Scope and Methods  
(AY 2016-17)

Lea Sgier  
Department of Political Science  
Central European University

MA Programme  
Fall semester 2016-17 (2 credits)

Class meetings fall semester (7 Sept-Oct 28)  
Group 1: Friday 11-12:40, room 309, Nador 15  
Group 2: Friday 13:30-15:10, room 309, Nador 15  
(Pre-session and zero-week: see below)

Class meetings winter semester  
Fridays of weeks 2, 3, 4, Group 1: 9:00-10:40, Group 2: 17:20-19:00  
And thesis writing workshops March 9-10 (both groups)

Office hours:  
Fall semester: Thursday 11:30-14:00 pm or by appointment  
Nov.-Dec.: also Wed 1-3pm  
Winter semester: Wed afternoon (or by appointment)

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Course description

This course introduces the students to the fundamentals of empirical research in the social sciences, and gives an overview of the main "logics" of empirical research (and related methodological tools). The aims of the course are (1) to assist them in developing a robust research puzzle and design for their Master's thesis; (2) make them aware of methodological choices in conducting empirical research in political science in particular, and of underlying logics and rationales, (3) to enhance their methodological "literacy", so as to enable a critical reading of published research.

The course is structured in three parts. The first (pre-session and zero-week classes), give the students an overview of the essential features of empirical research in political science and discuss how to elaborate good research puzzles and questions. The second part introduces the two main traditions of empirical research (nomothetic and idiographic – often somewhat misleadingly referred to as "quantitative" and "qualitative") and their corresponding logics of theorisation, operationalisation and data collection and analysis. They will be illustrated with practical examples drawn from the literature, and then practised with two of the main methodological tools for data collection in social research: survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. More briefly, we will also look at logics of data analysis. Finally, the third part of the course (winter semester) addresses various epistemological, ethical and practical questions
related to the process of designing and conducting empirical research in political science. These classes will include sessions with fellow graduate students who are more advanced in their studies, applied discussions of a few selected MA theses and research/thesis proposals, and a wrap up session in which the students will discuss and seek solutions for problems encountered in drafting their thesis proposals. This last sequence of this part takes place in the winter term, when the students will also participate in the thesis workshops where they present their thesis proposals and receive feedback from their colleagues and faculty members.

Course format
The course will consist of interactive lectures and class discussions, as well as practical work.

Course requirements and assessment
The assessment will be based on the following three elements:

Class participation (15%):

Students are expected to read the texts assigned for class and to participate in the class discussions and group activities. For some sessions, the students will be asked to send a short contribution before the class, which will constitute the basis of some in-class activities.

Take home assignments (45%)

2 written assignments:

Assignment 1 – Short proposal (20%)
Max. 800 research puzzle with a short methodology section – due Tue 10 October (midnight).

Assignment 2 – Operationalisation/pre-test for data collection (25%)
Assignment 2 will come in five steps and is done in groups of 3-4 people. The first four are to be carried out by everyone from week to week (construction survey and interview questions) – some of the work will be done during class hours already. These steps are not graded, but serve as "training ground" for the fifth (and graded) step.

The fifth and last step will be a continuation of steps 1&2, OR of steps 3&4: each group will construct a small survey questionnaire or an interview topic guide and will do a small pre-test.

Final version due Saturday 12th Nov.

Individual research design (40%) – Deadline: 20 February 2017
Students will submit a research design of max. 1600 words by the end of the course (in the winter semester – exact deadline to be specified later). Students are encouraged to develop this proposal as their thesis proposal. The proposal should include the following elements (the

• Research puzzle and research question(s)
• State of the art/literature review: this part should indicate how the planned research fits into and contributes to existing studies on the chosen topic
• Theoretical/conceptual framework (if applicable: with hypotheses);
epistemological perspective

- Research design: plans for data collection (and analysis) in the perspective of a research that would be feasible within the constraints of the one year MA programme; justification for the chosen methodological approach; brief reflection on research ethics (if relevant); time-line.

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory for this course. One absence (over the whole 12 sessions) is tolerated without sanction, however the assignment (if one was set) remains due. If a student is absent more than once for justified reasons (illness/accident, death in the family, or other case of force majeure that can be duly documented), s/he should contact the instructor to discuss about how to make up for the missed classes. If a student is absent more than once for unjustified reasons, his/her participation grade will be reduced.

More than three absences will result in failure of the course, except if these absences a) are due to force majeure b) is fully documented (medical certificates etc., whenever possible before the absence, if that is impossible, then as soon as possible afterwards) and agreed by the Head of Department, c) have been made up for as soon as possible by compensatory work.

If a student foresees a situation that might make it impossible for him/her to comply with the course requirements, s/he should contact the instructor to discuss the situation.

Please note that an excused absence (an absence of which you have informed the instructor beforehand) is not the same thing as a justified absence.

Learning outcomes
By the end of the course, the students should have acquired
- A critical understanding of the main methodological approaches employed by the empirical research in social sciences
- An understanding of how empirical research is conducted in social sciences
- Practical skills in crafting their thesis proposals, including the formulation of a research question and making the ensuing decisions pertaining to the most appropriate methodological approach for conducting their studies

Academic honesty
CEU rules of academic honesty and active participation apply.

