FH KREMS
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Qualitative Research Methods

erlebnis → studium

II. Introduction to qualitative research

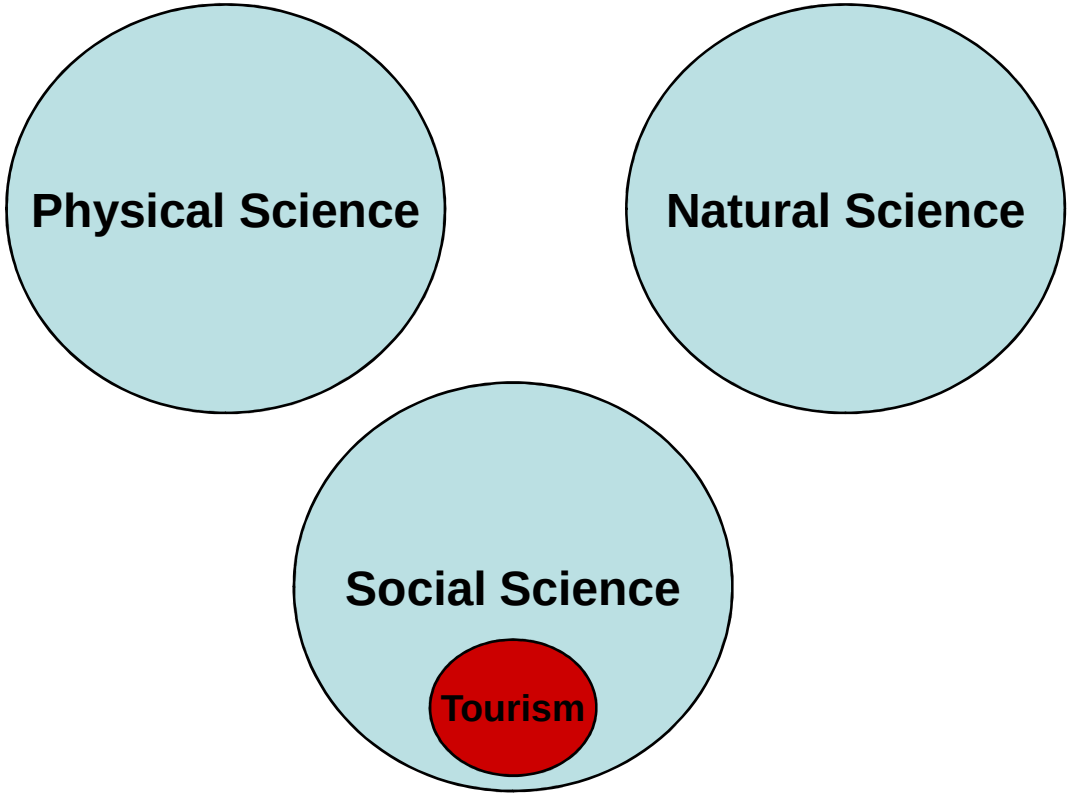
What is research?

- …the aim is to make known something previously unknown to human beings. It is to advance human knowledge, to make it more certain…the aim is …discovery (Elias, 1986, p. 20).

- Scientific research is research which is conducted within the rules and conventions of science.

- Ideally it should be possible for research to be replicated.

- It should contribute to a body of knowledge about a field/topic.


Physical Science
Natural Science
Social Science
Tourism

Tourism Research

- Research in travel & tourism differs from market research carried out in other industries.

- The general theories, methods of data collection and analysis of market research are similar in all industries:

  however, when applied in the context of tourism they must be sensitive to the specific characteristics of the travel and tourism industry.

1. **Tourism is a special type of human experience.**
2. **The tourism industry is particularly vulnerable to outside forces.**
3. **Tourism has a widespread impact.**

Research into different facets of tourism has been very slow to develop - Why?

- Preoccupation with promotion.
- Protective nature of proprietary research.
- General lack of understanding of how sweeping and complicated the field of tourism really is.

Tourism requires a multidisciplinary approach

- … because of the great diversity of the many elements that make up tourism, problems are not resolved by only one research method.

- no single discipline alone can accomodate, treat, or understand tourism.

Positivism and Interpretivism

- **Positivism:**
  - single reality;
  - observers are independent and science is value-free thought is governed by explicitly stated theories and hypotheses; search for objectivity
  - positivist research concentrates on description and explanation;
  - researcher remains detached, external observer
  - statistics and mathematical techniques for data processing are central (set of specific formalised techniques).

- **Interpretivism:**
  - multiple realities;
  - research seeks to understand what is happening in a given context, understood through perceived knowledge;
  - focus of research is on understanding and interpretation;
  - researcher allows feelings and reason to govern actions, researcher involvement;
  - primarily non-quantitative techniques are used.

