

Universität zu Köln

Research designs in social sciences: foundations and practical steps

Course synopsis (draft as of 30 June 2017)

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1. Course goals

The course aims to help students to:

- Understand the core arbitrations to be made in the course of a research process in social sciences;
- Understand and be able to reflect on current points of contention and cleavages with regards to research designs in social sciences; in particular: be able to identify some more fundamental issues behind seemingly ‘technical’ choices;
- Get a first view on how a robust research design is constructed, following different traditions: “qualitative” (case-oriented), “quantitative” (variable-oriented) and “comparative” (multiple cases)
- Be able to consult, at a basic level, specialized resources to obtain more detailed information (readings, bibliographical databases etc.) relevant for social scientific research
- Be able to critically assess, at a basic level, the research design used by the author(s) of published work in social sciences

2. Pedagogy

- The working language is English (lectures, interaction both ways, reports etc.)
- The course is mostly lecture-driven, with some elements of interaction:
 - While lecturing, the instructor regularly requests from course participants that they provide some concrete examples (real-life situations) of the points presented
 - For each daily session (2 Units), 2 groups of students are designated to prepare a bullet-point “key lessons learned” summary (1 group per Unit), to be presented with 1-2 slides at the beginning of the next daily session. This is followed by a short, open interaction and questions/answers with the whole audience.

3. Evaluation

Out of the 9 ECTS points:

- 4 ECTS points are allocated to the preparation of the course, reading the mandatory literature and preparing individual sessions
- 1 ECTS point is allocated to the bullet-point “key lessons learned” summary (group work);
- 4 ECTS points are allocated to a 4-page individual written report to be submitted by each course participant. *[Details of the structure of the written report, evaluation criteria etc. will follow in a subsequent version for the participants]*

4. Day to day planning

Unit	Day/time	Content
1	19 Oct 9:00 - 10:30	1. Course organization and general framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course organization • Course introduction • How to ‘think about one’s research’ as a social scientist
2	19 Oct 10:45 - 12:15	2. Upstream issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upstream issues (1): ontology • Upstream issues (2): epistemology • Upstream issues (3): methodological cleavages
3	20 Oct 9:00 - 10:30	3. Generic aspects of research designs and generic ‘tricks of the trade’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research process as a whole: what is a “research design”? • Generic quality criteria for a sound research design
4	20 Oct 10:45 - 12:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic operation (1): searching for useful information on a given topic • Generic operation (2): compiling and processing useful information • Generic operation (3): managing a research process (time management, etc.)
5	26 Oct 9:00 - 10:30	4. ‘Qualitative’ research designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining ‘qualitative’ research • Qualitative methods and techniques: a bird’s eye view
6	26 Oct 10:45 - 12:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A typical qualitative research design: building blocks and sequence • Strengths of qualitative research • Limitations and caveats of qualitative research
7	27 Oct 9:00 - 10:30	5. ‘Quantitative’ research designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining ‘quantitative’ research • Quantitative methods and techniques: a bird’s eye view
8	27 Oct 10:45 - 12:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A typical quantitative research design: building blocks and sequence • Strengths of quantitative research • Limitations and caveats of quantitative research
9	9 Nov 9:00 - 10:30	6. ‘Comparative’ research designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining ‘comparative’ research • Comparative methods and techniques: a bird’s eye view • A typical sequence, its strengths and limitations/caveats (in short)
10	9 Nov 10:45 - 12:15	7. In conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course conclusion [by instructor] • Main lessons learned [by participants]

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open discussion on a few points of current debates • Instructions for individual reports
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5. Readings

[first working list: will be fine-tuned and complemented short by excerpts from published (empirical) pieces and allocated to the respective days; an electronic portfolio will be made available in due time]

Becker, H. S. (1998). *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It.*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *[some passages]*

Blanchard, P., Rihoux, B., & Álamos Concha, P. (2017). Comprehensively Mapping Political Science Methods: an Instructors' Survey. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 209-224. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2015.1129128

Brady, Henry, & Collier, David (Eds.). (2010, 2nd ed.). *Rethinking social enquiry.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. *[some passages]*

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.* 3rd ed., London: Sage. [**Chapter 1, pp. 3-21** on « The selection of a research design »; + **2-3 other passages**]

Della Porta, D. & Keating, M. (2008). "Comparing Approaches, Methodologies and Methods. Some Concluding Remarks", in Della Porta, D. & Keating, M. (eds), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, **316-322**.

Della Porta, D. & Keating, M. (2008). "How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction", in Della Porta, D. & Keating, M. (eds), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, **19-39**.

Della Porta, D. & Keating, M. (eds) (2008). *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective.*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **[some passages in particular in Chapters 10 to 15]**

Gschwend, Thomas, & Schimmelfennig, Frank (Eds.). (2011). *Research Design in Political Science. How to Practice What They Preach:* Palgrave Macmillan. **[some passages in particular in Chapters 1-3 & 8]**

King, G., Keohane, R. O. & Verba, S. (eds) (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research.*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. *[some passages]*

Moses, J. W. & Knutsen, T. L. (2007). *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research.*, New-York: Palgrave Macmillan. *[some passages]*

Pennings, P., Keman, H. & Kleinnijenhuis, J. (1999). *Doing Research in Political Science. an Introduction to Comparative Methods and Statistics.*, London: Sage Publications. *[some passages]*

Ragin, C. C. (1987). *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies.*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. *[some passages]*

Rihoux, B. & Ragin, C. C. (eds) (2009). *Configurational Comparative Methods. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Techniques.* Applied Social Research Methods, Thousand Oaks and London: Sage. *[some passages]*