General readings:
In addition to the requested and recommended readings listed in the course outline below, the following books are recommended as general companions to the course:

Course Outline

Details regarding the assignments will be provided as we go along. The assignments are due 24h before the course.

Pre-session:

Wednesday 7 Sept (Groups 1 and 2)
12:30-14:10, FT809

Introduction to the course: structure, logic and requirements; relation to the other methods courses starting in week 7 (qualitative data analysis, case study research, applied statistics).

Introduction to research methods and research design in the social sciences.

Zero-week

Monday 12 Sept (Group 1)
9:20-11:00, FT 809

Tuesday 13 Sept (Group 2)
9:20-11:00, FT809

Research questions and puzzles (1)

The nature and constraints of scientific research (vs other approaches to knowledge production) – relevance, originality, validity etc.

Mandatory readings


Assignment 1a: 500 word research puzzle

Week 1

Friday 23 Sept
(Group 1, 11-12:40; Group 2: 13:30-15:10, both FT908)

Research questions and puzzles (2) : exercise

Assignment 1b: revise research puzzle

Mandatory readings

Week 2

Friday 30 Sept
Traditions in empirical research: "top-down" and "bottom-up" research strategies/designs – overview.

Mandatory readings

Assignment 1c: revise and finalise research puzzle (deadline: Tue 10 October – graded).

Week 3

Friday 7 Oct
“Top down” research strategies: Theorisation, operationalisation and sampling; generalisation and inference.

Mandatory readings

Additional reading:

Assignment 2 (in 5 steps – all four are mandatory, but only the last one will be graded).

Assignment 2a (group): identify relevant dimensions of the concept of "patriotism".

Week 4

Friday 14 Oct
“Top down” research strategies: the logic of standardised data collection.
The logic of causal analysis.

Mandatory readings

Additional readings
Assignment 2b (group): develop a series of survey questions on the issue of 'patriotism'
(starting from the previously identified conceptual dimensions); turn them into a small
questionnaire and pre-test it.

Week 5

Friday 21 October
"Bottom-up" research strategies: Theorisation, 'operationalisation' and sampling;
generalisation.

Journal of Qualitative Methods 5(3), article 2.
(10) Zirakzadeh, Cyrus Ernesto (2009). "When Nationalists are Not Separatists:
Discarding and Discovering Academic Theories while Doing Fieldwork in the Basque
Region of Spain", in Schatz, Edward (ed.), Political Ethnography. What Immersion
Contributes to the Study of Power. Chicago: London: the University of Chicago Press,
pp. 97-117.

Additional Readings
Methods". Research on Aging 17:89-113.
Ritchie, Jane and Lewis, Jane (2003). "Generalising from Qualitative Research", in Ritchie, Jane and Lewis, Jane
(eds), Qualitative Research Practice. London: Sage, pp. 263-286 (ch. 10).
Whyte, William Foote (1955). Street Corner Society. The Social Structure of an Italian Slum. Chicago:
University of Chicago Press (Appendix).

Assignment 2c (group): along the same conceptual dimension as previously identified, figure
out a number of (qualitative) strategies that would allow to investigate 'patriotism'
bottom-up.

Week 6

Friday 28 Oct
"Bottom-up" research strategies: the logic of unstandardised data collection and analysis.
Research ethics

Mandatory readings
Career and Family Relationships in the Middle Class. Harmonsworth: Penguin, pp. 1-
16 and Appendix.
(12) Hennink, Monique; Hutter, Inge and Bailey, Ajay (2011). Qualitative
Research Methods. London: Sage, ch. 6 (In-depth interviews).

Additional readings
8, 10.
Assignment 2d (group): elaborate a number of questions suitable for in-depth interviews (or focus groups) with which you could investigate understandings of 'patriotism' bottom-up.

Assignment 2e (group – graded). As a group, use your previous work and turn it into a more "refined" version: either you prepare a questionnaire to investigate people's understandings of 'patriotism'; define a reachable target group; prepare a short introduction; pre-test your questionnaire on 10 people, and report your experiences with the pre-test in a few sentences; or you prepare an interview topic guide for a semi-standardised interview; define a reachable target group; and pre-test your topic guide on at least 3-4 people (one per group member), and report your experiences with the pre-test in a few sentences.

End of first part of the course
(4 additional sessions to be taken place in the winter semester)

Winter semester

Week 2

Friday 20 January 9:00-10:40 (Grp 1) or 17:10-19:00 (Grp 2) (check e-learning for room number)
The research proposal, literature review and theoretical/conceptual framework (reminder and further elements).
Research ethics.
Epistemological issues.

Mandatory readings

Week 3

Deadline for submission of a first draft of the final paper: Thu 26 Jan

Friday 27 January 9.00-10:40 (Grp 1) or 17:10-19:00 (Grp 2)
Learning from those who have done it before
Discussion of practical issues related to conducting research with MA students in the 2-nd year and PhD students.

Week 4

Friday 3 Feb 9.00-10:40 (Grp 1) or 17:10-19:00 (Grp 2)
Wrap-up session devoted to questions and issues still on the table in the perspective of the
final proposal for the course (and of the thesis proposal to be written).

   (Preparing research designs).

**Deadline for Assignment 3b (final long proposal): 20 February 2017**

9-10 March 2017 - Thesis workshops (for both groups)