

SO130 Introduction to Urban Research

Seminar Leader: Stefania Animento
Course Times: Wed & Fri 14:00-15:30
Room: K24-1-Seminar Room 11 (22)
Email: s.animento@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Fri 16:00-17:00

Course Description

The city is an increasingly complex social matrix. Urban researchers deploy all kinds of methods from social sciences to explore it, as excavating data is a crucial task for those who want to tackle the urban realities within which people live and interact. Social research, however, is not limited to describing social life; it also seeks to explain the mechanisms through which social groups and phenomena are connected. Further, challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and producing critical knowledge, it aims to make potential for social change visible.

Far from being an automatic process, generating data requires constant reflection and the careful selection of methods that best fit the research questions. Furthermore, it is fundamental to understand the different logics behind qualitative and quantitative research. Finally, the spatial context always comes into play as a crucial dimension of analysis.

This course intends to awaken students' sociological imagination, to help them formulate meaningful research questions and develop coherent research designs. Through the focus on urban social life, students will learn how to conduct social research in contemporary urban societies. In the first part, the course will provide an overview of crucial theoretical issues related to conducting urban research. In the second part, students will explore the practical tools required to conduct qualitative social research in the city. Self-reflexivity and self-positioning of the researcher will also be discussed.

Selected qualitative methods, such as interviewing, ethnography and discourse analysis, will be practiced with a learning-by-doing approach and through several excursions in Berlin neighborhoods. Students will be required to complete three graded assignments (doing a field observation, conducting an interview and developing a research design) and a range of homework and in-class assignments.

Requirements

Attendance and participation: 30%

You are to come to class on time and having done the readings assigned for that session. Your preparation, attendance, and participation during classes are crucial. This marks up 30% of the final grade. Class participation includes a 10 minutes presentation of your research proposal and a 10 minutes oral feedback to another student's research proposal, as well as the preparation of a poster of your proposal during Week 13 (see Course schedule). The requirements and evaluation criteria for each of the above will be discussed at the beginning of the semester.

Only two absences will be excused. Missing more than two classes will significantly affect your participation grade for this class. Please consult the Student Handbook for BCB's policy on absences.

Readings

All readings for the course will be made available through Google Classroom, which will be shared with the students at the beginning of the semester. Also, at the circulation office you can find a reserve shelf containing some of the books available for in-library use. Students are responsible to check Google Classroom on weekly basis in order to download and read course materials regularly. The instructor reserves the right to change any reading listed below depending on students' feedback on the degree of difficulty of assigned readings, as well as students' expressed interests throughout the semester.

Practical/Writing Assignments

You will have a total of 4 practical and writing assignments:

- **Methods assignment 1: 10%**

Write field notes (ca. 500 words) based on the participant observation of public space which will take place during our excursion on October 12; submit the text by midnight of Tuesday, October 16 at the latest.

- **Methods assignment 2: 20 %**

Prepare an interview guide and conduct an interview (ca. 30 minutes). Write an interview report including: 1) the interview guide, 2) the transcript of a part of the interview (10 min.) and 3) a brief account on the interview situation and the researcher's role (500 words). Submit the report by midnight of October 25 at the latest. This assignment will be discussed more in detail during the course.

- **Short presentation: 10%**

Prepare a 5-10 minutes presentation at the opening of class on assigned reading. A 500 words summary and discussion questions will be submitted to the class one day before class by 12 noon. Please view the summary and discussion questions as a writing/thinking exercise, not as a finished product, and use them to respond with your own questions, criticism and new ideas they suggest. The presentations will be scheduled during the first class.

- **Research proposal: 30 %**

Develop a research proposal on a topic of your interest involving urban social life (2000 words), including: 1) a brief introduction on the topic and the research question, 2) a brief literature review, 3) the case selection and 4) the methods selection. The research should be based on a comparison between Berlin and another city, or between two Berliner neighborhoods. The assignment will be discussed more in detail during the course. Submit the research proposal by midnight of December 21 at the latest.

Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Class participation: 30%2. Field notes: 10% // October 163. Interview: 20% // October 254. Presentation: 10% // tbc5. Research Project: 30% // December 21 |
|---|

Policy on Plagiarism and Late Submission of Papers

As specified in The Student Handbook, “Bard College Berlin students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of integrity and intellectual engagement in their academic work. Attendance and thorough preparation for class, as well as commitment to the pursuit of excellence in written work, are fundamental requirements of Bard College Berlin’s programs.” Acts of academic misconduct (plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, cheating) will be reported and result in a disciplinary process (please see The Student Handbook for details).

