



Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork for Researchers in Human Geography

-> relevant for students of any emphasis

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Aims

Researchers in Human Geography often conduct fieldwork that can be challenging both on personal safety and moral grounds. The procedure outlined below serves to estimating risks of harm to participants, researchers and institutions involved in the actual fieldwork and to balance those risks against benefits that might accrue to society as outcomes of the research.¹

Procedure

- Researchers design their fieldwork based on their accepted thesis concept.
- They fill out the UZH fieldwork checklist (http://www.su.uzh.ch/activities/arbeitssicherheit/doku/Fieldwork_checklist-ENG_Feb2013.pdf) as well as the Human Geography field work questionnaire (section A below), which addresses fundamental ethical and personal safety questions.
- Researchers submit these two documents to their supervisor between 4 to 6 weeks before fieldwork departure and set up a meeting and discuss them. After the meeting, they write up the points of concern raised in the meeting including the agreed preventative measures and share this document with their supervisor.
- If the researcher or the supervisor deem it helpful, the researcher requests a meeting with one of the Human Geography fieldwork counsellors to discuss specific points of the questionnaire or general issues in relation to field work ethics and safety.
- If researchers do field work in areas determined as risk-prone, they set up a research safety protocol with their supervisors (section D below). For deciding whether field sites are in risk-prone areas, they consult the website of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/representations-and-travel-advice.html>).
- Before researchers start their fieldwork, they consult the checklist on administrative fieldwork preparation and on data protection and data management (sections B and C below).
- From then onwards, they keep reflecting on ethics and safety issues throughout their research. If the need arises, they get in touch with their supervisor or with their fieldwork counsellor.

Human Geography field work counsellors

- Hannah Hilbrandt: hanna.hilbrandt@geo.uzh.ch
- Sara Landolt: sara.landolt@geo.uzh.ch
- Stephan Hochleithner: stephan.hochleithner@geo.uzh.ch

¹ For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop_en.pdf

A) Human Geography fieldwork questionnaire

Please fill out the following form in order to plan your fieldwork. Rather than a checklist, this questionnaire is meant as a platform for discussion and feedback, which serves both you, your supervisor and the field work counsellors to evaluate such questions before, during and after your field work.

If you have questions regarding your fieldwork that are not covered in this form, please raise them with your supervisor or with the field work counsellor. If you have suggestions for additional questions that would be useful for this survey, let your supervisor or fieldwork counsellor know. This form is continuously being updated.

To be filled by the researcher and discussed with the supervisor:

Name of student

Supervisor

Faculty member

Location of fieldwork

Date of fieldwork

Date of meeting

1) Research framing

Do I want to include my research partners in the development of my research aims, research questions and methodology, i.e. adopt participatory elements in my research design? How will I present/explain my research in the field? If partial disclosure of my research object is necessary, how will I justify this decision? And how will I go about the potential harms of this decision? How will I make sure that my research questions and terminology are respectful? How will go about the possible expectations (and/or frustrations) that my research generates?

Please fill you answers into these boxes (they will automatically expand as you write)

2) Positionality

What power do I estimate to have over research participants from my position as a researcher, volunteer or host? What vulnerabilities and/or dependencies do I have? What perceptions and imaginations do I expect to generate through my background and identity markers (culture, gender, group, nationality, age)? How will I deal with this during as well as 'outside' work? How will I anticipate the possible security risks that this positionality provokes for all people involved (research participants and researchers)?

3) Doing no harm

What harm could potentially come out of my research? To whom specifically? (e.g. marginalised/social minority groups, research assistants, physically vulnerable groups, myself, other researchers...)? How do I anticipate this? Ethnography and anthropology can be intrusive in people's (including one's own) lives – how can I anticipate this? How can I maximise the benefits emerging from my research? How flexible am I in my research method? Do I have a plan B?

4) Informed consent and voluntary participation

Do informants know what their participation in my research entails? Do they understand that they are free to pull out at any time? E.g. do any gatekeepers "force" them to speak with me? Have they become dependent on me – e.g. through research compensation? Do they know what happens with the data (storage, kind of analyses and publications) during and after research (see points 6 and 10)? Do I need to remind them that they can pull out?. Do I need an informed consent form and is the form I suggest using adequate (for instance, using appropriate language)? Do I have to inform others or need an informed consent form of others (e.g. parents in case of doing research with minors or head of an institution in case of doing research with particular employees and so on)? If I am using social media, have I considered the implications on consent and voluntary participation (e.g. blurred boundary between public and private space)? Does my research entail deception of participants at any point? If so, is this necessary and why? How will I anticipate this?

