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Book Review:

Designing Social Research. The Logic of Anticipation. 2nd Edition
by Norman Blaikie. POLITY PRESS, 2010, 364 pp, soft cover.

The book *Designing social research. The logic of Anticipation* by Norman Blaikie is mainly focused on making clear the very first step taken by any social scientist – planning his/her research. The next two phases of each project: execution and reporting are closely connected with carefully constructed plan. Norman Blaikie puts an emphasis on the link between this first stage of any scientific venture and its final results. According to his belief no well done research can be carried out without thoroughly planning which should take place on the very beginning of the project.

Planning is vital in any kind of social research. Failure to plan is to run the risk of losing control of the project and failing to complete it successfully. The fact that some kinds of research require decisions to be made as the research proceeds is no excuse for avoiding careful planning at the outset (p. 1).

The target audiences

As the Author states, *Designing social research. The Logic of Anticipation* is intended for postgraduate students who have some methodological practice rather than for totally inexperienced persons who are just starting their adventure with social research. Blaikie declares that the target audiences of this book are not those who are planning theoretical research that is based “on existing literature as a resource” (p. 3). Moreover, in my opinion, this publication may be also valuable for academics teaching methodology of making social research, because it specifies and puts together in proper order the main ideas that play important role in designing empirical project.

Designing social research The Logic of Anticipation seems to be useful not only for sociologists. The circle of audiences is broadened to representatives of social sciences that base on empirical studies, like: anthropology, social psychology, political science and many more disciplines rooted in interdisciplinary fields.

The book is consisted of Introduction and eight parts that reflect chronologically following stages of research planning: “Preparing Research Designs”, “Designing Social Research”, “Research Questions and Purposes”, “Strategies for Answering Research Questions”, “Concepts, Theories, Hypotheses and Models”, “Sources and Selection of Data”, “Methods for Answering Research Questions: Data Gathering and Analysis” and “Sample Research Designs” as the final part and conclusion for previously discussed topics. Each chapter has brief summary at the beginning and “Conclusion” at the end which helps readers to acquaint with selected problems described earlier.

Introduction

In the Introduction we can find brief characteristic of this publication. The reader not only is introduced to purposes and structure of the book, but also presented with the Author's "philosophy" and concepts that refer to his vision of social sciences. The last part of the introduction "Manifesto for Social Research" is the culmination of the Author's standpoint on how to practice science. "Manifesto" is consisted of twenty points list that regards general standards of social research procedures.

"Preparing Research Design"

This chapter describes the first stages of making a research plan. According to the Author's conception, research design is the vital document that encompasses and gathers all key problems a researcher will have to deal with in next steps of his/her project. It should help the researcher to put the ideas into a frame and structuralize them which, then, makes it easier to predict possible difficulties in theoretical manner instead of in practice.

A research design is a private working document that is prepared by a researcher or a research team before a research project is undertaken. It incorporates all the decisions that need to be made and provides justifications for these decisions. This should ensure that the decisions are consistent and it exposes them to critical evaluations (p. 12).

Well prepared research design is also the first opportunity for a researcher to receive feedback at the very beginning of his/her scientific activity. It is a chance to obtain valuable information about some important issues planned on the beginning of the project: the selection of the research problem, the research questions, the choice of research strategy, elaboration of the ontological and epistemological assumptions as the base of research, paradigms and theories within research that will be conducted, hypotheses tested in research, data sources, methods and techniques of selection, but also limitations and problems that may interfere with research conduction. Properly constructed research design gives a researcher possibility to change a project or adjust it on its very beginning to some expectations of those who supervise it. In the next part of this chapter we can find development of issues mentioned above with some practical hints helpful for a researcher.

"Designing Social Research"

In the chapter "Designing Social Research" the problem of ensuring control over planned research is raised. Designing research is the next logical step after completing preparations mentioned in the previous part. The Author presents the following reasons that support undertaking this stage of scientific project:

- ✓ make the research design decisions explicit;
- ✓ ensure that the decisions are consistent with each other and with the ontological assumptions adopted; and
- ✓ allow for critical evaluation of the individual design elements, and the overall research design, before significant research work commences (p. 36).

Blaikie also points at the questions (called here *Fundamental Requirements*) that a properly constructed research design should answer: 'what', 'why' and 'how' will something be studied. In the next part of this chapter titled "Getting Started" a reader is introduced with the selection of a problem taken under study, conditions lying under the choice of a topic/problem, type of research (basic or applied) and researcher's stance. This last mentioned position (researcher's stance) characterizes the possible kinds of relationships (and their consequences) between the researcher and the researched.

"Research Questions and Purposes"

One of the most important parts of constructing research plan is to define questions that we are planning to answer and problems we want to explore as a result of our investigation. The following chapter "Research Questions and Purposes" deals with both matters of scientific project. We can find there some basic information about types and functions of research questions, how to develop, refine them and what the relationship between research questions, hypotheses and review of literature is. The Author tries to prove the important role of well prepared research questions in entire research outcome. In this part the emphasis on practice is put. Presented questions are discussed with connection to many examples. As the next, the research purposes connected with "the types of knowledge a researcher wants to produce" (p. 69) are explored. The Author distinguishes and discusses a few goals that researcher can achieve: 'explore', 'explain', 'understand', 'predict', 'change', 'evaluate' and 'assess impact' gathered as two basic types of purposes: basic and applied.

