

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies

PhD course “Logic of Social Inquiry”

Winter Term 2020/21

Tuesdays, 10:00 - 11:30 am.

Location: zoom.us

(<https://zoom.us/j/3915869382>; Password: MPIfG20)

Instructor: Dr. Leon Wansleben, MPIfG, lw@mpifg.de

Introduction

This course provides a systematic introduction to designing and conducting individual research projects in the social sciences and is targeted at PhDs, who are in the process of formulating their dissertation projects. The aim is to connect general questions about epistemology and about the aims of social research with concrete practical issues, e.g. how to develop good research questions; how to connect questions with appropriate methodologies; and how to write good articles and book chapters. Underlying this course is a pluralist conception of epistemologies and methodologies in the social sciences. Pluralism requires us to be self-reflexive about our own presumptions and axioms in conducting research, and to meaningfully engage with the approaches and projects of our colleagues. We will do so through a dialogical format, and by working as much as possible with your research projects.

Assignments and assessment

The course will be taught through a combination of lectures, student interventions, and discussion. You are expected to attend regularly and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings for each session. In addition, you are expected to complete the following assignments:

- Submit **one response memo** (approx. one page) on a reading for one of our sessions. The memo should summarize key arguments, reflect critically on what you consider as problematic, implausible or missing, and end with a question arising from reading a particular text that is included in the reading list (this text does not need to be required reading). Please send the memo before the session in which we cover the chosen reading.
- Write **one transfer exercise memo** (approx. two pages) that you use to discuss a particular research design problem that you encounter with your own PhD project. This design problem can relate to the formulation of your research question, the status of theory, disentangling the relevant (causal) processes/mechanisms of interest, or identifying appropriate methods of data collection. Please send these memos before the class in which we cover the respective theme.
- Write a **research proposal** (approx. 10-12 pages) in which you develop the research question and research design for your PhD project. In order to prepare this, you should arrange an individual meeting with the lecturer during December or January. The jointly agreed task will be tailored to the current stage of your PhD project and should help you to develop it further.

Weight of different assignments for final grade:

- Response memo, transfer exercise memo and class participation 30%
- Research proposal 70%

All written submissions should be sent by email to lw@mpifg.de; they can be written in German or English.

Readings

Session 1 (03.11.2020) Introduction

No specific reading required.

Useful textbooks and papers for understanding the design and intentions of this course include:

Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of discovery: heuristics for the social sciences*. New York: Norton.

Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Della Porta, Donatella and Keating, Michael (eds) 2008. *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press.

Martin, John Levi. 2017. *Thinking Through Methods: A Social Science Primer*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 2005. *The logic of social research*. University of Chicago Press.

Session 2 (10.11.2020) Pluralism in the social sciences

Required readings:

Della Porta, Donatella and Keating, Michael. 2008. How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction. In: Della Porta, Donatella and Keating, Michael (eds.) *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 19-39.

Complementary readings:

Abbott, Andrew. 2001. *Chaos of Disciplines*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Becker, Howard S. 1996. The Epistemology of Qualitative Research. In: R. Jessor, A. Colby and R. A. Shweder (eds), *Ethnography and human development: context and meaning in social inquiry*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 53-70.

Merton, Robert K. 1982. The Normative Structure of Science. In A. Rosenblatt and T.F. Gieryn (eds.), *Robert K Merton: Social Research and the Practicing Professions*, Cambridge, MA: Abt Books, pp. 3-16.

Popper, Karl. 1934/2003. The problem of induction. In: Gerard Delanty/Piet Strydom (eds.), *Philosophies of Social Science*. Open University Press, pp. 42-46.

Weber, Max. 1904/2003. 'Objectivity' in social science. In: G. Delanty/P. Strydom (eds.), *Philosophies of Social Science*, Open University Press, pp. 107-120.

If interested in contemporary controversies on the scholarly nature of sociology in Germany, you can watch: <https://youtu.be/6KXOLVYuVYc> (Soziologischer Aschermittwoch, Uni Koeln, 06.03.2019).

Session 3 (17.11.2020)

Description

Required readings:

Gerring, John. 2012. "Mere description." *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4): 721-746.

Complementary readings:

Collins, Harry M. (2008). Actors' and Analysts' Categories in the Social Analysis of Science. In: *Clashes of Knowledge*. P. Meusburger, M. Welker and E. Wunder. Dordrecht, Springer. 1: 101-110.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Hirschauer, Stefan. 2006. "Putting Things into Words. Ethnographic Description and the Silence of the Social." *Human Studies* 29: 413-441.