Papers that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If we agree to accept a late paper, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade higher than a C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grading Criteria for the Final Research Proposal (a more detailed rubric will be shared during the course)

A = Extraordinary. The research proposal demonstrates that you have acquired full understanding of the logics underlying the development of an urban research project. All sections of the proposal are consistent and extensively fulfill the requirements: the research question is original, socially relevant and topical; the literature review illustrates the main arguments developed by research; the case selection is consistent with the research question and highly original; the selected methods demonstrate full command of the methodological repertoire of urban research. Writing is skillful and clear.

B = Good to Very good. The proposal demonstrates a good understanding of the logics underlying the development of research projects. However, one or two sections of the research proposal are less developed and present minor inconsistencies.

C = Acceptable. The proposal fulfills the minimum required by the assignment. It presents serious inconsistencies regarding more issues, e.g. the research design might not fit the research questions. At least two sections are sufficiently developed and show basic understanding of the object of the course.

D = Major deficiencies. The research question is neither original nor socially relevant, the structure of the research project is not balanced and lacks consistency between the sections. At least one section is sufficiently developed and meets the requirements. Writing is not clear.

F = Unacceptable. All sections of the proposal fail to follow the basic points of the assignment and/or fail to adhere to the academic standards as set out in the students’ handbook.

- Please note: The grading criteria for the other assignments will be discussed during the course.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction - What is the city? What is urban research?

5.9. Introduction: Making invisible cities visible?

General introduction to the course: assignments, grading, participation.

- Calvino, Italo (1972): *Invisible Cities*. Excerpts.

Assignment for the next session (not graded): take a walk in the city and draw a sketch map of the walk you made.

7.9. How do we look at cities?

- De Certeau, M. (1984): Walking in the city, in: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91-110.
- Massey, D. (1994): A global sense of place, in: *Space, Place and Gender*, 146-156.

Week 2: Epistemologies of Social Research

12.9. What is social research?

Exercise in class: thinking of urban life and how we can explore it.

- Della Porta/Keating (2008): How many approaches in social sciences? In: Della Porta/Keating (2008): *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*, 19-39.
- Blokland, T.; Harding, A. (2014): What is urban theory? in: *Urban Theory: A critical introduction to power, cities and urbanism in the XXI Century*, 1-22.

14.9. How Research Starts: Formulating Research Questions

Exercise in class: Formulating research questions on topics related to the city.

- Booth, C. et al. *The Craft of Research* (1995); Chapt. 3-4, 35-67.

Week 3: Building a Comparative Research Design

19.9. From the Research Question to the Research Design

Exercise in class: Working groups on how to develop a research design based on assigned research questions.

- Della Porta, D. (2008): Comparative Analysis: case-oriented vs. variable-oriented research, in Della Porta/Keating: *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*, 198-222.

21.9. Comparative urbanism

Exercise in class: Developing comparative research designs: how should cases be selected?

- Robinson, J. (2011): Cities in a World of Cities, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35, 1, 1-23.

Week 4: Urban Ethnography I

26.9. What is ethnography?

- Hammersley, M.; Atkinson, P. (1983): What is Ethnography? In: *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 1-19.
- Duneier, M. (2014): An Invitation to Urban Ethnography, in: Duneier et al.: *Urban Ethnography Reader*, 1-8.

28.9. Urban ethnography

- Hall, S. (2012): Making practice visible, in: *City, Street and Citizen: the measure of the ordinary*, Routledge: London, 13-30.
- Whyte, W. F. (1943): Street Corner Society, excerpts / Goffman, Alice (2015): On the run, Methodological Appendix, excerpts.

Week 5: Urban Ethnography II

3.10. Holiday: No Class

5.10. Field Excursion 1: Out in the City

Assignment (not graded): choose one types of data among pictures, found materials, drawings, maps or sounds, collect it during the excursion and share it with the class.

Week 6: Taking Field Notes

10.10. Field notes

Discussion about the material collected during the excursion.

Exercise: learning how to write field notes (with examples brought by the lecturer).

- Goffman, E. (1989): On Field Work, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 18 nr. 2, 123-132.
- Hall, S. (2012): The Art of Attire, in: *City, Street and Citizen: the measure of the ordinary*, Routledge: London, 74-94.

12.10. Field Excursion 2: Out in the City

Assignment for the next session: Write field notes (500 words) based on the participant observation of public space during our excursion on October 12; submit the text by **midnight of Tuesday, October 16 at the latest**.

Week 7: Interviews I

17.10. Why Interviewing?

- Berg, B. (2009): A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing, in: *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*, Boston: Pearson, 101-121.

19.10. Developing an interview questionnaire

Exercise in class: writing an interview guide.

- Mannay, 2016: Ethical concerns: Answers to questions we did not want to ask, in: *Visual, Narrative and Creative Methods*, 109-127.

