

Introduction to Effective Research Design

Methods Seminar, 2nd term 2021-2022

Thursdays, 11:00-13:00, various rooms, Badia Fiesolana (please consult the Events platform for details)

Organised by Klarita Gërxhani and Anton Hemerijck

(compulsory for all first-year researchers)

Contact: Maureen.Lechleitner@eui.eu

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. Therefore, the seminar will address key issues about research questions, theory development, case selection and data gathering and analysis. Researchers will learn how empirical research and social science theory can be integrated in different strands of social research, and they are encouraged to “improve” existing research (presented in a selection of monographs and research articles) by thinking of alternative theories, hypotheses, concepts, measurements and research strategies. Moreover, the seminar aims to teach, and show, what is involved in writing research, that is not only the findings but also the intellectual journey and logical process of arriving at these findings.

We do Research Design by ‘collectively’ reading a series of contemporary books - from Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic*) in 1904 to Elinor Ostrom (*Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*) in 1990 and Arlie Russell Hochschild (*Strangers in Their Own Land*) in 2016 - posing and addressing ‘big’ questions as well as a number of research articles that rather focus on ‘small’ questions. The main objective is to explore how different scholars define their research interests and questions, and how they engage in academic debates, develop theories, use methods and collect data, to construct their persuasive arguments and/or explanations.

The structure of the seminar is intentionally based on the careful reading of contemporary books and articles. Careful reading does not imply word-for-word reading, but rather reading the text in such a way that you can detect the basic research design behind the overall argument. The rationale of 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 ‘big’ and ‘small’ 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 is the puzzle motivating the author(s)' research question?
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. Is the theoretical and/or empirical evidence internally and/or externally valid? 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. Creswell, John W. and J. David Creswell, *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing
3. Gerring, John (2011). *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge University Press. 2nd edition.

Requirements

1. *Reading and participation in class discussions*: all researchers are expected to complete the readings and come prepared to actively discuss them in the seminar.
2. *Presentations*: each week of the seminar, groups of three/four researchers (to be finalized at our first meeting for all the sessions) will be tasked to prepare a power point presentation of the assigned readings (i.e. book or articles), where the following is expected: (i) a general outline of the readings; (2) introducing and answering the five core questions and discussion points about Effective Research Design that arise from the readings. This assignment is not to be mistaken for a general essay on a topic, but rather a succinct analysis of the readings in terms of theory and methodology and how they relate to each other, more like an X-ray.
3. *Post at least two questions*: each week, all researchers (except those who will present) will use a google-doc to post at least two most intriguing and prominent questions related to the readings, accompanied by some motivation of each. These questions need to be posted the day prior to the seminar, at 17:00 at the latest.
4. *Writing assignments*: using the readings as an inspiring example, the researchers will be asked to write -throughout the seminar- four academic pieces on a particular dimension of their prospectus. Namely, a piece on Introduction (max. 2 pages – deadline 26/01), a piece on Literature review (max. 2-3 pages – deadline 09/02), a piece on Theoretical framework (max. 2 pages – deadline 23/02), and a piece on Operationalization (max. 2 pages – deadline 09/03). By the agreed upon deadline, the researchers should upload them on the Brightspace. They will receive feedback within two weeks.

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.

This seminar is worth 20 credits.

Session 1: Introduction: getting started on your thesis (13 January)

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* (20 January)

Weber, Max. (1904) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Optional:

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: European Political Economy – *case selection in configurational monograph research* (27 January)

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

Session 4: Institutionalism and governance – *mixed methods combination of in-depth evidence with quantitative analysis* (3 February)

Ostrom, Elinor. (1990) *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press.

Session 5: Focused research design in article applications (10 February)

Slougha, Tara, Daniel Rubensonb, Ro'ee Levyc, Francisco Alpizar Rodriguezd, Maria Bernedo del Carpioe, Mark Buntainef, Darin Christenseng, Alicia Coopermanh, Sabrina Eisenbarthi, Paul J.

Ferraroj, Louis Grahamk, Alexandra Hartmanl, Jacob Kopasm, Sasha McLartyn, Anouk S. Rigterinko, Cyrus Samiia, Brigitte Seimp, Johannes Urpelainenq, Bing Zhangr. (2021) "Adoption of Community Monitoring Improves Common Pool Resource Management Across Contexts." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118(29)(& Supplementary Material).

Buis, Maarten L. (2013) "The Composition of Family Background: The Influence of the Economic and Cultural Resources of both Parents on the Offspring's Educational Attainment in the Netherlands between 1939 and 1991." *European Sociological Review* 29(3): 593–602.

Session 6: International Relations (17 February)

Rathbun, B. C., & Pomeroy, C. (2021). See No Evil, Speak No Evil? Morality, Evolutionary Psychology, and the Nature of International Relations. *International Organization*, 1-34.

Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt. (2013) Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing is Bad for International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations* 19/3: 427–457.

Session 7: Early 21st century social and political discontent – *the merits and limits of narrative explanation* (24 February)

Hochschild, Ari. R. (2016) *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, New York: The New Press.

Session 8: Inequality and policy – *description, measurement, and causation through RCTs* (3 March)

Banarjee, Abhijit and Duflo, Esther. (2012) *Poor Economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty*. PublicAffairs, NY.

Session 9: Two-day workshop (10-11 March)

Session 10: What have we learned? (17 March)