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Session 4 (24.11.2020)

Explanation

Required reading:

Tilly, Charles, and Robert Goodin. 2006. "It depends." Pp. 3-32 in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, edited by Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Complementary readings:

Elster, Jon (2015). *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Gerring, John. 2005. "Causation: A unified framework for the social sciences." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 17 (2), pp. 163-198.

Heckman, James J. (2005), The scientific model of causality. *Sociological Methods & Research* 28 (4), pp. 387-424.

Little, Daniel (1990), *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press.

Marini, Margaret Mooney and Burton Singer (1988), Causality in social sciences. *Sociological Methodology* 18, pp. 347-409.

Mayntz, Renate (2009), *Sozialwissenschaftliches Erklären*. Campus.

Tilly, Charles. 1995. "To Explain Political Processes." *American Journal of Sociology* 100(6):1594-610.

Tilly, Charles. 2004. "Reasons Why." *Sociological Theory* 22(3): 445-454.

Session 5 (01.12.2020)

Causality via mechanisms

Required reading:

Hedström, Peter, and P. Ylikoski. 2010. "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1): 49-67.

Complementary readings:

Mayntz, Renate (2002), *Akteure – Mechanismen – Modelle*. Campus.

Reiss, Julian (2009), Causation in the social sciences: Evidence, inference, and purpose. *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 39 (1), pp. 20-40.
Gross, Neil .2009. "A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms." *American Sociological Review* 74(3): 358-379.
Hedström, Peter, and P. Ylikoski. 2010. "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1): 49-67.
Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 2005. *The logic of social research*. University of Chicago Press, chapter 6.

Session 6 (08.12.2020) A causal devolution?

Required readings:

Abbott, Andrew. 1998. The causal devolution. *Sociological Methods & Research* 27(2), pp. 148-181.

Complementary readings:

Watts, Duncan J. 2014. "Common Sense and Sociological Explanations." *American Journal of Sociology* 120(2): 313-351.

Session 7 (15.12.2020) What makes a good research question?

Required readings:

Martin, John Levi. 2017. *Thinking Through Methods: A Social Science Primer*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chapter 2: How to Formulate a Question.

Complementary readings:

Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of discovery: heuristics for the social sciences*. New York: Norton, Chapter seven (ideas and puzzles)

Merton, Robert K. (1960), Notes on problem-finding in sociology. In: Merton, Robert K., Broom, Leonard, Cottrell, Leonard S. Jr., *Sociology Today*. Basic Books, pp. ix-xxxiv.

See various articles in *Sociologica: International Journal for Sociological Debate*, Volume 12, Number 1, special issue on Heuristics of Discovery.

Session 8 (22.12.2020) Research designs

Required reading:

Hancké, Bob. 2009. *Intelligent Research Design: A Guide for Beginning Researchers in the Social Sciences*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, chapter 2.

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 2005. *The logic of social research*. University of Chicago Press, chapter 1 (methods for sociology and related disciplines)

Complementary readings:

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O. and Verba, Sidney (1994), *Designing social inquiry*. Princeton University Press. Pp. 3-33.

Schmitter, Philippe (2008), The design of social and political research. In: Della Porta, Donatella and Keating, Michael (eds.) *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 263-295.

Schneiberg, Marc and Clemens, Elisabeth S. (2006), The typical tools for the job: Research strategies in institutional analysis. In: *Sociological Theory* 24 (3): 195-222.

Session 9 (12.01.2021)

Designing statistical analyses

Required reading:

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, chapter 8 (Research design, general criteria).

Gangl, Markus (2010). Causal Inference in Sociological Research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 21-47.

Complementary reading:

Holland, Paul W. 1986. "Statistics and Causal Inference." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 81(396):945-60.

Imai, Kosuke. 2011. "Introduction to the Virtual Issue: Past and Future Research Agenda on Causal Inference." *Political Analysis* 19 (V2): 1-4.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S104719870001425X>.

Kaplan, David (ed). 2004. *Handbook of quantitative methodology for social sciences*, Sage.
Martin, John Levi. 2018. *Thinking through statistics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, *Introduction*.

