

# Qualitative Methods: From the Archives to the Field

PhD course, 7.5 ECTS

Fall 2025

## Schedule:

September 17-19 (Wednesday-Friday), Stockholm University

October 15-17, (Wednesday-Friday), University of Gothenburg

## Course convenors:

Convenor: Professor Kanchana N Ruwanpura, University of Gothenburg

Co-convenor: Associate Professor Andrew Byerley, Stockholm University

## Course Description:

We draw on a range of methods to facilitate our social science research and scholarship. These varied methods reflect our theoretical and methodological influences shaping our approach towards fieldwork and data gathering. Feminist scholars especially have underlined the need to be attentive to the power dynamics and positionality, as shaped by class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and race are all remarked upon. When on the field, we then work with and through our research participants not as equals but as researchers embedded in structural inequities that shape the global world, where we too are implicated in positions of privilege.

However, field research is also an inherently messy process and there is a nascent literature that is starting to accept both the unbounded and messy nature of fieldwork as well as how failure is a central component in how qualitative geographical field research is done. Equally, there are questions about how we engage with our field, how (and if) we give back, and what ethical dilemmas arise and need negotiation all need our awareness and attention. These are some of the issues that we will consider in this course. We will go through a series of methods not only because they are standard repertoire but also because we hope to consider open-ended approaches to conducting field research.

**Deadline and process:** Date TBC please e-mail a copy of the application (see document) to Kanchana N Ruwanpura [kanchana.ruwanpura@gu.se](mailto:kanchana.ruwanpura@gu.se) and Andrew Byerley [Andrew.Byerley@humangeo.su.se](mailto:Andrew.Byerley@humangeo.su.se)

## Possible guest speakers:

Danielle Drodzewski, Stockholm University (in person)

Anja Karlsson Franck, University of Gothenburg (in person)

Azmeary Ferdoush, Loughborough University, U.K. (via Zoom)

Bart Klem, University of Gothenburg (in person)

Gustav Cederlöf, University of Gothenburg (in person)

Noemi Gonda, SLU (in person)

Vasna Ramsar, Lund University (via Zoom)

Ritwika Biswas, Bucknell University, USA (via Zoom)

## Learning Outcomes

- An ability to make connections between theoretical concepts in geography, methods and field experiences
- A grounding in a range of methodologies, and an ability to critically assess their weaknesses and strengths

- Practical experience in designing and completing a small research project
- An understanding of the relationship between critical social theories and how to contest dominant and positivist thinking
- Experience in teamwork and collaborative research, with attentiveness to ethics, safety, and respect for peers and your research constituents

**Course Assessment:** Submit an essay minimum of 3,000-4,000, inclusive of references. The essay also should draw on and integrate the preliminary readings provided in the syllabus, and draw on methods for one's dissertation.

**Diversity/Climate Statement:** The course hopes to draw upon a diverse group of academics based globally, and hence they may be joining us via Zoom. This will also resonate with the climate policies of various Swedish universities – although all of us (Swedish-based academics) and students will be present in person. All local participants are encouraged to travel via public transport (i.e. avoid flying) for climate-related reasons.

**Course Admission:**

This course is directed to geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, political economists and global studies, and economic historian scholars pursuing research that relates to development subjects in some way. The course is conducted as a Swedish national PhD-course in Human Geography, which means that in case of many applications, priority will be given to PhD-students at member departments, i.e. human geography departments in Sweden. However, the course is also open to doctoral students in cognate disciplines both from Sweden and beyond; as well as in rare cases to early career researchers.

**Language of instruction/Syllabus:**

English

Approximately 1,000 pages of compulsory readings.

**Course Fees:**

There is no course fee, but participants will have to cover travel, accommodation etc. by their own arrangements. PhD candidates from the Departments of Human Geography in Sweden make the arrangements with their home institutions.

**Schedule:**

**Session 1: Stockholm, September 17-19**

WEDNESDAY Sept. 17:

12.00 pm: Wednesday start with lunch:

1:15 pm-2.45 pm: Introduction: Convenors and students: Students present a 2-page PPT:

Group activity: *What they are doing, what methods are considered and what methods they know.*

The group presents on behalf of the rest: *A summary.*

2:45-3:15 pm: Coffee break

3:15 pm-5:00 pm: Seminar on readings: *Archives, ethnography, taking notes*

THURSDAY Sept 18:

09.00 am-12.00 pm: *At the archives – field activity*

12.00 pm: Break for lunch

1:30 pm-4:00 pm: Seminar: *Discuss using the archives, readings, and debates.*

6:00 pm: Group dinner (own account)

FRIDAY Sept. 19:

09:00 am: Workshop (with lecture and seminar): Invited guest speakers to speak on ethnography, discuss the readings and Q&A session

12.00 pm: Break for lunch

1:30 pm-4:30 pm: *Taking notes and using ethnographic tools: Ramblr and Qualnotes*

DRAFT: Draft essay for peer review (at least 2,000 words) date TBC

### **Session 2: Gothenburg, October 15-17**

WEDNESDAY Oct. 15:

12.00 pm: Wednesday start with lunch:

1:15 pm- 3:15 pm: *Paired peer review session* of draft papers on methods

3:15-3:45 pm: Coffee break

3:45 pm-5:00 pm: Seminar on readings: *Power, positionality, and spatiality*

THURSDAY Oct. 16:

10.00 am-12.30 pm:

10:00-10:30 am: *Introduction to problematizing the field*

*Critical exercise around "the field": Reflect upon the field and insider/outsider*

12.30 pm-1:30 pm: Break for lunch

1:30 pm-4:30 pm: Seminar: *Guest panel, discussing the readings, and Q&A.*

6:00 pm: Group dinner (own account)

FRIDAY Oct. 17:

10:00 am: Seminar: discuss the readings about the field exercises for previous day and Q&A session

12.00 pm: Break for lunch

1:30 pm-3:00 pm: Invited guest speakers and Q&A session

3:00-3:15 pm: Coffee break

3:15-4:30 pm: Group writing session: Return to draft writing, text and discuss

4:30-5:30 pm: Synthesizing readings, speakers, and field methods

### **Stockholm days: Topics and Readings**

#### ***Archives and doing archive work***

Stoler, Anne L. 2010. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press.

