

Research Design for Environmental Politics and beyond

Instructor: Dr. Alejandro Esguerra | alejandro.esguerra@uni-bielefeld.de
Seminar: Tuesdays, 12pm – 2pm | E0-180
Office Hours: Mondays, 2pm – 3pm | book an appointment in the ekvv.

Aims: The aim of the seminar is to equip students with the meta-theoretical insights, methodological skills, and reflexive capacities to develop a sound research design for environmental politics and beyond. After the seminar, students will be able to conduct independent research in form of a MA thesis.

Approach: The seminar has a two-fold approach: Students will read texts that sensitize for methodological problems and provide guidance in developing a research design. We intertwine these sessions with “application sessions” in which students pick-up the readings and apply them. To this end, participants choose a project topic at the beginning of the seminar and develop this topic throughout the semester. At the end of the seminar, a draft research proposal for this project is presented and discussed. It can then be developed into a term paper.

Audience: This seminar is an advanced MA course designed for students at the end of their studies. While there are a few references to environmental politics, students are free to choose their own projects in the realm of political science, political sociology, world studies, or science studies. The seminar has an emphasis on qualitative research without excluding other approaches. The course language is English; students may write their assignments and term paper in German.

Assignments: All assignments have to adhere to standards of scientific integrity. This concerns issues of plagiarism (see <https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/forschung/gute-wiss-praxis/>) as well as general conventions of good scientific practice. Please ensure that on each document you note down your name and ‘Matrikel’ nr., the date, and the course title. I strongly suggest that you use a citation program such as citavi or endnote; I recommend using Zotero because it is an open-source program and free of charge.

1. Assignments for the *Studienleistung*: (a) read the mandatory articles for each session and discuss the readings in class (b) choose two reading from two different sessions, write a 300-word reflection note on each article, post it in the course moodle, and be prepared to discuss your reflections in class. The *Studienleistung* is not graded.
2. Assignments for the *Prüfungsleistung*: (a) write the three applications and upload them in moodle (b) finalize your research proposal as a term paper by August 31st 2024, and upload it in moodle. Your final research design will be graded.

OVERVIEW

1. 09.04. **Introduction to the course**

PART I: REFLECTION ON SCIENCE AS PRACTICE

2. 16.04. **The structure of science: norms, positionality, and difference**
3. 23.04. **Posing questions, defining problems**
28.04. *First assignment due: Upload individual topic and research question*

PART II: PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE

4. 30.04. **Pluralist perspectives: From positivism to humanism**
5. 07.05. **Varieties of causality**

PART III COMPARISON AND CASE STUDY DESIGN

6. 14.05. **Case-oriented versus variable-oriented research**
21.05. *Reading week, no class*
7. 28.05. **Case study methods and case selection**
8. 04.06. **Process tracing and causal mechanisms**
09.06. *Second assignment due: Upload revised topic, research questions and outline approach*
9. 11.06. **Application session**
10. 18.06. **Writing session**

PART IV. FORMS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ETHICS

11. 25.06. **Triangulation and co-production**
12. 02.07. **Forms of data collection**
05.07. *Third assignment due: draft research proposal*

PART V: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

13. 09.07. **Presentation I**
14. 16.07. **Presentation II**

SESSION DETAILS

1. 09.04. **Introduction to the course**

Note: This is an asynchronous session. Please make yourselves familiar with the syllabus. How is the course structured? What are the assignments?

Also, start reflecting on a possible research topic that you would like to develop throughout the semester. This can be your MA thesis topic, but it does not have to be.

PART I: REFLECTION ON SCIENCE AS PRACTICE

2. 16.04. **The structure of science: norms, positionality, and difference**

This session is an exercise in reflecting about the norms, practices, objectives, infrastructures and means of conducting inquiry (in times of environmental crisis). What is science and its practice? How should we think the relationship of science and society? Note that all authors approach these topics quite differently: Try to tease out the differences, and perhaps you may also find some common ground.

