time, a shift from pure federalism research to multi-level research took place: the number and variety of political systems to be considered expanded, and regionalized and decentralized states as well as the EU system became part of the agenda. Originating from this research tradition, the European Center for Research on Federalism (EZFF), became ‘the most important German forum for the discussion of federalism’ (Sturm 2009, p. 423, own translation). While, over the past 15 years, German scholars have joined the international trend of comparative Europeanization studies only for a certain time (Börzel 2002; Grotz 2007), studies on European regions (Conzelmann and Knodt 2002; Zimmermann-Steinhart 2003; Dieringer and Sturm 2010; Detterbeck and Renzsch 2013; Beuttler 2016) have remained popular. Further, the multiple crises that came over the EU since 2007 also stimulated research specifically dedicated to comparing the dynamics in the ‘quasi federal’ EU system with those within national federations, and with a more particular focus on the observable centrifugal trends (Anders et al. 2016).

The fourth and fifth strands started with the re-unification of Germany at the beginning of the 1990s. Differences between the old and new German *Länder* prompted research on fiscal federalism which has a long international tradition and was conducted in Germany for instance by Wolfgang Renzsch at that early time. Comparative research on fiscal federalism was particularly popular at the height and in the aftermath of the so-called ‘Federalism Reform II’ (Baus et al. 2007; Renzsch 2009; Anderson and Scheller 2012; Heise 2010) but also during the public debt crisis (Feld 2015; Scharpf 2013) and the re-organization of the fiscal equalization system (Geißler et al. 2015).

Differences between the *Länder* also bolstered the fifth strand of comparative federalism research. Intra-state comparisons between the states have long been an established part of US-American federalism research, and were considered a role model for comparative research on the German *Länder* by some scholars (Freitag and Vatter 2008; cf. Schultze 2008). It has been integrated in the German research by scholars such as Josef Schmid and Susanne Blancke, and Sabine Kropp. Today, there is an enormous number of intra-national comparative studies dealing with virtually every aspect of subnational units understood as ‘small worlds’ (Burgess and Keil 2013), a sub-area which is beyond the scope of this article. Some contributions have a focus on the German *Länder* after ‘Federalism Reform I’ (cf. Dose and Reus 2016), others center on issues of constitutional change (Reutter and Lorenz 2016), on the state governments (Leunig 2012; Bröchler and Blumenthal 2011), or the state parliaments (Reutter 2006). Following the tradition started by Fritz W. Scharpf, Arthur Benz, Ute Wachendorfer-Schmidt and others, some of these intra-state comparisons are extended to comparisons of individual policy areas in the German and European multi-level-system (Scheller and Schmid 2008; Benz et al.

2016) or link policy research with federalism research (Große Hüttmann et al. 2012; Leuprecht et al. 2015).

The second thing to note, alongside the close link between real-world political development and federalism research highlighted above, is that in Germany different methodological approaches to comparative federalism research developed in three overlapping waves—cross-cutting the major content-related individual strands. They have been shaped by the organization (and partly by the funding) of the German 'research landscape' as well as by the growing professionalization of political science as an academic discipline in Germany. The first wave was not genuinely comparative (with some noteworthy exceptions, such as Lehmbruch), yet nevertheless firmly related to questions of international federalism research and received a remarkable amount of international attention. Moreover, it was characterized by a notably close interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange which, perhaps curiously, seemed to be quite 'natural' back then.

The second (ongoing) wave, emerging in the mid-1980s, is characterized by the establishment of a close international interdisciplinary scientific community which seeks to link academic researchers and practitioners. Federalism research centers, many of them located in (and some of them co-financed by) economically strong subnational regions with a pronounced regional tradition, provide an international (*International Association of Centers for Federal Studies* (IACFS); *Forum of Federations* (FoF)) and Europe-wide (close cooperation of the research centers in Europe) network that fosters international exchange and comparative research. At least at the beginning of this wave, innumerable edited volumes, including specifically commissioned 'country reports' on recent developments or thematically linked chapters were published. However, over the years, these (often interdisciplinary) volumes have become ever more sophisticated conceptually and analytically, linking single-country case studies with each other more systematically, thereby making them more 'comparative', or at the very least more comparable (cf. Global Dialogue-series of the IACFS and the FoF (2005–2010)).

