



Introduction to Effective Research Design

Methods Seminar, 1st term 2019-2020

Thursdays, 15-17, Seminar Room 2, Badia Fiesolana

Organised by Elias Dinas and Anton Hemerijck

No registration required (compulsory for all first-year researchers)

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Description

This seminar provides an introduction to effective research design. Research design bears on the critical links between the central puzzle of research, on the one hand, and theory, methods, case selection and data collection and analysis, on the other. The purpose of effective research design is about testing theoretical – plausibly imaginative – conjectures against the best evidence available. The course addresses key issues about research questions, theory development, case selection and data gathering and analysis. It picks up from the general truism that a researcher will never find answers if she/he does not specify what she/he wants to know.

We do Research Design by – collectively – reading a series of ‘classic’ texts, from Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic*) from 1904 to Arlie Russell Hochschild (*Strangers in Their Own Land*) of 2016, so as to explore how different scholars define their research interests and questions, how they engage in academic debates, develop theories, use methods and collect data, to construct their persuasive ‘classic’ arguments and/or explanations.

The structure of the course is intentionally based on the careful reading of classic books (and associated articles on a similar topic from a different angle). The rationale behind the seminar is to uncover the exploratory search process in designing research. Each of the books (and articles) to be read for the seminar is based on a question-specific research design. By collectively reading these books (and articles) we hope to bring to the fore the fine nuances in choosing appropriate research design for interesting questions. In so doing, we immerse ourselves in the learning process of research design.

The discussion in the class will follow a similar structure every week. On each reading, we will be discussing the following questions:

1. What is the research question? What does the author(s) want to know?
2. How do(es) the author(s) try to address this question? How is the research organized and the evidence assembled? (*Logic of discovery*)
3. What does the author(s) know if he/she/they are right or wrong? What kind of evidence seems suitable to prove a point or thesis? (*Logic of proof*)

4. To what debate does the author want to make a scholarly contribution? (*Logic of engagement*)
5. What would you do differently when working on a similar puzzle? (*Logic of scientific progress*)

Preparatory Reading (from which you would benefit by reading/scanning before coming to the seminar):

1. Hancké, B. (2009), *Intelligent Research Design. A Guide for Beginning Researchers in the Social Sciences*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Shively, W. Phillips. *The craft of political research*. Routledge, 2017. 10th edition 2017
3. Creswell, John W. and J. David Creswell, *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing

Some of these introductory readings are heavy-going in trying to be overcomplete. Better to have them in background to back to every now and then, than to read in one go.

Requirements

Each week of the seminar, groups of two/three researchers (to be assigned at our first meeting for all the sessions) will be tasked to write a 2/3 page discussion outline, introducing and answering the five core questions and discussion points about Effective Research Design that arise from of the reading(s). The assignment is not to be mistaken for a general essay on a topic, but rather a succinct analysis of the book in terms of theory and methodology and how they relate to each other, more like an X-ray. The group should upload the outline of discussion points onto Sharepoint (a common platform from which and onto which you can download/upload material) the evening before the seminar. **All students, however, are expected to complete the readings and come prepared to discuss them in the seminar.** In addition, by the second but last seminar of class (November 28, 2019) each student must submit a **1500 word paper** that summarizes what she/he wants to do in their the in terms of a preliminary research design, prototyping the prospectus.

This course is mandatory for all first-year SPS researchers. Because this makes it a large course, we cannot allow visiting students to register for the class. If you want to write a term paper for this class as part of your general term paper requirements, you need to make significant use of the readings and topics on the syllabus and make a contribution to the discussion on Effective Research Design (in other words, a draft of your prospectus is not an acceptable term paper). Those who wish to write a term paper should first discuss the proposed topic with either Professor Dinas or Professor Hemerijck, and then submit to both professors by email (with a cc to Maureen) and in paper copy by the January deadline for term papers.

This seminar is worth 20 credits.

Session 1: Introduction: getting started on your thesis (3 October)

After an elementary introduction into effective research design, during the first seminar, the terms of engagement for seminar will be explicated and the groups responsible for assigned reading presentations will be formed.

Session 2: Introduction to Research Design Essentials – *theory building and theory testing* (10 October)

Essentials: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Additional Reading: Cantoni, Davide. "The economic effects of the Protestant Reformation: testing the Weber hypothesis in the German lands." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 13.4 (2015): 561-598.

Session 3: Identity and Nation-Building – *the logic of causal inference* (17 October)

Laitin, David D. *Identity in formation: The Russian-speaking populations in the near abroad*. Cornell University Press, 1998. LIB 305.800947 LAI

Wimmer, Andreas (2018), *Nation Building. Why Some Countries Come Together While Other Fall Apart*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Session 4: European Political Economy – *case selection in configurational research* (24 October)

Social Democracy and Europe: Scharpf, F.W. (1991), *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press. LIB 320.94055 SCH

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Session 5: Early 21st century social and political discontent – *the merits and limits of narrative explanation* (31 October)

21st century political discontent: Hochschild, A. R. (2016), *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, New York: The New Press. LIB 320.520973 HOC

Desmond, M. *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. Broadway Books, 2016.

Session 6: Conflict – *mixed methods* (7 November)

Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. LIB 303.64 KAL

Additional reading: Kalyvas, S. N. (2012). Micro-level studies of violence in civil war: Refining and extending the control-collaboration model. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24(4), 658-668.

Session 7: Political parties – *from cases to variables* (14 November)

Przeworski, Adam, and John Sprague. "Paper stones: A history of electoral socialism." (1988), chapters 2, 3, 5 (pages, 29-55; 57-99 143-179. LIB 940.287-P PRZ

Additional Reading (1): Hix, S. et al, The Rise and Fall of Social Democracy, 1918-2017

Session 8: Inequality – *description, measurement, correlation and causation* (21 November)

Firebaugh, Glenn, The New Geography of Global Income Inequality, Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press

Additional readings: Jason Beckfield, (2019). Unequal Europe. Regional integration and the rise of European inequality, chapter 4, 174-210

Session 9: Explaining the world – *even airport book adhere to (some) effective research design requirements* (28 November)

Diamond, Jared M. *Guns, germs and steel: a short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years*. Random House, 1998. LIB 901 DIA

Shadow: Taleb, N. N. (2007). *The black swan: The impact of the highly improbable* (Vol. 2). Random house.

Session 10: What have we learned? (5 December)

Assessment:

1. All participants do the readings each week and engage in the classrooms discussion.
2. Each week a group of two to three researchers will prepare a 2/3-page response paper, in terms of structured analysis of the research design (in terms of theory and methodology) the readings are based. Each response paper has to send to the entire class 24 hours before the seminar.
3. Individual assignment: By December 10 you will have to write a similarly 2/3-page structured summary of what you want see as the research design of your thesis. If undecided about what you really want to do, you will have to invent a research design that you would like to do.

Last updated 03.10.2019