



## ***Field Research:***

### ***Proper planning does make fieldwork a 'bit' easier***

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#### **1. ... still in Zurich**

##### *a) Personal insurance*

Master students are responsible for arranging their own personal insurance. Contact your private insurance company (health insurance, accident insurance, public liability, etc.) and get information on the maximum coverage abroad and if necessary arrange an additional insurance for your stay abroad.

Please read the 'Security and Safety Instructions for Field Research'

<http://www.geo.uzh.ch/de/studium/reglemente-formulare-merkblaetter/master-studium>

##### *b) Administration related to actual fieldwork*

- Take photocopies of your passport and visa and, if you are not Swiss, residence permit
- Prepare letters to get 'easier' access in the field

The following letters might help in the field to legitimise you and your research and to convince different actors to grant you access or welcome you for an interview. The letters should contain the following information:

1. Letter of Recommendation – University of Zurich
  - Name, date of birth, Passport No.
  - Affiliation
  - Research area
  - Name of supervisor, affiliation, financial sources
  - Intention of your stay in the field
  - Request for assistance
  - Contact detail of local partner institution
  - Signature, Stamp of supervisor
2. Letter of Recommendation/Passage Letter– local partner University
  - Name of PhD candidate
  - Affiliation to the local institute, responsible/contact person
  - Purpose of research, affiliation to the local research institute
  - Request for assistance
  - Signature, official stamp of local contact person
3. Letter of Recommendation by local authorities (best in local language!)
  - Name of PhD candidate
  - Purpose of research
  - Interest of the local authority to support the research
  - Name and contact details of officer
  - Official request for assistance
  - Signature, official stamp by officer



4. Research Proposal
  - Outline your research project in a short but sufficient way
  - Use 'simple' language in order to make the proposal readable for lay people
  - Maximum 2 pages
- Prepare a work contract for your local assistants and clarify financial resources for assistants
  - Name contract partners (Assistant and PhD candidate)
  - Specify tasks (Terms of Reference) e.g. translation, transcription, contact local partners, authority, accompany you in the field (overnight trips)
  - Working hours
  - Salary per day/week/month
  - If there is no insurance possible this has to be mentioned (assistant is responsible for her/his insurance i.e. travel, health, unemployment, etc.)

Option: Check if there is a chance to provide insurance to the local research assistant via the local research institute or if the research assistant can be locally contracted but paid by your financial resources

- *Prepare a reference letter for local research assistant*
  - Name, birthday, passport number of research assistant
  - Specify responsibilities
  - Duration of assistance contract
  - Briefly write about your research and how it is related to local research institutions and your own affiliation and institute
  - Signature and if possible official stamp (try to prepare some blank letters)

## 2. ... doing research in the field - „Rules of Conduct”

### a) *Your security and health*

- Fieldwork should be arranged in such a way that it does not influence your own well-being – your health and safety should always be your first priority
- Get information on arrival on where you can get access to local health institutions (or international/private hospitals). Write down names and contact details of doctors (general medical, dentist)
- ➔ get this information from local contact persons or ask your embassy for their 'health institution list'
- If the research area is in a marginalized area consider choosing a local assistant who is familiar with the region or has personal/family relations within the area
- Organize your fieldwork in such a way that you include 'recovery periods' (maybe in a bigger city or somewhere you know people or you have friends in the country)
- If you are doing research in a critical area (conflict region) you should register with your embassy and get their emergency phone number (this can help you if you are stuck in a difficult situation!)



b) *Security of local research assistant*

- You should treat the healthy and safety of a local research assistant in the same way as you do your own
- Clarify your position and research objectives at the beginning of your stay in your research field. Contact local authorities and introduce yourself and your research assistant and if necessary or possible give a time-schedule of how long you will stay in the area.
- If you are conducting research in critical or conflict situations you should secure the position of your local research assistant
- ➔ Find out if you need to register your visits with the local police or in some cases it is necessary that the research assistant registers with the police in order to avoid any future problems (specially if s/he is not from the area or from a different ethnic group etc)
- Avoid travelling to 'critical areas' on your own (especially if you do not speak the local language or are aware of the local political context in detail or you do not have strong links into the area)
- Avoid relations of dependence with your research assistant or key informants

c) *Ethics in fieldwork*

*Ethics and Method:*

Ethical considerations are not something that one 'attaches' to the thesis after the study has been carried out. They must be considered **prior to**, **during** and **after** conducting research.