The third wave, beginning towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, has been marked by the increasing distinctiveness of the discipline of political science in Germany, and the changing publication culture in the international social sciences (the ever-growing importance of articles in refereed journals). However, there are still many comparative studies published as monographs or as chapters in edited volumes in Germany. At the same time, comparative studies with the aim to explain, rather than to understand, federalism-related phenomena, are gaining in importance (cf. Sturm 2012, p. 92 f.; Krumm 2015). The scientific community grew bigger and became more heterogeneous, but subgroups of professional associations, such as the *Themengruppe Föderalismus* of the German Association for Political Science founded in 2012, and the respective groups of the ECPR, CES and IPSA, invite structured discussions on explicitly political science related issues.

In an attempt to find out more about the different comparative approaches and the linkages between German and international comparative federalism research, all articles published in the two internationally leading journals on federalism—*Publius* and *Regional & Federal Studies*—for the period 2002–2015, have been coded. There has been a clear increase in articles with German and German-language authorship

and, as to these articles, an increase in comparative contents. The overall trend is the same for both journals, though *Regional & Federal Studies* contains significantly more articles from German(-language) authors than *Publius*. Whereas in *Publius* articles with German authorship increased from 2.2 per cent (2002–2006) to 3.5 per cent (2007–2011) and 7.1 per cent (2012–2016), they increased in *Regional & Federal Studies* from 6.6 per cent (2002–2006) to 12.2 per cent (2007–2011) and 15.6 per cent (2012–2016). The share of articles with German-Speaking authorship was broadly stable in *Publius* (2002–2006: 1.5 per cent; 2007–2011: 0.7 per cent; 2011–2016: 1.4 per cent) and increased in *Regional and Federal Studies* from 1.4 per cent (2002–2006) to 2.2 per cent (2006–2011) and 3.9 per cent (2012–2016). Of the total of articles by German and German-Speakers, the percentage of comparative articles in *Publius* increased from 40 per cent (2002–2006) to 50 per cent (2007–2011) to 83.3 per cent (2011–2016) and in *Regional & Federal Studies* from 9.1 per cent (2002–2006) to 30 per cent (2007–2011), holding stable in 2012–2016 (28 per cent).

In the last 15 years four German authors published two articles in *Publius*, whereas in *Regional & Federal Studies*, six published two articles, two published three articles and two published no less than four articles. One special issue of *Publius* and four special issues of *Regional & Federal Studies* have been (co-)edited by German scholars in the period analyzed. Of the total number of eight special issues (co-)editorships of Germans, five editorships are from scholars closely linked to the *Themengruppe Föderalismus*. Moreover, large-*n* studies (there are, after all, just 25 full-fledged federations in the world) are rare (during the period analyzed only two from German(-speaking) scholars in *Publius*), and there is a clear majority of articles in which Germany is at least one case to be compared with one or several others.

The *Jahrbuch des Föderalismus* remains the central periodical publication of federalism research in German (even though articles in German-language journals continue to gain importance, cf. Benz and Lehmsbruch 2002). It differs from the two English-language journals analyzed above, as contributions are published annually on recurring topics, and most are commissioned and do not undergo an external review-process. Since 2009/10, contributions submitted in English have been no longer translated into German, and since 2009, there has been one key topic per year which is usually linked to Germany (*Themenschwerpunkte*). The coding of all articles published in the *Jahrbuch* between 2002 and 2015 shows that, even though *Länderberichte* and other comparative articles decreased (mainly due to the large number of articles on Germany in the new Germany-focused special section), there is still a very remarkable number of international authorships and comparisons. However, with the decrease of pure *Länderberichte*, the *Jahrbuch* follows the current trend towards more specific comparisons and fewer country reports.

Comparative federalism research in Germany is in many ways linked with international political research on federalism. Concerning the five major content-related strands distinguished above, it is important to note that, although the key impulses for the development of these major strands related to specific German developments, the big issues and questions driving US-American and international federalism research (federalism and democracy, federalism and dynamics, comparison of subnational units but also the ‘growth industry’ of Europeanization research and the more recent

trend towards index building) have strongly shaped the evolving agendas of federalism research in Germany. Likewise, the three methodical waves of comparative federalism research in Germany identified above, while perhaps to some extent being peculiarly German, have by no means ignored the larger methodological dynamics and developments in international federalism research, and in many instances put research conducted and published in German at an international level in terms of rigor and quality. The impact of Germany-based federalism research on international research may have been more limited, perhaps not only, but at least in part, due to obvious language barriers, yet in some areas, such as the study of sub-national regions in the EU or bargaining theories in multi-level systems, German or Germany-based scholars have effectively taken the lead, and clearly left their mark on the international community.