5) Anonymity and confidentiality

How will I communicate to my research participants to what extent my research will be confidential and anonymised (→ see point 4 on informed consent above)? Have I taken the necessary steps to keep promises of anonymity and confidentiality? Is it necessary to anonymise the field site? What harm could come out of (not) doing so?

6) Data protection

What problems could arise with recording and storing my data? How do I protect my data during and after field work from data loss, theft as well as from people who should not have access to them? Who needs access to data during and after research (research team, supervisor)? Who owns the data I collected? (If nothing else is agreed upon in writing, the UZH policy is that raw data belongs to all members of the research team. I.e. they all have the right to continue using the raw data and publishing results from it, even after leaving GIUZ). What will happen with the data after finishing the thesis? Which data can I make available openly and which not? (→ see section D on data protection below)

7) Field assistants

What information do I have to include in the contract with my field assistants (legal, payment, but also informal terms of reference)? What are my available legal options of employing my field assistants? Do I have the necessary documents for employing my field assistant prepared (→ see section C administrative fieldwork preparation and the template contract for research assistance abroad in section E)? What agency and role status does the field assistant have in the research? How do I anticipate potential risks that the research generates in terms of my research collaboration? Do I have a platform to discuss issues that may emerge? Are mutual expectations agreed upon (in terms of overstepping 'limits' or taking risks)? What receipt and refund policy for expenses have I agreed upon?

8) University and field country legislation

What permits do I need to conduct this research (visa, research permits, university letters, business cards, government letters etc.)? Do these documents limit my field access in some way? How can this be improved? How does this influence my data? Do these documents put me or my collaborators at risk in any way? How do I avoid this?

9) Personal health and safety

Do I have the necessary gear? What are my first steps in the field? How do I get from A to B? Do I know what to do if I get sick in the field? Do I have my health insurance and necessary vaccination, medication and first aid gear ready? Am I at risk of becoming isolated? Do I have possibilities to build up a support system (e.g. timetable, places to hang, contacts to pursue, access to internet)? Am I in danger of being harmed by anyone in the field (research informants, assistants, authorities)? Do I know what to do in case of emergency (e.g. embassy, contacts on the ground and at university)? In what case do I mobilise them? If any of my field sites are in risk-prone areas, do I have a research safety protocol in place with my supervisor (→ see section D below)?

10) Writing and dissemination

Does the information I plan to release based on my fieldwork have benefits and/or contain potential harm? Could my research findings be problematic and for whom? Will I need to censor some results and why? Am I clear about who owns my findings and my data? Am I happy with the confidentiality arrangements I have made? How do I plan to anonymise my informants? Does this influence the kind of analysis I am able to make? Are my research findings openly accessible to the public? Is it possible to make my collected data available to the public or for future research (e.g. by storing it in a digital repository)? Are my plans on how my data will be used and shared in line with what I plan to tell my research participants before asking them for their informed consent?

11) Giving back beyond academic writing: sharing results

What is the best format to maximise the benefits of my research findings (to the research participants and other parties who might be interested)? How do I make sure that the knowledge generated travels back to research participants? Does this jeopardise the promises of confidentiality or anonymity I made? How will the information released best benefit the audience? Does it have a potential to do harm?

12) Giving back beyond academic writing: supporting research participants

Do I compensate participants? What material compensation can I supply for time and energy? What problems could emerge with compensation (e.g. making participants dependent on me financially and less able to pull out of the research)? How could I handle these? Am I engaging in activism or feeling responsibility to making changes? What are the consequences of my public engagement with the way my research results are perceived in the field?

B) Checklist for administrative fieldwork preparation

Notifying the University of Zurich

Before leaving to conduct fieldwork, researchers need notify the University of Zurich of their fieldwork absence. Depending on employment status, there are different forms to sign. The human geography secretariat is happy to help with this task.

Ensuring insurance coverage

PhD candidates and Master students are responsible for arranging their own personal insurance. Contact your private insurance companies (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.

For this, note that accidents during an official trip are in principle considered as accidents at work. As a rule, AHV and statutory accident insurance remain unchanged, if you are travelling to EU and EFTA countries and to several other countries (i.e. USA, Canada, Australia) being contractual partners of Switzerland, but not to all countries. If unsure, contact the UZH human resources division (Personalabteilung) to clarify your individual case.