Mandatory Readings

- Escobar, Arturo. 2020. *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. Duke University Press. **Focus: Ch.1 15-29.**
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575–99. **Focus: 575-585.**
- Merton, Robert K. 1973. "The Normative Structure of Science." In *The Sociology of Science*, 267–78. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **Focus: "The Ethos of Science", 269-278.**

Further Readings

- Latour, Bruno. 1998. "From the World of Science to the World of Research?" *Science* 280 (5361): 208–9.
- Lövbrand, Eva, Silke Beck, Jason Chilvers, Tim Forsyth, Johan Hedrén, Mike Hulme, Rolf Lidskog, and Eleftheria Vasileiadou. 2015. "Who Speaks for the Future of Earth? How Critical Social Science Can Extend the Conversation on the Anthropocene." *Global Environmental Change* 32: 211–18.
- Weingart, Peter. 2010. "A Short History of Knowledge Formations." *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, 3–14.

3. 23.04. **Posing questions, defining problems**

Many argue that research questions are an essential guidance throughout the research process. But where do research questions come from? What is a good research question? Does a research question already signal a meta-theoretical commitment? Where do research problems (should) come from? Start reflecting on your research topic and how this could be translated into a research question.

Also, the instructor provides a short input on the first assignment due on the 28th of April.

Mandatory Readings

- Flick, Uwe. 2022. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 7th ed. SAGE Publications. Ch. 6. **Focus: 71-80**
- Geddes, Barbara. 2003. "Big Questions, Little Answers. How the Questions You Choose Affect the Answers You Get." In *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*, 27–88. University of Michigan Press. **Focus: 27-35.**
- Sandberg, Jörgen, and Mats Alvesson. 2011. "Ways of Constructing Research Questions: Gap-Spotting or Problematization?" *Organization* 18 (1): 23–44. **Focus: 23-33.**

Further Readings

- Barry, Andrew. 2021. "What Is an Environmental Problem?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 38 (2): 93–117.
- Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Cornell University Press. → Types of dissertations, 89-95.

28.04. ***First assignment due: Upload individual topic and research question***

PART II: PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE

4. 30.04. **Pluralist perspectives: From positivism to humanism**

We kick-off this session with the presentation and discussion of the individual research questions.

In the second part of the session, we discuss central concepts such as epistemology and ontology and how they figure in the various conceptions of science ranging from positivism to humanistic approaches.

Mandatory Readings

- Della Porta, Donatella, and Michael Keating. 2012. "How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction." In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, 19–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Focus: read the entire text.**
- Keat, Russell, and John Urry. 1979. *Social Theory as Science* (Routledge Revivals 2011). Routledge. **Focus: 3-7.**

Further Readings

- Hawkesworth, Mary. 2015. "Contending Conceptions of Science and Politics. Methodology and the Constitution of the Political." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, 27–49. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Keat, Russell, and John Urry. 1979. *Social Theory as Science* (Routledge Revivals 2011). Routledge. Chapter 1.

5. 07.05. **Varieties of causality**

In this session, we discuss competing understandings of judging quality of research. Causality is a central criterion in this context, but schools of thought differ on how to establish causality. While the text by Adrienne Héritier stays within the paradigm of positivism (broadly understood), Peregrine Schwartz-Shea introduces to quality criteria of interpretivism or post-positivism and outlines a different vision of causality.

Mandatory Readings

- H eritier, Adrienne. 2012. "Causal Explanations." In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, 61–79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Focus: read entire text, 16pp.**
- Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine. 2012. "Judging Quality: Evaluative Criteria and Epistemic Communities." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, 89–113. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe. **Focus: skip 124-129 if you wish, but do read the remaining parts of the article.**

Further Readings

- Little, Daniel. 2023. "Causation in the Social Realm." In *Causality in Policy Studies: A Pluralist Toolbox*, edited by Alessia Damonte and Fedra Negri, 11–35. Springer International Publishing.
- King, G., R. O. Keohane, and S. Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton Univ Pr. Ch. 3.1 and 3.2.
- Wendt, Alexander. 1998. "On Constitution and Causation in International Relations." *Review of International Studies* 24 (5): 101–18.

PART III COMPARISON AND CASE STUDY DESIGN

6. 14.05. **Case-oriented versus variable-oriented research**

This session introduces to two diverging ways of conducting research, namely case-oriented versus variable-oriented research. Both forms are equally legitimated but come with implications. Read the assigned readings, reflect on the differences and which of the two camps you favor in your project – why is this the case?

