

Call for Participants: Workshop in Comparative Law Methods

Conveners: Prof. Dr. Philipp Renninger (University of Arizona/Seattle University); Prof. Dr. Odile Ammann (École de droit, Faculté de droit, des sciences criminelles et d'administration publique, Université de Lausanne); Dr. Lukas Heckendorn Urscheler (Vice Director of the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law). This workshop is a cooperation between the École de droit of the University of Lausanne and the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law.

Location: Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, Dorigny, CH-1015 Lausanne.

Date and time: Tuesday, 10 June 2025, 9:00am – 5:00pm.

Target group: PhD candidates; postdocs; advanced master students; any researcher interested in comparative law (not necessarily at the early-career stage).

Languages: While the conveners' presentations will be in English, participants are welcome to speak and participate in English, French, and German.

Purpose and overview:

Especially in Switzerland, legal comparative investigations form a common and important element of legal research projects. Comparative concerns feature prominently in doctoral dissertations but also in postdoctoral investigations, habilitations, master theses, and anthologies. Many of those Swiss projects explicitly compare (Swiss and foreign) law, sometimes as a main focus but mostly in the form of comparative excursions. Even more projects implicitly require a comparison. Highly popular amongst PhD students, e.g., are attempts to solve (or create) new problems and issues in Swiss law by simply importing longstanding German or French legal debates.

Yet, those comparative works seldom reflect on the method of comparative law they apply. As a result, most authors simply employ the established methods of Swiss domestic legal research throughout the entire analyses – not only when analyzing Swiss law, but also when investigating the foreign legal system and comparing the two with each other. Put differently, researchers tend to neglect both alternative and foreign approaches to comparative law. This overlooks both the interdisciplinary and the intercultural diversity and potential of comparative methodology.

This workshop offers three key benefits for legal researchers (including, but not limited to, those at the early stages of their careers). First, participants will reflect on the methodology and research design of (open or hidden) comparative legal investigations. They will explore which methods best suit their own research projects and which role comparative considerations could and should play in their work. Second, participants will get to know a variety of comparative law methods. This can foster the interdisciplinarity of their comparative legal research. Third, participants will become aware of the differences in comparative legal methodology between different countries and legal/scientific cultures. This will help realizing the interculturality, and thus the true comparativeness, of comparative law.

Schedule:

Part I (morning):

The workshop conveners will provide an overview of various comparative law methods, such as the functional method, contextual and empirical (qualitative and quantitative) approaches, legal culture, law and literature, or theory-based comparative law. For every method, they will present

the functioning, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the suitable fields of application. Moreover, they will present different comparative research designs. This will cover key questions such as how to formulate one's research question, how to select comparative units/jurisdictions, and how to determine the role of comparison within the broader research project.

Part II (afternoon):

Prior to the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to share a short outline of their research project, with a focus on the methodological approach they intend to adopt in their work. During the workshop, participants will briefly present their project, again emphasizing the methodological aspects. The workshop conveners and fellow participants will then provide feedback on the intended method and research design. The aim is for participants to obtain external expert and peer assessment: Are the intended methods suitable for their project? How might they be refined or improved? Should alternative methods be considered for specific aspects of the research?

Costs:

The workshop is free of charge. Doctoral students affiliated with the CUSO Droit are eligible for reimbursement of their travel expenses and lunch.

Registration:

Please register by Sunday, 11 May, by sending the following documents to audrey.boussat@unil.ch:

- a current CV;
- a brief statement of interest (ca. 500 words);
- the title of your research topic.

We welcome submissions in English, French, and German.