"Strategies for Answering Research Questions"

To answer research questions in proper way is one of the most crucial tasks a researcher has to face in his/her efforts to produce valuable knowledge that meets expectations of evaluators and some methodological standards. In this chapter we can find exhaustive characteristics of four research strategies: inductive, deductive, retroductive and abductive. The Author also shows the connection between research strategies, paradigms and the types of answers (related to different questions) that we can give basing on adopted strategy. A visible emphasis put on mutual dependencies between ontological and epistemological assumptions as the frame for research strategies is definitely the strength of this chapter. A reader has an opportunity to receive some broader view on making research and producing knowledge in result.

"Concepts, Theories, Hypotheses and Models"

This chapter is devoted to presenting connection between concepts, theories, hypotheses, models and research questions resulting from adopting some research strategy.

The nature of the research questions, and the choice of research strategy or strategies, will determine how concepts are used, whether hypotheses are used, and the role of the theory and models (p. 110).

The Author begins with clarifying the role of concepts (see also Blumer 1969: 26) regarding to four different traditions (ontological, operational, sensitizing and hermeneutic) and later links it with research strategies characterized in previous

chapter. On next pages, analogously, we can find characteristics of theory where the role, types and relation between a theory and research presented on examples of selected classics of sociology (Merton, Mills, Turner etc.) are discussed. In the next part of this chapter the Author presents the role of hypotheses and models divided into different types.

“Sources and Selection of Data”

There is no well prepared research without previously secured sources of information and chosen methods of data selection. This chapter provides some basic knowledge about sources and selection of data. Sometimes we can point out students who have brilliant research purposes but no ideas how to obtain data to verify their hypotheses and deliver answers to research questions. In this chapter readers not only can find valuable information about typologies of data (types and forms) but also broaden their consciousness about the ways of data gathering. In part “Sources of Data” a reader can acquaint with different manners of data obtaining according to different types of social settings (for example: Natural social settings → Micro: Individuals, Small groups or Social episodes). The next part of this chapter is devoted to the problem of data selection techniques. It encompasses both probability (simple random, systematic, stratified sampling, cluster sampling) and non probability methods (accidental or convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling and theoretical sampling). We can also find there some information about techniques of verifying accuracy and precision of data selection.

The advantage of this chapter is located on showing a young researcher abundance of combinations of data selection according to investigated phenomena. Moreover, the Author emphasizes the conditions that play an important role in collecting high quality data necessary for making generalizations and theory building.

“Methods for Answering Research Questions: Data Gathering and Analysis”

This chapter begins with discussion about the role of timing in data collection. The Author groups research regarding to time dimension (cross-sectional research, longitudinal and historical) and provides brief description of each type of studies. In the next parts a division of methods into qualitative and quantitative with their characteristics (basic differences, the problem of generalization etc.) is presented. However, Blaikie puts an emphasis on conditions that should be taken into consideration when researchers apply a division mentioned here.

The labels “quantitative” and “qualitative” should be applied only to data, methods of data collection and analysis, styles of research and researchers; they are inappropriate for classifying research paradigms (p. 199).

The point of view presented here is similar to the conviction expressed in *Discovery of grounded theory* by Strauss and Glaser: “there is no fundamental clash between the purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data” (Glaser, Strauss 1967: 17). Later we can find very brief description of methods of data collection, reduction and analysis. The chapter also outlines the problem of adopting mixed methods in the same research discussed on selected examples linked with early and recent developments.

“Sample Research Designs”

This chapter is the final part of the book. It encompasses conclusions linked with previously discussed strategies and processes of preparing research.

Now that the core elements and choices involved in preparing a research design have been explored, I conclude with some examples of what research designs might look like, were you to follow the scheme laid out in the previous chapters (p. 230).

The advantage of this chapter bases also on the fact that the Author presents some selected research designs in connection to investigated phenomena. Each research design is consisted of a few useful elements that are discussed on examples: “the problem”, “motives and goals”, “research questions and purposes”, “review of literature”, “research strategies”, “concepts”, “data sources, types and forms”, “selection of data sources”, “data collection and timing”, “data reduction and analysis”, “problems and limitations”.

This last part of the book gives a reader possibility to check if he/she understands properly previously discussed stages of research process but also to compare his/her ideas of making studies with well prepared examples rooted in the Authors rich experience. It makes *Designing Social Research. The Logic of Anticipation* even more practical and useful for students and younger researchers.

The final conclusions concerning *Designing Social Research. The Logic of Anticipation*

In my opinion, the book *Designing social research. The Logic of Anticipation* helps to properly perceive research process with all its complexities and possible traps. It briefly characterizes, step by step, the crucial elements of scientific project for social studies. What makes this position especially valuable is complexity and holistic picture of planning social research. The readers, especially those inexperienced, have opportunity to take a look on the first phases of research that are mutually linked and depend on each other. This is crucial for designing research with proper care and attention which is of course directly linked with achieved results. The Author uses his first-hand experience to show always a few ways of solving a problem. What is important here, his hints base on some practical examples, but a reader can also find many methodological standpoints present in contemporary literature.

As mentioned before, the book is intended especially for the researchers who are taking their first steps in academic career but also more ambitious students who poses some grounded methodological knowledge and basic research experience. Those, who are seeking for more advanced knowledge about particular aspects of planning research, can find here only some basic, comprehensive information. For more advanced knowledge they should continue their searches in monographs that face particular areas of social research. This publication by Norman Blaikie pretends to be academic textbook with all its consequences.

References

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