- Berg, B. (2009): A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing, in: *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*, excerpts.

Assignments for the next session: conduct a short interview and write a report of the interview situation, including the interview guide.

Week 8: Interviews II

24.10. Reflexivity and how to transcribe

- Rose, Gillian (1997): "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics." *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3): 305–320.
- Nowicka, Magdalena; Ryan, Louise (2015): Beyond Insiders and Outsiders in Migration Research: Rejecting A Priori Commonalities, *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, Volume 16, No. 2, Art. 18.

Assignment for next time: transcribe a part of the interview (min. 5 minutes of interview). Submit by midnight of 25.10: interview guide, report and transcript of 10 minutes of interview.

26.10. Analyzing interviews

Exercise in class: analyzing interviews, the lecturer will bring to the class examples of analysis.

- Kvale, S. (1996): The 1000-Page Question, *Qualitative Inquiry*, Volume 2 Number 3, 275-284.

***FALL BREAK ***

Week 9: Discourse and Document Analysis I

7.11. Discourse and document analysis

- Fairclough, N. (2003): Social Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Text Analysis, in: *Analyzing Discourse*, 16-30.
- Wodak, R.; Krzyzanovski, M. (2008): Introduction, in: *Qualitative Discourse Analysis*, Palgrave: New York, excerpts.

9.11. Discourse analysis and the city

Exercise in class: analyzing excerpts of urban policies documents.

- Lees, L. (2004): Urban Geography: discourse analysis and urban research, *Progress in Human Geography*, 28: 1, 101-107.
- Colomb, C. (2013): Poor but sexy: Marketing the creative city, 2001-2011, in: *Staging the New Berlin*, excerpts.

Week 10: Discourse and Document Analysis II

14.11. Discourse Analysis

Examples of discourse analysis from a research project on social mixing and gentrification in Berlin.

- Brown, T. (2015): Sustainability as an empty signifier, *Antipode*, vol. 48, nr. 1, 115-133.

16.11. Urban social movements: contesting dominant discourses

- Watt, P. (2008): Underclass' and 'ordinary people' discourses: Representing/re-presenting council tenants in a housing campaign, *Critical Discourse Studies*, 5:4, 345-357.

- Novy, J.; Colomb, C. (2013): Struggling for the Right to the (Creative) City in Berlin and Hamburg: New Urban Social Movements, New “Spaces of Hope”?, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 37, nr. 5, 1816-38.

Week 11: Studying the city: Finding Statistical Data

21.11. Finding Data on Berlin: Using Online Resources

Discussion on Berlin: choosing a topic and discussing how to do find data (for example by looking at the “Airbnb versus Berlin” project <http://www.airbnvsberlin.de/>)

Exercise in class: searching for statistical data on Berlin (Amt für Statistik Berlin Brandenburg), please bring your own laptop.

- Bernt, M; Grell, B.; Holm, A. (2013): The Berlin reader, excerpts.
- Reick, M. (2017): Gentrification 1.0: Urban transformations in late-19th-century Berlin, *Urban Studies*, 1-17.

23.11. Field Excursion 3 (tba)

Week 12: Urban Research: Emerging directions

28.11. Big data and digital ethnography

- Savage/Burrows (2007): The coming crisis of empirical sociology, *Sociology*, 41, 5: 885–899.
- Shin, D. (2016): Urban sensing by crowdsourcing: Analyzing Urban Trip Behavior in Zurich, *International Journal of Research*, vol. 40, nr. 5, 1044-1060.

30.11. Participatory Action Research

Open questions on the final research projects.

- Breitbart, M. (2010): Participatory Action Research Methods, 141-156.

Week 13: Research Proposal Presentations

Work groups: presenting the own research and delivering feed-back to others’ research: Learning how to present and to critically evaluate research projects. Learning how to visualize research projects through posters. The structure of these two classes will depend on the size of the class.

5.12. First round: peer review groups

7.12. Second round: poster presentations

Week 14: Public Sociology

12.12. Urban Research: What for?

Examples of projects of non-scientific divulgation of research.

- Burawoy, M. (2005): For Public Sociology, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 70, 4-28.

14.12. Public divulgation of research

Presentation of the lecturer’s current research project.

In class: discussing open issues and questions and collective course evaluation.

Week 15: Completion week

Assignment Final Project: Develop a research project on a topic of your interest involving urban social life (2000 words), including 1) the presentation of the research problem and research question, 2) a brief literature review, 3) case selection and 4) methods design. Each point should have ca. 500 words. The research should be based on a comparison between Berlin and another city, or between two Berliner neighborhoods. Deadline for submission of the final essay is **midnight of Friday December 21 at the latest**.