Key criteria

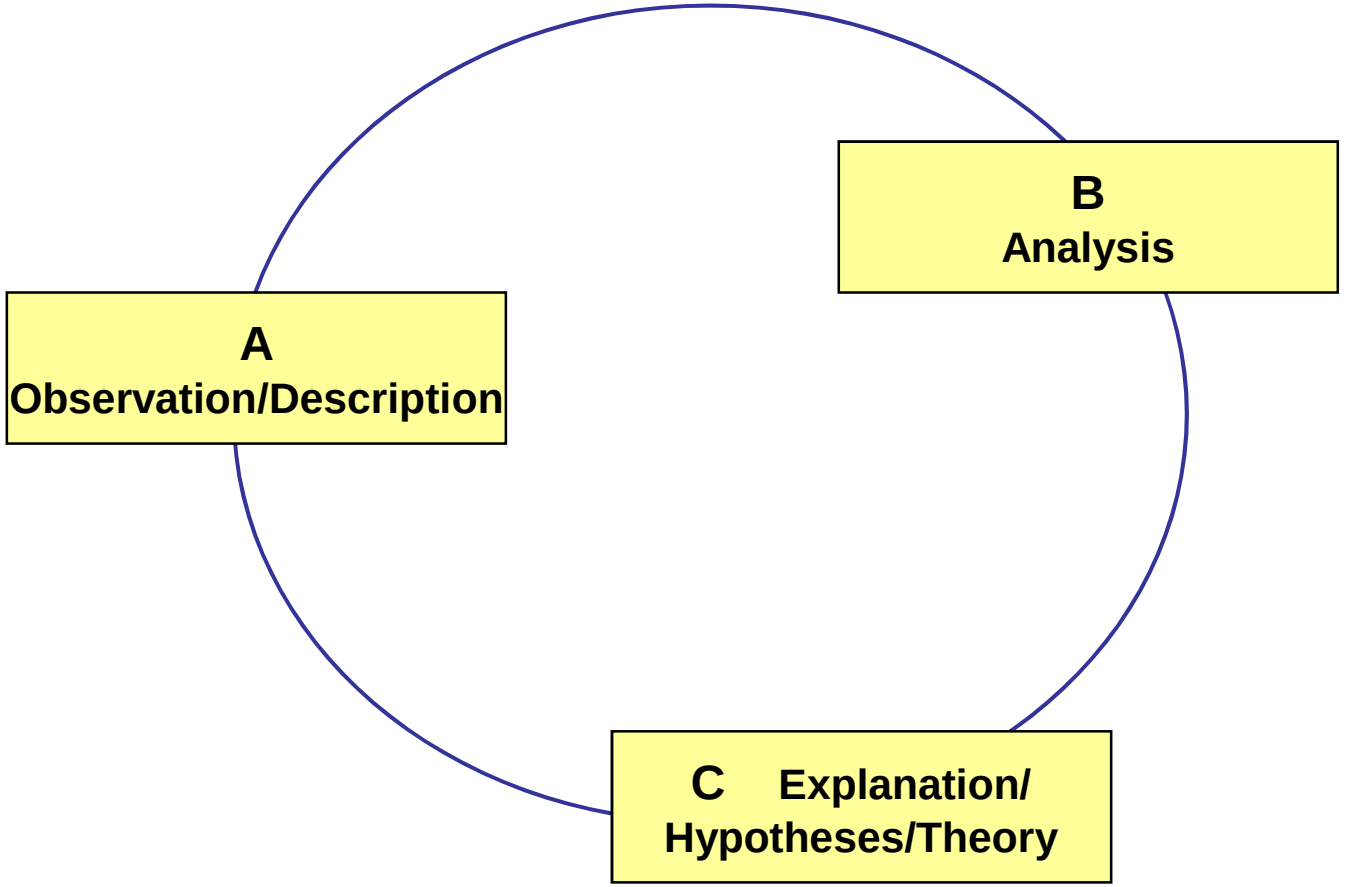
Positivism

- researcher is independent, objective, external perspective
- large samples may be used
- Prior theory used to generate hypotheses
- testing theories & measuring pervades
- deductive
- relatively structured

Interpretivism

- researcher is involved
- small samples
- prior theory may be used at various times
- generating theories or "theorie-building", emphasis on meaning and understanding
- inductive
- relatively unstructured/ semi-structured

Induction and deduction



Circular model of the research process
Source: based on Williamson et al., 1982, p. 7, in Veal, A.J. 1992, p.29

Qualitative and quantitative research

- **Quantitative research**:

  relies on numerical evidence to draw conclusions or to test hypotheses;
  involves statistical analysis;
  Examples: questionnaire surveys, observation

- **Qualitative research**:

  generally not concerned with numbers;
  seeks to receive in-depth information;
  Examples: in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, observation

Triangulation

= combination of several methods (complementary).

- Qualitative research is often used in exploratory studies at the beginning of the research process to define the research problem followed by quantitative studies.

- Qualitative research is sometimes undertaken to explain the findings obtained from quantitative research.

Historical development of qualitative research

- long history in the social sciences (anthropology, sociology)
- more recently in psychology
  - study of the human mind
- in tourism:
  - approach had been neglected during the 1960s and 1970s
  - increased application over the last few years

Defining qualitative research

Aims to provide an
in-depth and interpreted understanding
of the social world of research participants
by learning about
their social and material circumstances, their
experiences, perspectives and histories.

