

Mixing Methods and Triangulation in Research

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The history of social research is full of efforts to combine different methods of data collection and data analysis in one research project. Outstanding studies (like, for instance, Lazarsfeld's "*Marienthalstudie*" or Festinger's study about cognitive dissonance and cults) can serve as examples for that. In more recent years attempts to combine research methods have been extensively discussed under different labels like "triangulation", "mixed methods" or "multiple methods". These developments reflect the necessity often felt in applied social research often feel to employ methods from different traditions (e.g. qualitative and quantitative methods) within the same research project. Furthermore, they provide evidence for a growing interest in methodological pluralism, openness and pragmatism after several decades of extended "paradigm wars".

However, participants in methodological debates about method combination still have difficulties to find a common ground. For instance the relation between various concepts of triangulation on the one hand and mixed methods, on the other hand, remains unclear. This also relates to the debate about mixed methods which has still failed - after more than a decade - to produce considerable agreement regarding basic concepts and definitions. Furthermore, the correspondences between different mixed method designs or different forms of triangulation and social theory have been rarely discussed so far.

However, one is not well-advised to rely exclusively on abstract epistemological and methodological concepts and considerations to solve such problems if one takes into account the experiences of past paradigm wars. What is needed instead is a careful methodological reflection about tangible requirements, results and problems arising in research practice. The purpose of this session is to discuss several and divergent applications of triangulation and mixed method research and its relations to deeper lying methodological and theoretical concepts. For this purpose we will investigate the relation between different sorts of mixed methods designs on the one hand and types of research questions and theoretical rationales of research projects on the other hand. Papers which discuss practical problems of mixed method research and methodological contributions which address underlying methodological questions are both welcome.