#### ***Ethnography***

Bignante, Elisa. 2010. "The use of photo-elicitation in field research: Exploring Maasa representations and use of natural resources" *Echo Geo* <https://doi.org/10.4000/echogeo.11622>

Candea, Matei. 2007. "Arbitrary locations: in defence of the bounded field-site" *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(1): 167-184

Gonda, Noemi, Stephanie Leder, Marien González-Hidalgo, Linley Chiwona-Karltun, Arvid Stiernström, Flora Hajdu, Klara Fischer, Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Alin Kadfak, and Anna Arvidsson (2021) "Critical Reflexivity in Political Ecology Research: How can the CoVID-19

Pandemic Transform us into *Better Researchers?*” *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 3(2021): <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2021.652968>

Ingold, Tim. 2011. “Drawing Together: doing, observing, describing” in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* London & New York: Routledge, pp. 220-228

Marcus, George E. 1995. “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24(1995): 95-117

Pink, Sarah (2009) *Doing sensory ethnography* London and CA: Thousand Oaks. Sage Publications. Introduction.

Rabinow, Paul. 1977. *Reflections on fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

### ***Taking Notes***

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 2011 [1995]. “In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes” In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2nd edition). Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

O’Neill, Maggie and Bruce Roberts. 2019. *Walking Methods: Research on the Move*. Routledge.

Ramblr

### **Gothenburg Days: Topics and Readings**

#### ***Power, positionality and spatiality***

McDowell, Linda (1992) “Doing Gender: Feminism, Feminists and Research Methods in Human Geography” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17(4): 399-416

Staeheli, Lynn A. and Victoria A. Lawson (1994) “A Discussion of “Women in the Field”: The Politics of Feminist Fieldwork” *The Professional Geographer* 46(1): 96-102

Mullings, Beverley (1999) “Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting” *Geoforum* 1999(30): 337-350

Mullings, Beverley (2005) “Commentary: Post-Colonial Encounters of the Methodological Kind” *Southeastern Geographer* 45(2): 274-280

Sircar, Srilata (2019) “Feminism and intersectionality in Swedish Geography” *Gender, Place and Culture* 26(7-9): 1261-1270

#### ***The field and ethics***

Biswas, Ritwika (2023) “Embracing the uncertain – figuring out our own stories of flexibility and ethics in the field” *Gender, Place and Culture* 30(8): 1126-1146

Ferdoush, Azmeary (2021) “To “help” or not to “help” the participant: A global South ethnographer’s dilemma in the global South. *Geoforum* 124, pp 75-87 (open access)

Lunn, Jenny (Ed) (2014) *Fieldwork in the global south: Ethical challenges and dilemmas* London: Routledge

Mohanty, Chandra T (1991) "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* North Carolina: Duke University Press, pp 43-84

### ***Failure, creativity and being on the field***

Massey, Doreen (2003) "Imagining the field" In: Pryke, Michael; Rose, Gillian and Whatmore, Sarah eds. *Using social theory: thinking through research*. UK: Sage Publications.

Harrowell, Elly, Thom Davies, and Tom Disney (2018) "Making space for failure in Geographic Research" *The Professional Geographer* 70(2): 230-238

Saxena, Chayanika (2023) "Letting Failure Be: CoVID-19, PhD fieldwork and to not want to learn from failures" *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 44(23): 322-338

Watson Ash, Marianne Clarke, Clare Southerton and Deborah Lupton (2021) "Fieldwork at your fingertips: Creative methods for social research under lockdown" *Nature* March 3, 2021 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00566-2> (open access)

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

### **Ethnography**

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2003. "Participant Objectification" *JRAI* 9(2):281-294.

DeLyser, D., Herbert, S. Aitken, S. Crang, M. and L. McDowell. 2010. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography* London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press (A lot of very useful chapters in this book)

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 2011 [1995]. "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes". In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2nd edition). Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

Goffman, Erwin. 1989. "On Fieldwork" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(2):123-132

Ghodsee, Kristen. 2016. *From Notes to Narratives: Writing Ethnographies that Everyone Can Read* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Hine, Christine. 2017. "From Virtual Ethnography to the Embedded, Embodied, Everyday Internet" In *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography* Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway and Genevieve Bell (eds) New York: Taylor & Francis., PP 21-28

Lury, Celia and Nina Wakeford. 2014. *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. New York and London: Routledge.

Massey, Doreen. 2003. Imagining the Field. In: Pryke, M. Gillian Rose and Sarah Whatmore. Eds. *Using Social Theory: Thinking through Research*. Sage Publications.

Pink, Sarah. 2012. *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places*. Sage Publications.

Skinner, Jonathan ed. (2012) *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach* London and New York: Routledge: (Introduction and selected chapters).

Thanem, Thorkild and David Knights. 2019. *Embodied Research Methods*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.