Research Design
Monday, 10 a.m. – 12 noon
Room: “Hörsaalgebäude”, Lecture Hall 13

A well-elaborate research design is often a very important pre-requisite for a successful social science research project. This is an especially relevant topic for M.A. students of the social sciences, because, on the one hand, a solid research design is also needed for an M.A. thesis, while, on the other, when reading or otherwise digesting social science research results, some skillfulness is needed in order to assess the quality of other scholars’ work properly. Furthermore, this course introduces to “methodology” as one of the social science sub-disciplines and discusses its current fractures and tendencies. While this course is clearly embedded in the empirical, qualitative, and case-oriented research tradition, it also offers interesting viewpoints for those who prefer to work in a different manner. In this sense, this course aims at a broad view of methodology and research design. Note that it is not a methods course in which single data collection or data analysis methods are presented (such a course is foreseen for the summer term 2013), but it rather acts at the design level.

After discussing the importance of research designs for the social sciences, different forms of research designs are presented: case study designs; within-case analyses; comparative designs; the design of more quantitative social research; and historically oriented studies. Following this, different phases of the research process are discussed, such as the discovery of the research question; the concept formation; the formulation of hypotheses; the case selection; questions related to operationalization and measurement; and how to arrive at conclusions from a study. A final part will look at the (perceived) differences between so-called qualitative and quantitative research and will evaluate whether these are two different research approaches or just two variants of the same principles.

This course can be credited for the M.A. in sociology (“SOZ-MA-1”); the M.A. in political science (“PW-MA-2”); the Diploma and Magister studies in sociology and political science (“HM”); the Master in International Studies / International Peace and Conflict Research (“IS-MA-1”); and the Master in Modern East Asian Studies. It is especially recommended for students at the beginning of their M.A. studies. The course is held in English. The knowledge of the English language will not be a criterion for the grading. Note that the course is rather reading-intensive. All books are reserved in a Semesterapparat in the BGE library; journal articles are provided online (http://www.starkerstart.unifrankfurt.de/42909293/wagemann). If students want to purchase single books,


Gerring, John (2012), Social Science Methodology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

are valid investments and are also useful for future studies.

Modes and rules: Sign-up sheets circulate during all sessions. Students who do not sign up during the first three sessions (15, 22 and 29 Oct) cannot take the course.

At least 12 out of the 15 sessions have to be attended. In order to get full credit (“Modulprüfung”) all three following smaller papers are required, if only a certificate of attendance has to be released, only the first paper has to be submitted: (1) a summary plus critical assessment of no less than 50 pp. of the readings related to the course sessions 2 to 8 (length: 3-4 pp., to be submitted on 17 Dec at the latest, 20% of the final grade); (2) a critical review of a journal article/book chapter in sociology or political science, above all with regard to design questions (length: 5-6 pp., to be submitted on 11 Feb at the latest; 30% of the final grade); (3) an own project design (invented or real) with a particular emphasis on methodological and design questions (length: 10-12 pp., to be submitted on 11 Mar at the latest; 50% of the final grade). Note that all three short papers have to demonstrate the knowledge gained from the course.

Office hours Prof. Wagemann: Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. in AIE 2524 – please register (list at the door).

No readings.


Part A: Variants of Research Designs


Wagemann, Claudia and Carsten Q. Schneider (2010). “Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Fuzzy Sets: the Agenda for a Research Approach and a Data Analysis Technique.” Comparative Sociology, 9, 3: 376-396.


Part B: Phases of Research Designs


[9] 10 Dec 2012: Concept Formation


[10] 17 Dec 2012: Hypothesis Formulation


[14] 4 Feb 2013: The (Perceived) Divide Between Qualitative and Quantitative Designs


