INTERPRETIVE FIELDWORK IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, PHD, 2 CREDIT

Winter term
Wed, 9-10.40

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SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

Interpretive research puts the meaning-making of those studied at the centre of a research project. Often guided by the abductive logic of inquiry, such research is commonly not driven by formal hypotheses or variables. Based on constructivist ontology and intersubjectivist epistemology, interpretive research generates data through talk, observation, and/or document selection and analyses them through a wide array of methods. The rationale and the readings in this seminar accordingly focus on the study of politics ‘from below’ and ‘from within’ to make sense of power relations in particular political settings. Substantively, we will thus discuss examples of research questions that require an investigation into the meanings of specific political practices, concepts and processes to situational actors in order to illuminate wider-ranging or more theoretical issues of political concern. The methodological aim of this seminar is twofold. First, it explains the vocabulary, processes, and quality standards consistent with the interpretive emphasis on meaning-making. In this sense, it helps prepare interpretive research proposals in a systematic way. Second, it engages interpretive research practice by looking at how interpretive researchers think of and do fieldwork.

The seminar is open to all researchers but will be most suitable to those that are currently planning empirical research or those who will do so in the future and intend to conduct fieldwork that requires interpretive sensibility and includes various modes of in-situ interviewing (e.g., conversational interviewing, ordinary language interviewing), different degrees of participant observation, and the reconstruction of policy meanings. Those who have completed field research and are in the “writing up” stage will also benefit from several parts of the course, such as understanding and communicating (e.g., to reviewers) what the appropriate quality standards are for assessing interpretive work. While no extensive prerequisite knowledge of interpretive tradition is required for this seminar, general familiarity with, openness to and curiosity about different ways of doing research are necessary in order to have productive and mutually enriching discussions.

EVALUATION

1. Seminar contribution – 15%
2. Resumes – 40%

The chapters from the IRD textbook are not to be included in the resumes. For your resumes, please every time choose two readings, on the assumptions that the others have been read more superficially. Resumes must not exceed 350 words. Each resume needs to include the following:

- how the texts assigned for the session fit together, i.e. how they approach the theme of the seminar;
- the argument of each reading yet not lifted from the text but summarized in a way that demonstrates the understanding of its logic;
- the basic shortcomings/conceptual and empirical flaws of each reading.

Resumes should be sent by 5 pm on the day before the seminar and they will serve to organize the discussion.

3. Essay – 45%

SEMINAR BREAKDOWN

1. Introduction

2. The question of method (1)

The concept of method


3. Thinking interpretatively

The basic premises of interpretive inquiry and interpretive research design


4. Political ethnography and the question of method (2)

How to define political ethnography. Is there a method to it?

5. Abduction and in-situ concept development

Elements of abductive reasoning and concept formation

- IRD, ch 3;

6. Reflexivity as methodology

What is reflexivity? How it features in interpretive research design? What does it mean to see reflexivity as methodology?

- Pillow, W (2003) ‘Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research’, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16(2);

7. Constructing the field/ fieldwork and theory

The notion of the field and its generation. Theory and evidence in interpretive fieldwork.

- IRD, chs 4 and 5;
8. Research at home

What it means to do research at or around (the constructed) home and how it differs (not) from classic auto-ethnography.


9. Subjectivity

The notion of subjectivity as site and fodder of analysis.

- Kurowska, X ‘Post-enlargement subjectivity’, draft.

Additional:


10. Talking with people: conversation and interrogation

11. Reflexivity, subjectivity, talking with people, being trustworthy

Examples of applied reflexivity as methodology.

- Kurowska, X and B Tallis (2013) ‘Chiasmatic crossings: a reflexive revisit of a research encounter in European security’, Security Dialogue, 44(1);

12. Evaluation of interpretive research

How to review interpretive research

- IRD, ch 6;