The aim of this course is to learn how to do social science research. The focus is on research logics and epistemologies. The class will start with fundamentals of research – what is science and epistemology, what is reason or truth, what is the scientific method, and what is our responsibility as researchers. The course will then move to understanding the role of theory in research, and developing a vocabulary for the key parts of a research paper. This is followed by a few weeks focusing on specific methods. This list of methods is not for the purposes of learning technical how-to; rather, the aim is to explore the research logics and epistemological assumptions embedded in different methods. For example, event history is really about how processes unfold over time, while spatial analysis is about how processes can diffuse over space. Similarly, formal models are a way to think more abstractly about how we expect people to behave, and can be useful in hypothesis generation and model building. The readings will be exemplary readings to be read not for substantive content alone, but for unpacking how these papers work, and understanding their research logics. Throughout the class, students will use the readings to practically learn how to write a social science research question, craft an argument, reflect on the research process, and integrate the various elements of research (planning, data collection, linking theory and evidence).

The main learning goal is to understand the relationship between research question, methods, and academic literature. What is an effective research question? How do you find a good empirical case? How do you link question, method, and literature into a coherent research paper? These questions will be answered through lectures, class debate, practical application on class, deconstructing research papers, and work-shopping of student writing.

**Assessment:** Students will write a research paper, ideally linked to their masters topic, that allows them to work on all the key elements of social research – asking a question, framing hypotheses, evaluating alternative explanations, and using evidence. In week 5, students will write a one-page proposal for their final paper (10%). In week 7, students will submit a 5-7 page first draft (30%) of the 15-page final paper (50%). Class participation forms the final part of assessment (10%).

**Weekly Schedule**
1. Science, Ontology and Epistemology
2. Reason, Rationality, Truth and Scepticism – How and What do we Know?
3. Scientific Knowledge and Change – From Positivism to Constructivism and Relativism
4. Introduction to research papers, and what is theory
5. Qualitative Research: Interviews
6. Process tracing and counterfactuals: Mechanisms, clues, and evidence
7. Understanding Time: Event History Analysis
8. Understanding Space: Spatial thinking
9. Causation
10. Formal modelling
11. Mixed methods
12. The double problem of virtue and value
WEEK 1: Science, Ontology and Epistemology – September 5 – ML Salles-Djelic

Researchers produce a particular form of knowledge called science. We will get an overview in this session of the broad questions relative to the nature of that particular form of knowledge – with a specific focus on social sciences. This reflexivity on the nature of the knowledge we produce is never easy – but it is necessary. Our exploration of the notion of Science, of what it is and what it represents but also of the various forms it has taken through time implies that we question two fundamental notions – Ontology and epistemology. In what ways and in which sense do our scientific endeavours build upon different ontologies and epistemologies? Why should it matter for us as (future) social scientists?

Compulsory Readings:

Supplementary Reading
- Philosophy Terms – Ontology: http://philosophyterms.com/ontology/

WEEK 2: Reason, Rationality, Truth and Scepticism – How and What do we Know? – September 14th (morning tbd) – ML Salles-Djelic

Reason and rationality are often associated with Science – in a way that even goes as far as to define what science is all about. In this session, we will explore and deconstruct those notions of “reason” and “rationality” – showing the complexity behind the apparent simplicity and familiarity of those words. We will question the strong dualist assumption that has framed scientific thinking ever since Descartes – and become familiar with the argument that a strict distinction between reason and emotions is in fact impossible. A parallel deconstruction exercise will be done with the notion of ‘truth’, allowing us to replace in a long philosophical debate current discussions about ‘truth’ and ‘post-truth’ eras.

Compulsory Readings (to be modified somewhat)
- Descartes. First Meditation. http://www.wright.edu/cola/descartes/

Supplementary Readings:
• Skepticism – Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 
  https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism/?PHPSESSID=6114ef2913b3dd5ee970272c
db20dbd5

WEEK 3: Scientific Knowledge and Change – From Positivism to Constructivism and
Relativism – September 19 – ML Salles-Djelic
Depending on our understanding of what science is, of what kind of endeavour we are engaged
in as social scientists, of what type of knowledge we are producing, of the nature of the
connection between the knowledge we produce and the world, we will have a quite different
perspective on the way in which scientific knowledge changes. We will explore those debates
that are still very intense today – and we will contrast two perspectives that are,
epistemologically, at first sight irreconcilable: positivism and constructivism. Still, we will
look into a possible “third ways”.

Compulsory Readings:
• Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, extracts (particularly
  chapters 9, 10 and 11).
  https://projektintegracija.pravo.hr/_download/repository/Kuhn_Structure_of_Scientific
  Revolutions.pdf
• Emrys Westacott, “Relativism: An Allegorical Elucidation”, in Philosophy Now, 20,
  1998
  27-34

Supplementary Reading:
  and Society, 1 (1974) 59-88
• Stedman-Jones, Susan (2012). “Forms of thought and forms of society: Durkheim and
  the question of the categories”. L’Année Sociologique.

WEEK 4: THE DOUBLE PROBLEM OF VIRTUE AND VALUE – September 26 –
ML Salles-Djelic
We are producing knowledge but this knowledge then goes “out there” and it is likely to have
an impact. Many questions emerge from that – all of them are more or less related to the
issue of “responsibility”. Is there “bad” knowledge or only “bad uses” of a scientific
knowledge that would be essentially neutral in axiological terms? How far are we responsible
for the ways in which the knowledge we produce gets to be performed in the real world?
Related questions are those that emerge from the social nature of the scientific endeavour.
Science is a social activity like any other – with its hierarchies, organizations, financial
needs, symbolic associations.... What is the impact of changing logics within this social
realm on the knowledge we produce? Does it matter who finances science? Does it matter
what kind of career structure or organizational set up frame our daily activities?

Compulsory Readings (to be modified):


**Supplementary Readings:**

- Harris, Sam. 2010. “Science can answer moral questions” [http://www.ted.com/talks/sam_harris_science_can_show_what_s_right.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/sam_harris_science_can_show_what_s_right.html)

**WEEK 5: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PAPERS, AND WHAT IS THEORY – October 3rd – Sukriti Issae**


**WEEK 6: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: INTERVIEWS – October 10th – Sukriti Issar**


**WEEK 7: PROCESS TRACING AND COUNTERFACTUALS: MECHANISMS, CLUES, AND EVIDENCE – October 17th – Sukriti Issar**

1 [http://howardsbecker.com/articles/HSB%20interview%20with%20HM.pdf](http://howardsbecker.com/articles/HSB%20interview%20with%20HM.pdf)


**WEEK 8: EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS – October 24th – Sukriti Issar**


**WEEK 9: SPATIAL ANALYSIS – November 7th – Sukriti Issar**


**WEEK 10: CAUSATION – November 14th – Sukriti Issar**


WEEK 11: FORMAL MODELLING – November 21st – Sukriti Issar
- To be added

WEEK 12: MIXED METHODS – November 28th – Sukriti Issar