Session 10 (19.01.2021)

Selecting and comparing cases

Required reading:

Georg, Alexander L. and Bennett, Andrew. 2005. *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press, chapter 1.

Goldstone, Jack. 1997. "Methodological issues in comparative macrosociology." Pp. 107-20 in *Methodological issues in comparative social science*, edited by Fredrick Engelstad, Kalleberg Ragnvlad, and Grete Brochman. Greenwich, CO: Emerald Group Publishing.

Complementary readings:

Mahoney, James and Rueschemeyer, Dietrich (eds). 2003. *Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press.

McMichael, Peter 1990. "Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method." *American Sociological Review* 55(3): 385-397.

Ragin, Charles C. 1987. *The comparative method*. University of California Press.

Rueschemeyer, D. 2003. Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains? J. Mahoney and D. Ruschemeyer (eds). *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 305-336.

Vaughan, Diane (1992). Theory Elaboration: The Heuristics of Case Analysis. In: C. C. Ragin and H. S. Becker. *What is a case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 173-202.

Yin, Robert K. (19), Case study research: Design and methods. Chapter 1-2. Sage, pp. 2-65.

On QCA:

Berg-Schlosser, Dirk; De Meur, Gisèle; Benoit, Rihoux; Ragin, Charles (2009) Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as an Approach, pp. 1-18; In: *Configurational Comparative Methods: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Techniques*, ed. by Benoit, Rihoux; Ragin, Charles (2012), Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Wagemann, Claudius; Schneider, Carsten Q. (2010) Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Fuzzy-Sets: Agenda for a Research Approach and a Data Analysis Technique, *Comparative Sociology* 9, 1–21.

Session 11 (26.01.2021) Accounting for temporality and process

Required reading:

Beach, Derek, and Rasmus Brun Pedersen. 2013. *Process-tracing methods: foundations and guidelines*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, chapters 1 and 2.

Complementary readings:

Bloch, Maurice. 1977. "The Past and the Present in the Present." *Man (N.S.)* 13: 591-599.

Hall, Peter A. 2006. Systematic process analysis: When and how to use it. *European Management Review* 3: 24-31.

Haydu, Jeffrey. 1998. "Making Use of the Past: Time Periods as Cases to Compare and as Sequences of Problem Solving." *American Journal of Sociology* 104(2): 339-371.

Kuhn, Thomas (1962) A role for history. Pp. 72-77.

Trampusch, Christine and Bruno Palier. 2016. "Between X and Y: how process tracing contributes to opening the black box of causality." *New Political Economy* 21(5): 437-454.

Causal inference with time-series data:

Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2014. *Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 5 - Differences-in-differences.

Imai, Kosuke; Kim, In Song; Wang, Eric. 2020. *Matching Methods for Causal Inference with Time-Series Cross-Sectional Data*. Draft, Harvard University (<https://imai.fas.harvard.edu/research/files/tscs.pdf>)

Session 12 (02.02.2021) Big questions in the social sciences I: How do we explain revolutions?

Required reading:

Skocpol, Theda. 2005. *Social revolutions in the modern world*. Cambridge a.o.: Cambridge University Press, Introduction 3-24.

Jansen, Robert S. *Revolutionizing Repertoires: The Rise of Populist Mobilization in Peru*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, Introduction 1-26.

Complementary reading:

Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1996. *The age of revolution: 1789 - 1848*. New York: Vintage Books.

Tilly, Charles. 1996. *European revolutions, 1492-1992*. Oxford a.o.: Blackwell.

Session 13 (09.02.2021) Big questions in the social sciences II: How do we study power?

Required readings:

Culpepper, Pepper D. 2015. "Structural power and political science in the post-crisis era." *Business and Politics*: Vol. 17, No. 3 (2015), p. 391-409.

Pierson, Paul. 2016. Power in Historical Institutionalism. *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism*, eds. Orfeo Fioretos, Tulia G. Falletti, and Adam Sheingate. Oxford University Press.

Complementary readings:

Granovetter, Mark S. 2017. *Society and Economy: Framework and Principles*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, S. 91-134.

Lukes, Steven. 2005[1974]. *Power: a radical view*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mann, Michael. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 1. A History of Power from the Beginning to Ad 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, S. 1-33.

Weber, Max. 1976[1921]. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), S. 28 (§16) sowie aus Kapitel III S. 122-30 (§ 1-6), S. 140 (§10 Abschnitte 1. und 2.), S. 153-4 (§13).