Preparing documents for field access

- Take photocopies of your passport and visa and, if you are not Swiss, of your residence permit.
- Print copies of a brief description of your research project. Use 'simple' language in order to make the proposal readable for lay people (maximum 2 pages).
- Prepare letters to get 'easier' access in the field. They might help 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 by the 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 by the local partner university

- Name of researcher
- 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 researcher
- 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

Preparing documents for field assistants

- Prepare work contracts for your local assistants, including:
 - names of the contract partners (assistant and researcher)
 - tasks (terms of reference) e.g. translation, transcription, contact local partners/authorities, 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 (i.e. assistant is responsible for her/his insurance i.e. travel, health, unemployment, etc.)
(see template in section E)

- Prepare reference letters for your local research assistants, including:
 - name, birthday and passport number of research assistant
 - responsibilities and duration of assistance in the contract
 - your research project and how it is related to local research institutions
 - your own affiliation and institute
 - signature and if possible official stamp (try to prepare some blank letters)

C) Checklist for data protection and data management

based on Keller, Roger and Backhaus, Norman 2015: Checklist Data Protection. Zurich: Department of Geography.

This checklist provides information on how to protect your data during fieldwork. This is important for various reasons such as computer theft, sudden disk failure (happens all the time!), confiscation of data (sadly happens often too) but also if you erase data accidentally, let your laptop drop into a snake pit, lose the bag in which you kept your interview sheets etc. In addition, it points out issues about data management after fieldwork (data handling, access to and storage of data) as well as after finishing the Master/PhD thesis. In doing so it also raises questions about data ownership.

Most importantly:

→ Save your data on different devices, save and update them regularly.

→ Always make sure to have at least one up to date copy of your original data stored safely.

- Test your backup and data safety scheme thoroughly before you leave for the field (i.e. does the new USB stick really work?; is the SD card and/or external hard disk compatible with your laptop?; can you get access to your chosen server from outside UZH?; does your VPN-tunnel work?).
- If your data is not digitally available, make photocopies (photo copying machine and/or (smart phone) camera). Store the copies apart from the original (in case they get "lost"); leave them with someone trustworthy in the field; send them home via postal service. Yet, if possible, always keep the originals (digitally or otherwise) with you. Only depart from them if absolutely necessary.
- If you have access to a reliable Internet connection, save your data on the GIUZ-server (see <https://it.wiki.geo.uzh.ch/DataAccess>).

It is also possible to use Dropbox, iCloud etc., but if you handle sensitive data (i.e. interview data), these cloud storage offers might have security issues and are therefore not recommended. An alternative to the GIUZ-server that Master/PhD students have access to but that sometimes is slow even if you have good internet access, is your personal SWITCHdrive (all UZH members have one and plenty of storage space; <https://www.switch.ch/drive/>). They store your data on servers located in Switzerland.

- If no Internet connection is available, use USB memory sticks. Store the USB sticks apart from your Laptop (in case your Laptop gets "lost"); leave it with someone trustworthy in the field; send it home via postal service. Some SD cards that are used for cameras have an "option" to directly use them as USB sticks and many laptops have an SD card slot. They are very small and can be hidden well. Be aware that USB sticks are as liable to fail as hard disks. Hence, a bit of "paranoia" regarding your data is no luxury.
- Regarding data encryption, there are several possibilities available and it is up to you to decide which one you would like to use. Before you turn to digital encryption think first about the easier and safer way to anonymize data. (Instead of naming a File "Interview_Kim_Jong_Un_2020_04_18" it is better to use an acronym that only you understand (i.e. "P5_20200418" or "I_5_in_P"). The same applies of course for the content since search engines do not stop at file names. If you need to keep a list of the real names of your interviewees or other critical data, keep this in an entirely different place and form (and do not name it "Real_interview_names"). For more information on anonymization see Kaspar & Müller-Böker (2006): Data protection in qualitative research (<http://www.zora.uzh.ch/76879/>).

- GIUZ IT does not recommend any specific software for data encryption/decryption. Since operating systems change and with that also how to do hide and display folders, we advise you to search for relevant webpages before you go to the field. Look for “how to hide a folder on windows/mac/linux” and “how to create an encrypted folder on windows/mac/linux”.