Mandatory Readings

- Della Porta, Donatella. 2012. "Comparative Analysis: Case-Oriented versus Variable-Oriented Research." In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, 198–222. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Focus: read entire text**
- Input: instructor introduces on elements of a research proposal

21.05. ***Reading week, no class***

7. 28.05. **Case study methods and case selection**

The readings give an overview of the case study method and case selection. Reflect to what extent the case selection criteria respond to the need of interpretivists and post-positivist scholars.

Mandatory Readings

- Bennett, Andrew. 2004. "Case Study Methods: Design, Use, and Comparative Advantages." In *Models, Numbers, and Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations*, edited by Detlef Sprinz and Yael Wolinsky-Nahmias, 2:19–55. University of Michigan Press. **Focus: 19-44.**

- Gerring, John. 2016. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. 2nd ed. Strategies for Social Inquiry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Focus: 37-55.**

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Further Readings

- Scheffer, Thomas, and Jörg Niewöhner. 2010. Thick Comparison: Reviving the Ethnographic Aspiration. Vol. 114. Brill.
- Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science. Cornell University Press. Ch.2 "What are case studies? How should they be performed?"

8. 04.06 **Process tracing and causal mechanisms**

Process tracing – PT, in short – has emerged as an influential method of doing research. The article provides an overview of the conventional, mostly positivist understanding of PT and provides a good example. Try to figure out the differences of the two forms of PT.

Mandatory Readings

- Meegdenburg, Hilde van. 2023. "Process Tracing: An Analyticist Approach." In Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods, edited by Patrick Mello and Falk Ostermann, 405–20. Taylor & Francis. **Focus on pp. 405-413 in case you would also like to read the Meegdenburg / Mello chapter for a positivist version of PT.**

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Further Readings

- Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. 2015. Strategies for Social Inquiry. Process Tracing From Metaphor to Analytic Tool. Cambridge University Press.
- van Meegdenburg, H. & P.A. Mello. Uncovering causal symptoms. Book manuscript, chapter 3: Causal Mechanisms.
- Pouliot, Vincent. 2015. "Practice Tracing." In Strategies for Social Inquiry. Process Tracing From Metaphor to Analytic, edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, 237–59. Cambridge University Press.

09.06. *Second assignment due: Upload revised topic, research questions and outline approach*

9. 11.06. **Application session**

In this session, students present their second assignment and receive peer feedback.

10. 18.06. **Writing session**

This session is an asynchronous writing session. Based on the feedback received in class, rewrite and expand your research proposal.

PART IV. FORMS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ETHICS

11. 25.06. **Triangulation and Co-production**

This session reflects on the different forms of data collection, triangulation as a means to build bridges between qualitative and quantitative approaches and research ethics, especially when co-producing knowledge.

Mandatory Readings

- Flick, Uwe. 2022. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 7th ed. SAGE Publications. Ch. 13: Qualitative Designs with Multiple Methods. **Focus: 173-186.**
- Wilkens, Jan, and Alvine RC Datchoua-Tirvaudey. 2022. "Researching climate justice: a decolonial approach to global climate governance." *International Affairs* 98.1, 125-143. **Focus: 131-143.**

Further Readings

- Brady, Henry E, and David Collier. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Ch. 6
- Dauphinee, E. (2010). The ethics of autoethnography. *Review of International Studies*, 36(3), 799-818.

12. 02.07. **Forms of data collection**

From ethnography to web-scraping, social scientists know many forms of collecting and handling data. This session introduces to three common forms of data collection for a MA thesis, interviews, documents, and ethnography.

Mandatory Readings

- Leech, Beth L. 2002. Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews. *Political Science & Politics* 35 (04): 665–68. **Focus: 131-143.**
- Schrag, Zachary M. 2021. *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press. Chapter 6, pp. 120 – 153. **Focus: on a type of text that is relevant for your study.**
- Wedeen, L. 2010. Reflections on ethnographic work in political science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13, 255-272. **Focus: 256-260.**

Further Readings

- Liamputtong, Pranee 2011. *Focus Group Methodology. Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.
- Mosley, L. (Ed.). 2013. *Interview research in political science*. Cornell University Press.
- Weidmann, Nils B. 2023. *Data Management for Social Scientists: From Files to Databases*. Cambridge University Press.

05.07. *Third assignment due: Draft research proposal*

PART V: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

13. 09.07. **Presentation I via Zoom**

14. 16.07. **Presentation II via Zoom**

31.08. Revised research proposals (term paper) are due.