Social Science Concepts and Methods
Block Seminar Graduate School

Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences
University of Hamburg

Winter Semester 2018/19

Seminar Outline

Convenors:
Prof. Dr. Antje Wiener (WISO-UHH)
Dr. Maren Hofius (WISO-UHH)

Venue: AP1, Room 250

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Abstract

In the planning of research projects, research objects are addressed based on theory, methodology, and research methods. And, pending on the research object’s empirical substance, specific research techniques are required to undertake fieldwork. While methodological ‘triangulation’ and ‘mixed methods approaches’ are possible, the choice of methodology requires careful consideration taking into account the researcher’s epistemological standpoint and ontological preference. Against that background, specific methodologies and methods are identified to pursue the research question. Several research objectives and types of research questions can be distinguished, including for example, theory-based or problem-oriented research objectives, or ‘how possible’ and ‘why’ questions, respectively. To familiarise the students with these distinct perspectives and choices, this seminar on Social Science Concepts and Methods addresses the research process that leads scholars to the position from which problem-oriented research assumptions can be made and more particular research questions can be formulated.

Chair’s Office
Allende Platz 1, 20146 Hamburg, Room 249
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Office hours: By appointment through the Chair’s office only
OVERVIEW: BLOCK SEMINAR OUTLINE

I Meeting
Preparation Organisation

October 22, 2018
09:15 – 10:45 h

This meeting will serve four main purposes:
1. Introduce seminar outline (theme, purpose, aim, organisation);
2. Discuss the substantive organisation of the seminar’s two main block-meetings in December and January;
3. Identify main areas of interest and presentation on topics taking into account participants’ own research projects
4. Outlook: Discuss central elements of a research proposal (e.g. research question, objective)

II Meeting
Block Seminar

December 3, 2018
09:15 – 14:45 h

This block-meeting will focus on the presentation and discussion of:
Ways of Knowing

III Meeting
Block Seminar

January 21, 2019
09:15 - 14:45 h

This block-meeting will focus on the presentation and discussion of:
Basic Research Strategies

Post-Seminar Reflection

Self-study

Going through these readings means learning about reflexivity and ponder the presence of the ‘I’ in your research:
Learning & Reflexivity

Core Readings

1 Please note that in the absence of access to STiNE electronic updates of this outline will be made available on the Chair’s website. It is each student’s responsibility to maintain him- or herself updated.
MEETING I - October 22, 2018, 09:15 – 10:45 h

INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OVERVIEW

Session 1: Writing a Research Proposal: Puzzles and Questions

Lead Questions:
What are the central elements of a research design/proposal? Where do research questions come from? And what makes a ‘good’ research question?

Background Readings:

MEETING II - December 3, 2018, 09:15 – 14:45 h

WAYS OF KNOWING I: INTERPRETIVE METHODOLOGY

Session 2: Interpretivism

Lead Questions: What is distinct about interpretive research? What does it ‘mean’ to do interpretive research? How does it differ from positivism? What does it offer?

Required Readings:

Further Readings:
Epstein, C. (2013) Constructivism or the eternal return of universals in International Relations. Why returning to language is vital to prolonging the owl’s flight, European Journal of International Relations 19(3), 499–519.
Session 3: Social Scientific Reasoning and Meta-Theorising

Lead Questions: What difference does it make to either seek to understand or explain a social phenomenon? Can the two purposes of research be neatly distinguished?

Required Readings:

Further Readings:

WAYS OF KNOWING II: MODES AND LOGICS OF INQUIRY

Session 4: Theories and Concepts

Lead questions: What is the difference between theory and concept? What are concepts (good) for? What different modes and purposes of theorising are there and how are they related to different modes of knowledge production?

Required Readings:

Further Readings:

**Session 5: Logics of Inquiry and the Interplay between Theory and Data**

*Lead Questions:* What different forms of reasoning exist and how do they differ? How do theory and data hang together throughout the research process? What logic of inquiry have you pursued in the past and how much did it conform to the actual research experience?

**Required Readings:**

**Further Readings:**
BASIC RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Session 6: Modes of Construction

Lead Questions: Who or what are we to follow as researchers? How can we tap background knowledge?

Required Readings:

Further Readings:
Symposium in *Political Science and Politics* (2017) 50(1), on “Ethnography and Participant Observation: Political Science Research in this ‘Late Methodological Moment’”

Session 7: Analysing Data – Discourse Analysis

Select Readings:


**Session 8: Analysing Data – Visual Analysis**

**Select Readings:**


POST-SEMINAR REFLECTION (OUT-OF-CLASS)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AS A VOCATION AND ACADEMIC VOICE

**Reflexivity: Practice Theory or Theory as Practice?**

*Lead Questions: What does it mean to conduct research in IR reflexively? What is and should the relationship between the theory and practice of international relations be?*

**Required Readings:**

**Further Readings:**

**The ‘I’ in IR: Autoethnography and Novel Writing**

*Lead Questions: To what extent are novel writing and auto-ethnography worthwhile ways of including the researcher's own presence in his or her research? What are the prospects of these forms of writing?*

**Required Readings:**

**Further Readings:**