COMMENT

Response to “On the appropriate use of QCA in environmental management research: A comment on Hossu et al.” by Ide

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We acknowledge the comment by Ide (2018) where he raises questions about the appropriate use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and our use of the method in Hossu et al. (2018). In this response, we would like to explain and justify the choices we made in applying QCA and hope that our discussion with Ide can contribute to the ongoing debate in the QCA community about good practices (e.g. COMPASS 2017).

Ide (2018) points out the ‘many variables, few cases’ problem. We agree this is a matter of concern, and we have acknowledged this issue in our study’s limitations (Hossu et al. 2018, p. 6). In the paper by Marx and Duşa (2011), cited by Ide (2018) to support his argument, this problem is discussed only in the context of crisp sets where contradictions have a definition different from their fuzzy sets counterparts. In addition, the intermediate solution (QCA-IS) which we chose in our study was not even available in 2011. Therefore, it is debatable to what extent the problem raised by Ide (2018) extends for the QCA-IS. This is especially true since it is less affected by the problem of limited diversity specifically because it uses lesser remainders for the minimization. Furthermore, influential comparative studies show that it is plausible to use small N designs when dealing with multi-national comparative analyses, as is the case of our study (Lijphart 1971; Skocpol 1979). Our research design did not allow for more case studies to be selected as we were presenting matching case studies associated with collaborative resource management in Romania and the U.S., and in Romania, such

cases unfolded rather recently, with a limited presence in peer-reviewed publications.

Ide (2018) states that little variation exists within the variables (e.g. the 80/20 rule). We acknowledge this concern; however, we want to point out that our empirical data are sometimes skewed towards the case studies in one country compared to another due to differing levels of collaborative practices employed by the two countries. Ide (2018) also argues that “the condition interdependence does occur in none of the Romanian” cases. This is not true, as the value of 0 for the condition ‘interdependence’ does not mean its absence, it means that the condition is present in the Romanian cases and “parties looked for collaborators either at state or at local level” (Table 3 in Hossu et al. 2018).

We chose to discuss the intermediate solution instead of the parsimonious or complex solution as it allowed us to filter out the counterfactuals which were not in line with the theory of Emerson et al. (2012) that we used to specify directional expectations. The parsimonious solution (QCA-PS) automatically employs these unobserved configurations coming in direct contradiction with the theory our study was based on. Despite Baumgartner and Thiem’s (2017) support for the parsimonious solution, according to Duşa (2019), QCA-PS manages to find the causally relevant conditions, but they are not guaranteed to be sufficient, while the QCA-IS is superior in finding both causally relevant and sufficient conditions.

Regarding Ide’s (2018) concern about the right calibration for QCA, we argue for the use of a multi-value QCA (mvQCA) when the research design implies categorical data. Constructing a fuzzy set condition from this type of data, as advocated by Ide (2018), is only possible via the “Direct assignment” method that Duşa (2019, pp. 61–98) argues is the weakest of all calibration types. As

Ide (2018) points out, in the calibration of some conditions, we grouped our data into two and three sets, with the latter having a middle level that would correspond to a fuzzy-set 0.5 value. For such type of data, in order to avoid the problematic 0.5 value (Ragin 2004) when constructing the truth table, mvQCA is more appropriate (Duşa 2019).

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