

Preamble

« Prerequisites of concepts to know »

Prerequisites: Basic knowledge of epistemology and of how to define a research question based on a study topic or research theme.

"Science begins with a NO" (BACHELARD: *The formation of the scientific mind*). This involves updating and rejecting preconceived notions and categories of analysis of common meaning, and requires formulating a model and positioning oneself in relation to the model.

The pre-notions: organized system of ready-made thoughts, images, implicit feelings that lead us to pseudo-knowledge; study topics that need to be conceptualized in order to be used in the production of scientific knowledge.

Examples: tradition, modernity, dynamic behaviour, economic advantage.

Pre-notions often are plurivocal: they may encompass several meanings.

Common meaning: meaning given to daily life, this meaning is furnished by very concrete mechanisms, through the media, images. To be scientific, one must break free from common meanings.

Common meaning categories of analysis: these categories are almost always binary, functional, and borrow from value judgments.

Examples: inside/outside; before/after; us/them; modern/traditional

Operational categories of analysis: tools of analysis that are built by a research scientist to characterize and class social groups, phenomena studied... These are exhaustive (all of the contents must be classed), exclusive (all of the contents are classed in either one category or another, not in two categories at the same time), pertinent (reveal facts and provide meaning).

Examples: visible/hidden; conscious/unconscious; official/real; values, rules, standards;

Theoretical and operational models: these are concepts, categories of analysis, and propositions (laws). The theoretical model is used for the diagnosis while the operational model is used for activities or action. The two are closely linked: a framework of thought also is a framework of action.

Theoretical framing: this is the process of making explicit the laws and paradigms articulated in reference to precise theories that gives meaning to the terms used, allows the search for pertinent categories of analysis. Paradigms and theoretic laws provide analysis

grids, put variables explaining a phenomenon into a hierarchy, and orient the approach to, and the collection of, data through the formulation of research hypotheses.

Formulation of hypotheses: developing the study commission into groups of linked questions whose answers, relevance and links must be verified.

The production of scientific knowledge is not independent of the social demand.

Social mandate: Ultimately, when a society requests a survey to be carried out, what does it want? Tools to maintain social peace, or arguments to justify claims, policy choices?

The commissioning of a study, the topic of the research: several lines formulated by the commissioner (frequently also the financial sponsor) of the study or research programme.

Analysis of the commission: this is when one examines the study topic from several angles:

- what are the explicit and implicit objectives of the study or research?
- what are the stakes for each party involved in the study being commissioned (including the commissioner/funder),
- are each of the terms in the commission statement clearly defined? If not, which conceptual terms could be used to replace plurivocal notions?
- does the commission statement include all of the important dimensions of the study or research topic? If not, is this justified (other teams working on the other dimensions...)?

The 7 dimensions of a study topic and the fields to which they refer:

Technical:	System of transforming environments and materials
Economic:	System of production and exchange
Legal:	Codes guiding actors' behaviour
Ideological:	System of perception
Political:	System of decision making
Social:	Relational system
Ecological:	System allowing life forms to maintain themselves in equilibrium with their environment

Intersection of dimensions: within each dimension, the other dimensions also are present.
Politics cuts across all of the other dimensions.

The dimensions provide numerous research avenues that then are selected according to the commission, resources, skills.

The analysis of the commission often leads to the reformulation of the topic, either to make it more precise by replacing notions with concepts that are clearly part of a theory, or to adapt the topic to the objectives, or to limit it to only some of its dimensions, or, in contrast, to broaden the topic to include important dimensions that were forgotten or ignored by the commissioner.

Formulation of hypotheses: this is the development of the commission (after its first reformulation) based on the identification of the dimensions of the topic, the theoretical framework, the construction of operational categories of analysis leading to the formulation

of research questions and hypothetical answers that are conceptual, in hierarchical order, linked together, and whose pertinence and links must be verified.

The limits of the study must be well argued

Analysis of the local and temporal context: this allows one to characterize the topic of the study/research, and to specify the exact form the study or research will take contingent on the location. This characterization is essential to define the **geographic, historical, and social scopes of the study**; for this task, one draws on knowledge of the environment in which the study will take place.

The following definitions are taken from the lesson *Choosing L3 From framing to the pertinent unit*:

Geographic scope of a study: the concrete area in which the study will be conducted.

Example: the geographic area delimited by the contours of a commune, a watershed, a particular ecosystem...

Social scope: all of the people and social groups concerned by the study through at least one of its dimensions.

Example: in everyday language, a village is a concrete geographic area containing houses and communal territory, sometimes coinciding with the communal boundaries, but in the social space, a village is the site of economic, social, and technical relationships that extend far beyond the geographic field. Consider residents who work outside the village, or non-residents working "in the village", or natives of the village who no longer live there, working outside and providing the "village" financial support, information, a network of urban commercial contacts...

Historical scope: the period studied, may include the past, far or near, the present, the future (prospective studies).

Bibliography

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