D) Research Safety Protocol and Emergency Exit Strategies

for field work in risk-prone areas

Based on: Durán-Martínez, Angélica (2014): *Building an Effective Research Safety Protocol and Emergency Exit Strategies. Drugs, Security and Democracy Program Working Papers on Research Security. No. 4. 1-42.*

1) Research Safety Protocol

	Aspects to be considered	Support
Context	Sources of conflict and its violent actor(s) Types of threats posed by violent actor(s) Power relations and role of state institutions Duration of conflict and recent important changes	Well-informed organizations and scholars working in the area, media reports
Researcher Identity	Foreign vs. local researcher Gender identity Dress codes, hours and areas in which (not) to move	Powerful local contacts (e.g. politicians), universities, embassies, international organizations and donors
Research strategy	Security concerns in research design Long or short periods of fieldwork One-site or multi-site fieldwork How to engage with state and informal authorities and local gatekeepers	University supervisor, scholars with experience of research in dangerous contexts
Admin	Research permits	Embassy
	Store, transport, and secure data	Scholars with research experience in difficult / dangerous contexts
Logistics	Establish local contacts that provide access to informants and assist in evaluating risks Possibilities for communication and access to internet Housing How to enter and exit the field study site	NGOs, universities, personal network

2) Emergency Exit Strategy

	Role	What to communicate before going to the field
Key emergency person ("point person")	Person of confidence Maintain regular contact with researcher Important: set frequency of communication and a buffer interval. If the researcher fails to communicate with the point person in the agreed-upon time frame, the point person will set in motion the security protocol.	Travel information Schedule of activities Lodging information (address and phone number, or description of where researcher stays) Researcher contact information (telephone, e-mail, etc.) Insurance information Tracking devices
First-tier local contacts	Local contacts in the field study site Locate researcher in emergency situation	Exchange contacts with key emergency person
Second-tier contacts	Embassies, host and home universities, NGOs Assistance in rescue and extraction efforts Financial support	Inform about research endeavor

3) Execution of safety protocol if the researcher fails to communicate with the point person

	Goal	Proceeding of point person
Phase 1	Locate the researcher	Access GPS Contact the first-tier local contacts to learn about the researcher's whereabouts Determine if the researcher is in danger and if the security exit protocol needs to be continued
Phase 2	Aid the researcher	Approach second-tier contacts and inform them about the situation Determine how the involved parties can assist the researcher reach safety Maintain communication between the involved parties
Phase 3	Secure the researcher	If need be get assistance from lawyer Ensure funding and transportation for exiting the field study site In case researcher is detained, work with authorities to reach his or her release

E) Template research assistance contract for field work abroad

This is an example for an agreement with a person employed abroad. If you want to employ a field assistant in Switzerland for example, try to employ this person via UZH if he/she is not self-employed.

Agreement

between

University of Zurich, Switzerland, the Department of Geography, represented by XXXX
(hereinafter referred to as the University)

and
XXXX

(hereinafter referred to as the Researcher)

Articles	Details
§1 Object of agreement	This agreement is about a research assistant assignment for the research project XXXX in accordance with the Terms of Reference and the Budget as defined in the annexes 1 and 2.
§2 Objectives	The objective of the assignment is to support the research activities of the project team, in particular XXXX.
§3 Duration	The assignment covers a total period of approximately XXXX days/weeks/months (starting XXXX and ending XXXX).
§4 Supervision	The Researcher will be supervised by XXXX.
§5 Remuneration	The University shall pay a total sum of XXXX CHF according to the terms of agreement stipulated in annex. No costs other than those stipulated in the budget shall be covered by this agreement.
§6 Modalities of payment	Payment will be made through bank transfer upon demonstration of this agreement.
§7 Taxes/social security	Any liabilities towards national taxes and social security schemes are the responsibility of the Researcher.
§8 Amendments	Any amendment to the present agreement shall be made in writing (e-mail is possible).
§9 Warranty	The Researcher warrants that he will perform research services in accordance with this Agreement, and with applicable supranational, national and local laws and regulations.
§10 Liability	The Researcher shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless University, University's present and former personnel, agents and students from any and all claim by third parties concerning this contract.

§11 Independent Contractor	Nothing within this Agreement shall be construed to create a partnership or an official contract between University and the Researcher, nor shall either party's officers, employees, servants, agents or representatives be considered the employees, servants, agents or representatives of the other.
§12 Intellectual Property	The University shall own all rights, title and interest in and to the materials, the results of the research services.
§13 Law/Jurisdiction	This agreement is subject to Swiss Law and is under the jurisdiction of Zurich.

Zurich, date xxx

The University

The Researcher

ANNEX 1: Terms of Reference

The University

The Researcher

ANNEX 2: Budget

The University

The Researcher