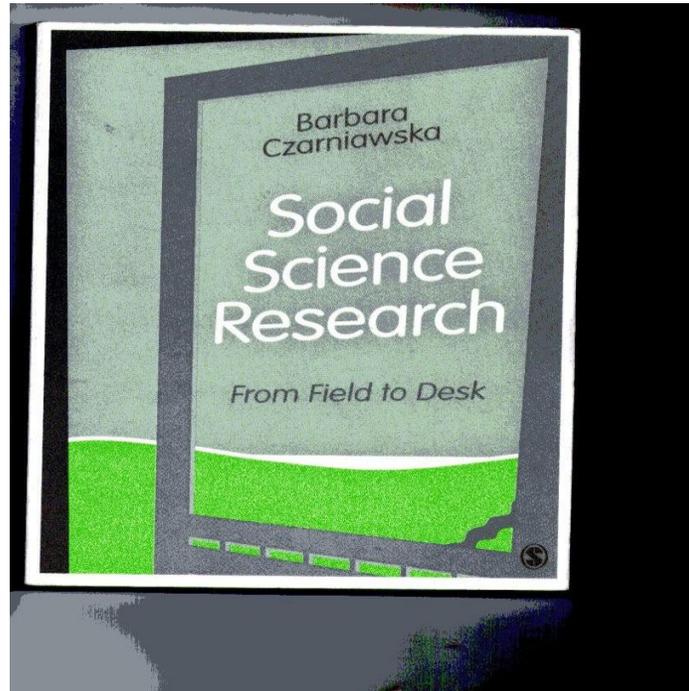


Book Review

Social Science Research: From Field to Desk



Author: Barbara Czarniawska

Title of Book: Social Science Research: From Field to Desk

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Number of pages: 175

Reviewer: Dr. Nadia Idri

The social science research is a practical guide for beginner researchers that treats methodological problems they can face. Czarniawska presented an account of practical methodological approaches, various research methods and methodologies, and diversified case studies from a cross-disciplinary work. In this expert guide of 171 pages divided into fourteen chapters, the author could enclose research steps from planning and designing research to collecting and analyzing data, to writing up and disseminating findings. Each chapter is divided into sections illustrated with examples the thing that makes of it a coherent structure. What makes the textbook worthwhile for new researchers and students is the end of each chapter that offers an activity and a list for further readings. Some chapters are also enriched with further notes for more understanding. Outstandingly, all chapters in the book consider ethical aspects; an important feature a researcher should have, and many new scholars may ignore in research. In this, according to Czarniawska, doing research is making moral choices and always under time pressure. The author, with her long experience in teaching and in doing ethnographic research,

could provide a rich and extensive list of references that ranges from 1913 to 2014 since she could collect a wide range of books and articles on research methods used in social sciences.

Thanks to this experience that the author could think of writing this simplified trust worthy guide for young scholars. Barbara wrote in her prologue: “what I hope to offer is a simple and pragmatic picture from beginning to end- of a research process that includes fieldwork”. In her overview, the author put focus on qualitative research more than quantitative methods although the reader can come across some quantitative illustrations when relevant they are.

All along the chapters, Czarniawska initiated her book by the three known questions a researcher should ask before getting started; that is the what? The why? and the How? to which she devoted her first chapter. The author, then, considered important steps in the research process focusing how to treat sources, importance of references, relevant research steps. In her second chapter, Barbara focused on how to review the literature. In upcoming chapters, she moved from study design to good academic writing.

In the third chapter, the author went through designing the study through the grounded theory approach. Then, she devoted chapters four, five and six to selected qualitative methods starting from interviewing, to observation and then, quasi-objects. Interviews, as an important method in qualitative research, have been defined and linked to context. The author related the interview to the site of narrative re-production. It can also be regarded as an observation opportunity either through observing the interviews or considering the diary interviews. Barbara served the reader with a section to help the scholar ask the relevant questions in their appropriate way and know how to transcribe and what problems he can meet. As for observation (chapter five), the author enumerated its varieties first and, then, focused shadowing. Going through objects, Czarniawska devoted the sixth chapter to following objects and quasi-objects relying on Actor-Network Theory.

Chapter seven adds new elements related to tools for fieldwork. Czarniawska treated diary studies in the digital era and considered the use of the camera in research. The author, being aware of the difficulty of fieldwork, devoted her eighth chapter to methodological problems and common complications the researcher can meet while trying to access information from different people, different types of people, different genders, particular situation, particular days, etc. This makes the job difficult for the researcher. That is why; Czarniawska dealt with “surviving in the field” with stories and real experiences illustrated all along the chapter.

Always within fieldwork, Barbara Czarniawska moved from fieldwork in social sciences in the real life in chapter eight to cyberspace in chapter nine. She emphasized fieldwork via cyberspace going through computer work, information gathering and eliciting field material. Then, the author explained clearly fieldwork about cyberspace and fieldwork in cyberspace. A historical account about its early days and the blooming of virtual ethnography has been presented.

In the two coming chapters; that is ten and eleven, Czarniawska moved to data analysis where she treated analyzing field material. Barbara came back to grounded theory revisited and covered content analysis, discourse analysis, conversation analysis and visual analysis in her tenth chapter. However, she devoted her eleventh chapter to text analysis where she started with the theoretical analysis, went through the origins of structuralism and its place in psychology. The author placed a section about semiology based on Actor Network Theory and ended the chapter with notes on post-structuralism.

The remaining chapters dealt with writing up the thesis with valuable techniques to succeed in the writing process. Aspects of: what to write, how to write academically and how to organize the work were detailed in chapters twelve and thirteen. Barbara Czarniawska ended the book with the when to stop question in chapter fourteen. The author enumerated three stops; first for reading, second for material collection and third for writing. After ending the writing process, the scholar-according to Barbara, should think of what to do next. In this last section, she referred to disregarding literature, previous field material, unused topics and themes, mass media and finally social media.

All in all, the book seems to be a valuable guide to any researcher who would like to succeed in research in social sciences through linking field-work data to academic writing; leading such data to drawing conclusions and linking them to other phenomena in the field of ethnographic research.

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