

The Qualitative and Fieldwork Working Group

Seminar Series: [A Hitchhiker's Guide to Epistemology, Theory and Methods](#)

The Qualitative and Fieldwork Working Group (Qualifie) at the SPS department is a student-led teaching initiative and a forum for all types of researchers interested in broadening their understanding and practice of qualitative methods. Throughout the academic year we organise a series of speaker events, paper discussion sessions and run an Ethnography Book Club in order to supplement the educational offering of the SPS department.

In the first term of this academic year we aim to delve deeper into the philosophy and epistemology of social sciences in relation to research methodology. *How do our epistemological priors influence the methods we employ and the way we conduct our research? What comes first - epistemology, methods or both? Can we mix epistemologies according to our research questions?*

We seek to operate on a diverse philosophical landscape that allows for new perspectives of doing social science, encourages thinking outside of the box, and stifles reflection on our ways of doing research. In each of our five meetings, which form a selection rather than an exhaustive whole, we will highlight one epistemological approach and discuss how to operationalise it methodologically.

We are very happy and honoured to be joined by an excellent set of scholars who work across a range of epistemological traditions and employ diverse methodologies. In this way, we seek to create a learning environment where we can discuss both larger philosophical, ethical and meta-theoretical points, as well as their practical and tangible effects on doing research. Consequently, the meetings are organised in a form of a short lecture by the invited speaker, followed by an open debate on the theme of the event.

In preparation for this term, we encourage everyone to get familiar with the following readings:

- Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511801938 [In particular: Chapter 2: How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction p. 19-39]
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage Publications Ltd. [In particular: Chapter 6: Theoretical Positions Underlying Qualitative Research p. 56-73]
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications. [In particular: Part I, Chapter 1]

**Wednesday 6th of October
17:30 - 19:30 CET; Via Zoom**

Interpretivism: Ethnography, Causality and Theory Driven Participant Observation.

The session will commence with a discussion on the core tenets of an interpretivist perspective. We will then discuss whether and how ethnography and causality can work as complementary, not counterposed projects.

Helping us with these philosophical endeavours will be Prof Paul Lichterman from the University of Southern California who will give a short presentation on the matter. We will then open the floor for an open discussion and Q&A.

About the Speaker: Prof. Paul Lichterman is professor of sociology and religion at the University of Southern California. He is author of the award-winning books *Elusive Togetherness* (Princeton) and *The Search for Political Community*, and the coeditor of *The Civic Life of American Religion*.

Reading list:

- € Lichterman, P., & Reed, I. A. (2014). *Theory and Contrastive Explanation in Ethnography. Sociological Methods & Research, 44(4), 585–635.*
doi:10.1177/0049124114554458

Additional reading:

- Paul Lichterman, 2011. "Thick Description as a Cosmopolitan Practice: A Pragmatic Reading." Pp. 77-91 in J. Alexander, P. Smith, M. Norton, eds., *Interpreting Clifford Geertz: Cultural Investigation in the Social Sciences*. Palgrave Macmillan.
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**Wednesday 20th of October
16:00 - 18:030 CET; Via Zoom**

Post-positivism, Fieldwork and proving causality

Our second session will focus on post-positivist perspective. We will moreover discuss how post-positivism interacts with fieldwork and how we can consequently prove causal relations and mechanisms.

For that purpose, we have invited Prof. Regina Bateson from the University of Ottawa who will give a short presentation on the matter. We will then open the floor for an open discussion and Q&A.

About the Speaker: Regina Bateson is an assistant professor of public and international affairs at the University of Ottawa. Her research is motivated by a concern for the rights and dignity of ordinary people. Several of her projects look at when, where, and how vigilantism occurs. She also studies human rights, political violence, civil wars, political participation, and gender and racial discrimination. Geographically, she focuses on Latin America (especially Central America) and the United States, though she also enjoys cross-national and conceptual projects.

Reading list:

- Bateson, R. (2021). Voting for a Killer: Efraín Ríos Montt's Return to Politics in Democratic Guatemala. *Comparative Politics*.
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**Wednesday 10th of November
16:00 - 18:00 CET; Via Zoom**

**Feminism, Participatory Action Research and Constructivist Grounded Theory
Method**

For the third session of the term, we have invited Giada Bonu (SNS) for a focus on the bridge between feminism and participatory action research from a methodological and epistemological perspective.

The nexus of positionality, self-reflexivity and shared research-design building process will be explored through empirical example retrieved from a 4-years research project on feminist spaces in urban contexts between Italy and Spain.

About the speaker: Giada Bonu is PhD Candidate at the Scuola Normale Superiore. Her research is focused on the production of feminist spaces as safer spaces in urban contexts of Italy and Spain. She is author of publications on participatory methodologies and methods, on the feminist movements in Italy, on space and gender and decolonial approaches to feminism.

Reading list:

- Gatenby, B., & Humphries, M. (2000). "Feminist participatory action research: Methodological and ethical issues". *Women's studies international forum*, 23 (1), 89-105.

Additional reading:

- Reid, C., Tom, A., & Frisby, W. (2006). "Finding the 'action' in feminist participatory action research". *Action Research*, 4(3), 315-332.
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Thursday 25th of November
16:00 - 18:00 CET; Via Zoom

Post-humanism

Speaker and Focus TBC

Wednesday 8th of December
16:00 - 18:00 CET; Via Zoom

Post-Colonialism and the Decolonisation of Political Science

In this session, we will discuss the core tenets of a post-colonial perspective, zooming in particularly on the question of how a post-colonial commitment bears on the decolonisation of science and practically doing research.

For that purpose, we have invited Dr. Vineet Thakur from Leiden University to give a keynote followed by an open discussion and Q&A.

About the Speaker: Vineet Thakur completed his PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in 2014. Before joining Leiden in September 2017, he worked at Ambedkar University (India), University of Johannesburg (South Africa) and SOAS (UK). He has also held fellowships at the University of Cambridge and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study. His research interests are broadly in the politics of knowledge production from the Global South, especially within the discipline of International Relations. He is also a diplomatic historian with expertise in India and South Africa.

Reading list:

- TBC