*Relation between researcher and research subjects:*

Interaction flows freely 'in both directions'. The relations are dynamic and subject to change which does make the entire process unpredictable. The situation should be 'controlled' by informants and they can decide when to leave the scene. They approve the researcher's access and duration of stay in the field!

The researcher has little power and should present his/her position in such a way that it does not dominate or control the situation. The researcher should always reflect his/her own position and ask following questions: *How am I perceived in the field, how does my appearance / presence influence the field?*

➔critical self-reflection!!

*Codes of ethics:*

1. *Informed consent:* involves two dimensions:
  - a. consent is to be given on a well informed basis: do subjects really know what they agree to participate in?
  - b. informants and interview partners must have an idea of what consenting might imply, what are the consequences?
2. *Anonymity:* research participants have rights to remain anonymous – use of 'false names' for persons and places



cp.: Kaspar, H. & Müller-Böker, U. (2006): Data Protection in Qualitative Research. In: Backhaus, N. & Müller-Böker, U. (eds): Gesellschaft und Raum – Konzepte und Kategorien. Schriftenreihe Humangeographie, 22. Zürich: 125-142.

<http://www.dsgz.geo.uzh.ch/PublicationsHuman.html>

3. *Avoid doing harm*: avoid questions or formulate questions on sensitive topics in such a way that they do not cause embarrassment or provoke embarrassing behaviour. If your informant is not willing to answer do not insist on an answer or show your disappointment. Avoid situations in which the informant is or feels vulnerable and reflect on your research design if it does put people at risk!
4. *Confidentiality*: The researcher must guarantee that collected information remains his private possession. Desist from discussing information with colleagues, family friends etc. and perhaps destruction of personally identifying information when used
5. *Respect for privacy*: The protection against intrusion on private property/territories, unauthorized access to personal information, intrusive questions and 'nosing' behaviours
6. *Respect of time*: Conduct research in such a way that the informant does not feel it is 'waste of his/her time'

*Ethical complications:*

1. Guilty knowledge or 'dirty hands'  
How do we deal with information that comprises 'illegal acts' or an informant tells you about a committed crime?  
What if we observe crime or corruption?  
What will happen to research subjects/the setting if information is disclosed and communicated to legal authorities? What are the consequences of not doing so?  
Science and Friendship (or love relations)  
Critically question your relation to your informants and find a solution if you feel the relation does become too close. Talk about these issues with your supervisor as it influences your findings.

*Example:*

*As the men started to see me as a friend it became still harder for me to perceive them as objects for my research. In fact this particular situation became the most delicate problem in my study – a problem for which I never managed to find a complete solution. I was trapped between the loyalty of friendship and the researcher role. For example I found it extremely difficult, after relaxed and informal evenings playing bridge, to write field notes about our interactions. To me this would be a violation of our friendship and for long periods of time I made no field notes at all.*

Mathiesen, Thomas (1965): *The Defences of the Weak: A Sociological Study of a Norwegian Correctional Institution*. London: Tavistock, p. 240

2. Reciprocity  
Should we pay for interviews? How to behave if other researchers pay their interview partners? Is there anything we can give back besides research data? What is a decent way to reciprocate? Do we have a responsibility to support informants if we see they are in a difficult life situation (pay doctoral fees or give them food, etc)?



**University of  
Zurich**<sup>UZH</sup>

Cp. also KFPE's New Guidelines for Research in Partnership:  
<http://www.kfpe.ch/11-Principles/>

and Ethik in der Forschung, University of Zurich

<http://www.phil.uzh.ch/forschung/ethik.html>