- The aim is to capture aspects of the social world for which it is difficult to develop precise measures expressed as numbers.
  - used for a qualitative understanding of underlying reasons and motivations
  - designed to find the "emotional hot buttons" of a tourist in relation to a particular subject, by bringing hidden stimuli up to the level of conscious awareness (Moutinho 1989, p. 522)
  - interviewees describe their experiences/feelings in their own words – they speak without being constrained by the framework imposed by the researcher
  - non-statistical (word and images rather than data)
  - unstructured/semi-structured (naturally occuring data)

- Helpful to develop an approach
  - generating hypotheses, identifying variables that should be included in the research

- "Qualitative research" is an **umbrella term**
  - range and scope of research methods is vast
- Qualitative research involves
  - documenting real events,
  - recording what people say (with words, gestures and tones),
  - observing specific behaviours,
  - studying written documents,
  - examining visual images.
- **Samples:**
  - small in range (non-representative cases)
  - purposefully selected on basis of salient criteria

- **Data collection methods:** usually involve close contact between the researcher and the research participants, which are interactive and developmental and allow emergent issues to be explored
  - Qualitative research refers to the interpretive study of a specified issue or problem in which the **researcher is central** to the sense that participants make.
- **Data:** rich and extensive detailed information
- **Analysis:**
  - open to emergent concepts and ideas,
  - non-linear and cyclical research
- Qualitative research design takes the form of a non-positivist perspective and uses an inductive approach (hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis testing).
- **Outputs:** tend to focus on the interpretation of social meaning through mapping and "re-presenting" the social world of research participants.

Role of the researcher

- Researcher plays a real part in the creation of data through direct interaction with respondents.
- ***Example:*** **social and cultural studies**
  - Impact of tourism upon host cultures.
  - Tourists
    - derive from a culture where leisure, recreation and tourism has been institutionalised.
  - Host society
    - dualism between work and leisure might not be recognised.
    - different perspectives of time.
  - Tourism has social impacts – creates social change of the host community.

  The researcher can best understand such issues unless he/she immerses him/herself into the norms of the host society.

Roles that the participant researcher might play (Ryan 1995):

1. **Complete participant:**
   becomes a genuine participant

2. **Participant as observer:**
   is participating but making it known that he/she is doing research

3. **Observer as participant:**
   reveals him/herself as researcher, participates in normal social process but makes no pretence at being participants, does not play a role in the group's happenings

4. **Complete observer:**
   simply observes without being part of it in any way, present but not known to the group

The qualitative research process

- Qualitative methods generally require a more flexible approach to overall research design and conduct.
- Most qualitative research involves a more fluid relationship between the various elements of the research – recursive.
  - Hypothesis formation evolves as the research progresses;
  - Data collection and analysis take place concurrently;
  - Writing is also often an evolutionary, ongoing process rather than a separate process which happens at the end of the project.

Disadvantages/critics of qualitative methods

- Small numbers of people are normally involved, thus generalisations about the population at large cannot be made.
- The measurement of qualitative material often requires judgements to be made by the researcher, hence questions of reliability and validity arise.
- Mass data: questions of what to leave out, problems with workload.

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

- Why should we believe what qualitative researchers tell us?
- How can they demonstrate that their descriptions are accurate and that their explanations hold water?

Validity → truth status

Would the theory hold for researchers using the same methodology in other regions or situations?

Reliability → replicability

If another researcher repeated a study, would the same theory be developed? Would he derive the same conclusions?

Validation of research findings

- refutability
- constant comparative method
- comprehensive data treatment
- deviant-case analysis
- using appropriate tabulations

For reliability to be calculated…

…it is incumbent on the scientific investigator to **document** his/her procedure and to demonstrate that **categories** have been **used consistently**.

Qualitative Methods

- Observation
- Case Study
- Content Analysis
- Focus Group Interview
- In-depth Interview

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Three Sets of Questions are posed for the Researcher:

- **The ontological** (the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence, or reality):
  what is the nature of the interaction between tourist and host
- **The epistemological** (is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope (limitations) of knowledge):
  how is understanding to be sought
- **The praxiological** (is the deductive study of human action based on the action):
  the questions of "whose practices for whom?", and "by whom?"

  Qualitative research is not free from <u>normative</u> questions.

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- **Mass data:** questions of what to leave out, problems with workload.

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

- Why should we believe what qualitative researchers tell us?
- How can they demonstrate that their descriptions are accurate and that their explanations hold water?

Validity → truth status

(how sound are the explanations?)

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Ethics and Moral Research Practice

- Attempting to carry out data generation and analysis morally and to plan the research and frame questions in an ethical manner.
  1. What is the purpose or are the purposes of the research?
  2. Which parties, bodies, practices, or whatever, are potentially interested or involved in or affected by this research?
  3. What are the implications for these parties, bodies, practices, and so on, of framing these particular research questions?