

Theorizing competition: an interdisciplinary framework

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Vantage point

- Competition is a relevant phenomenon in various fields of economic, political and social life
- Attracts the attention of scholars from various disciplines
- Also suggests an interdisciplinary approach
- But:
 - Huge variety of definitions
 - Numerous methodological approaches
- Some of them are potentially complementary, some substitutive → difficult to triangulate research
- Goal: framework to facilitate collaboration among disciplines and paradigms

Motivation: an example

- Kapeller et al. (2019):
 - Study comparative development in the EU and member states' growth models
 - Use dynamic models
 - Goal: how intra-EU competition among countries affects their development trajectories and policy preferences
- Rogojanu & Wolfmayr. (2021):
 - Study behavior of people seeking housing in Vienna
 - Use participatory observation and interviews
 - Goal: understand how people experience competition when searching for housing, and what it does with their behavior
- Are there commonalities? Can the studies be linked? Or compared?

Motivation: three challenges

1. The challenge of scope

- Difference in terms of who are the competing actors
- Difference in what the actors are competing for exactly

2. The challenge of methodology

- Different methods: model-based vs. non-model-based
- Different epistemologies → different kinds of explanations

3. The challenge of normativity

- Analysis of competition can be descriptive or prescriptive

The contribution

- The paper delineates an analytical framework that addresses these challenges
- Two potential contributions:
 1. Facilitates the comparison and triangulation of existing approaches to study competition
 2. Facilitates the transparent delineation of one's own concept for empirical work and its alignment with existing concepts
- The overall framework contains:
 - A minimal definition of competition
 - Three blueprints with guiding questions and ideal types
- This presentation: outline of the framework and presentation of lessons learned

A minimal definition of competition

- Necessary to delineate what we mean by competition
- Informs the elements of the framework → allows tailoring the blueprints to the topic of competition
- We use a 'minimal definition' → features something must have to be called competition¹
 1. Involvement of at least two actors
 2. Scarcity (and rivalry) of the object competed for
 3. Interaction structured by social institutions
- The following framework is meant to address research with phenomena that 'meet' these criteria

Blueprint on the scope of competition

GQ 1		Who are the competing actors?	
Ideal types	Individuals	Groups	States
Examples	Beauty contest	Democracy	Race for the best location
GQ 2		What is competed for?	
Ideal types	Universal		Particular
Examples	Bourdieu: competition as a universal principle		Classical pol. econ: Competition for commodities

Blueprint on the methodology

GQ 1		Who kind of explanations are aspired? ¹		
Ideal types	Hermeneutic	Causal	Functional	
Examples	Grounded theory analysis of housing	DAG-based modelling in economics	Evolutionary anthropology and group-level selection	
GQ 2		What kind of methods are suggested? ²		
Ideal types	Model-based analysis	Abstract-direct analysis		
Examples	Most of mainstream economics	Grounded theory and ethnology on housing		

1: Elster (1983): Explaining technical change

2: Weisberg (2007): Who is a modeler?

Blueprint on the normativity

GQ 1		Does the concept imply a normative connotation?	
Ideal types	Descriptive intention	Prescriptive intention	
Examples	General Equilibrium Models before the Welfare Theorems	Adam Smith on competition and the System of Natural Liberty	
GQ 2		If the concept is normative, how is c. evaluated?	
Ideal types	Negative	Ambiguous	Positive
Examples	Wetzel's (2013) assessment of competition as a neoliberal tool	Rosa's (2006) assessment of competition in post-modernity	Hayek' (1969) competition as a discovery process

1: Elster (1983): Explaining technical change
2: Weisberg (2007): Who is a modeler?

Example classification

	Rogojanu et al. (2021)	Kapeller et al. (2019)
Competing actors	Individuals in Vienna	EU Nation States
Obj. of competition	Housing / Living space	Tax revenues and employment
Explanation aspired	Hermeneutic	Causal
Methods used	Abstract-direct	Model-based
Implied normative connotation	None	Yes
Normative assessment	NA	Negative

Summary and conclusion

- The framework facilitates collaboration between...
 - ...disciplines → interdisciplinary collaboration
 - ...paradigms → pluralist research program
- Indicates that differences within disciplines are not necessarily smaller than between disciplines
 - Expl: evolutionary economics and classical sociology
 - Expl: neoclassical economics and analytical sociology
- The framework is useful in two practical instances:
 - Comparing and triangulating existing approaches
 - Transparent delineation of one owns concept, especially for empirical research

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