

Seminar: Introduction to Qualitative Methods

1st Term, Academic Year 2024-2025

Mondays, 11.00-13.00 (Rooms TBA, Badia Fiesolana)

First Seminar Session: 30.09.24

Last Seminar Session: 16.12.24

Instructor: [Paulus Wagner](#)

Co-Instructor: [Caitlin Procter](#)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 14:00-15:00

Note – This seminar is for SPS researchers only.

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Description

This is a course about how to conduct and evaluate rigorous, epistemologically plural qualitative research. It will both introduce you to key concepts and methods – e.g. cause and case studies, positionality and ethnography – and show how they work in practice. Seminar sessions will be divided in two. The first part is dedicated to a theoretical introduction to a given methodical approach as well as to the discussion of application examples drawn from diverse social science literatures. In the second part, seminar participants train to implement chosen methodological designs themselves under the guidance of the instructors. The goal of this introductory seminar is for you to become skillful users, be it regular or occasional, and knowledgeable consumers of qualitative (and mixed) methods in your own studies and reading.

The course starts with an introductory session on foundational issues: philosophy, theory, causation and ethics. The bulk of the course then provides an introduction to a number of qualitative methods. Each session's first hour is dedicated to discussing one method: case studies, historical comparative analysis, process tracing, qualitative text analysis, qualitative interviewing (I + II), fieldwork and ethnography, qualitative data analysis. During a 30-minutes lecture and 30 minutes literature discussion, a particular technique is introduced, undergoes a critical assessment, and we explore how the method works in application. While the instructor provides the lecture, participants prepare a literature presentation drawing upon empirical research in the social and political sciences, chosen from the syllabus.

The second hour of each session is a practice workshop in which participants training chosen methods by applying them to a research question. Participants can work alone or in groups on this task. Practice research questions can derive from a thesis project or can be chosen from a provided list. RQs and methodologies are chosen in the first two sessions of the term; the bulk of the semester is used for stepwise empirical (small N) implementation of the research design.

The group undergoes the steps of the research process together: choice of RQ, design, empirical (field)work, data analysis, report. Every group submits a short research report at the end of term.

The seminar concludes with a half-day workshop – on 16th December – where researchers present on their findings as well as on the hurdles and learnings of the research process, discussing each other’s efforts at operationalizing various qualitative methods.

The seminar is worth 20 credits.

Learning Outcomes

- An understanding of the links between epistemology, theory, cause, ethics and your choice of as well as assessment of a particular qualitative method.
- For the six core qualitative methods – case studies; comparative historical analysis; process tracing; text analysis; fieldwork/ethnography; interviewing – an appreciation of the method’s content, its strengths and weaknesses, and an ability to assess applications.
- Practice skills in implementing qualitative research designs.

The SPS Seminar Intermediate Qualitative Methods, instructed by [Jeffrey T. Checkel](#), builds on this Seminar by providing a deeper understanding of theoretical and practical issues in qualitative methods, e.g. of epistemology and ethics, of cause and of case studies, of process analytics or discourse analysis, and of mixed methods.

SPS’s third-term course offerings further build on these learning outcomes by providing detailed operationalizations and hands-on training in particular qualitative methods as well as in mixed methods.

Format

During the September Programme, SPS will offer a ‘Preparatory Workshop: Introduction to Qualitative Methods.’ In structuring this seminar, we assume you have the background knowledge provided in that workshop – on philosophy, ethics, interviews and ethnography – either because you participated in it or have had graduate coursework on the topics it covered.

For all ten weeks, Paulus Wagner will lead the first part of the session (Lecture & literature discussion).

The seminar’s second hour is then devoted to a practical workshop, which will be co-instructed by Paulus Wagner and Caitlin Procter.

Syllabus

A full syllabus – listing all required readings - will be posted by 31 August 2024.