3 Conclusion

German comparative Political Science has not followed a '*Sonderweg*', as Hans Keman was keen to point out when assessing the developments of the post-war period a decade ago (Keman 2007, p. 68), and the discipline of Comparative Politics today is certainly, and more than ever, deeply anchored in the wider community of continental European Political Science. Put in positive terms, there is nothing 'Teutonic' about the way of conducting Comparative Politics in Germany today—a phrase once used to highlight the (alleged) inclination of German scholars 'to put theory before method', and to distinguish it from the Anglo-Saxon and other styles in the Social Sciences. Moreover, inspirational sources have by no means been confined to the Continent, or Europe at large. While obvious differences at the level of executive structures have limited the immediate impact of US presidential studies on comparative executive politics research in Germany, which has tended to centre on the comparative study of parliamentary democracies, both comparative legislative studies and comparative federalism research owe a lot of inspiration to the work by leading American scholars.

While the 'normality' of German comparative politics in terms of a general commitment to international standards of comparative political research is to be welcomed, it would, on the other hand, seem difficult to identify a particularly prominent influence, or leadership role, of German or Germany-based scholars of comparative politics—at least in the three areas evaluated in this article. Generally, German comparative politics has been considerably better at adopting internationally influential concepts than at developing genuinely novel concepts and approaches, or producing spectacular counter-intuitive empirical findings, that significantly shaped the work of scholars at the international level. Of course, as always, exceptions prove the rule. As the previous sections suggest, in some areas—from research on the causes and effects of Europeanization to comparative research on sub-national political institutions—German or Germany-based scholars have indeed played a prominent international role. Further, the statistics indicating the evolving share of work by German or Germany-based scholars in leading international journals suggest that state-of-the-art contributions from this group of scholars are by no means confined

to these particular areas. Some recent developments suggest more explicitly that individual scholars from Germany are internationally acknowledged as leaders in their field. At the level of research-oriented positions, the appointment of Thomas König from the University of Mannheim as the Lead Editor of the *American Political Science Review* in 2016 arguably marks the most spectacular accomplishment of late.

One of the reasons for the overall limited international influence of Germany-based comparative political studies, if perhaps not the single most important one, has been the established dominance of German-language publications. However, this has begun to change, though less apparently than in several other countries. The flagship journals of some national political science communities in Europe—such as *Acta Politica*, the *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, or the *Swiss Political Science Review*—are now published in English throughout, and are distributed worldwide by major Anglo-Saxon publishers. It seems difficult to imagine that this could happen anytime soon to their German equivalent, the *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*. The *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* has, from its inception in 2007, always accepted articles in German or English, but the share of English-language articles has been slightly shrinking recently: The first five volumes (2007–10) contained a 26 per cent share of papers (original research articles only), while in the next five volumes (2011–16) the share of research articles in English dropped to just over 23 per cent. Of course, it is easy to overrate the language factor. There are obvious limits to measuring the quality of research mainly, let alone exclusively, on the basis of the language of publication. Needless to say, a German-language paper is not per se of a lesser quality than an English-language paper, and even if referees for German-language papers have to be drawn from the family of scholars with a proper command of German, this community is certainly sizeable enough to allow in most relevant areas establishing reasonable standards of peer group review—which marks an important contrast to significantly smaller language communities. Thus, the limiting effects of German-language research publications are probably less about quality, and more about international visibility, circulation, and impact. That said, given the notoriously low acceptance rate of some major international journals and Anglo-Saxon University Presses, publishing at this level certainly marks an important proxy indicator of exceptional scholarly excellence in its own right.

Overall, then, there would not appear to be a ‘German school of Comparative Politics’ in the full sense of term. However, what may be deplored in terms of limited academic leadership and truly global influence, is to be greeted in terms of a growing commitment to international, rather than specifically German standards of excellence in political research. To some extent, it is the very considerable size and resourcefulness of the German academic system that breeds the danger of a latent parochialism—which is not totally unfamiliar from the United States. That a recent special issue of the *International Political Science Review*—the journal of the International Political Science Association which is dedicated to a balanced representation of the global political science community—has been co-edited by three German scholars, who all have one or even more articles in that very issue, and which involves five more German contributors (so that, in sum, just three out of

nine articles are by non-German authors), is remarkable in itself, and testifies both to the strengths and the limitations of German Comparative Politics at the international level.

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