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Methodology of Political Science. The case of Eurasianism

Abstract: The text answers the following question: what is the point of conducting political science research? The research can make a lot of sense when you are strongly motivated and, motivation is just as important as your knowledge how to do it. In the latter case, you must proceed in the correct order. Firstly, the boundaries of the research field should be set, and secondly, original and unconventional research problems and hypotheses should be defined. Thirdly, the proper selection of primary and secondary sources is necessary. Fourthly, you choose appropriate research methods and techniques, and then construct a research tool or tools. After the determining of the level of accuracy and relevance of data collected, it is possible to proceed to the verification of hypotheses. The more thorough the process and the more inquisitive researcher, the more interesting research results are obtained.

Key words: methodology, research methods and techniques, Eurasianism

Introduction: to play or not to play?

There are numerous influential and valuable textbooks that help us understand the methodology of social sciences, and that of political science first and foremost (see e.g., Nowak, 1985; Sztumski, 2005; Krauz-Mozer, 2005; Bäcker et al., 2016; Krippendorf, 2018; Johnson, Reynolds, Mycoff, 2019). Yet the best way to understand the meaning of methodology is to practice it. This in turn, is possible only through designing and then implementing research projects. Only practice makes perfect for a researcher.

The aim of this article is to show how to design a research project within political science. Political thought is among the most difficult sub-disciplines to study. While quantitative methods can be used for electoral research or studies of political attitudes, political thought is typically studied using qualitative methods. These are much more susceptible to the researcher's subjective choices and evaluations than easily verifiable quantitative research techniques and research tools. Eurasianism is chosen here because it is difficult to study. This current of thinking is so original that it does not submit to the classical classifications of Russian political thought. Another significant reason is that I am part of the quite large group of authors dealing with this topic.

The first and most important issue for each researcher is to answer a basic question for themselves. Is the given topic exciting, fascinating and interesting enough for them to dedicate several years or months of their precious life to it? If we do not answer this question in the affirmative, we should choose another topic. If we cannot find any research subject of interest, then we should probably consider choosing a different profession. If we are not passionate about something or, worse, we are not even interested in something, then we can be sure that we will not do it correctly. It is therefore better to pursue a different path than condemn yourself to failure. Only if we dedicate enough

time, and even more – our commitment and passion – to a given project there is a chance that we will discover something that no one has noticed or been able to demonstrate before. Success is not achieved by those who do not feel like working.

Two personal traits are also needed. Curiosity is one of them. After all, searching is a much more certain (though not completely certain) way to find anything than waiting for chance, or Godot. The ability of self-improvement is the other one. I know very well that the document received in the Presidential Palace[1] can be treated as obvious evidence of one's own genius. This is not true. Everyone can be wrong, and certain professors are sometimes more wrong than ordinary people because they are unable to correct their own mistakes.

Research objective

If the above conditions are met, we can proceed with the first stage, namely setting the research objective. What do we want to explore? The answer is usually that which is mysterious, fascinating or at least interesting to us. In the social sciences, it is extremely rare for research to be multifaceted and to analyze a given issue, process or being from many different perspectives. We usually choose one dimension of examination rather than many. Either way, we have to define it at the very beginning. In practice, this also means adopting one, less often two or more, theoretical approaches, paradigms or theories. We must be aware that depending on whether we adopt, for example, the paradigm of classical neo-Realism or Constructivism in studies of international relations, we will obtain different research results. Simply by using different language, or different theoretical categories, we can examine different things. You can examine a forest in terms of the amount of timber in cubic meters, or in terms of biodiversity. In political science, let us take the example of Russia. If we use Wallerstein's world-system theory we can determine that this large country is located in the semi-periphery or periphery (and thus far from the center of the world). However, the theory of long cycles of George Modelski allows us to consider the Russian Federation as one of the main players in global hegemony. The same applies to any other issue.

When studying political thinking, classical typologies of ideology are most commonly used. In the case of the studies of Russian thought, the division into Slavophiles and Occidentalists applies. However, these typologies are no longer sufficient when we study twentieth-century and newer thought. Therefore, I followed the well-known anthropologist Ewa Nowicka (1972) and adopted her division of the attitudes of communities subordinate to the dominant culture (nativism, vitalism, self-negativism and counter-acculturation) for studies on Eurasianism. Another thing is that neither ideological nor pragmatic thinking (which are opposites) are the only types in the social world. Therefore, I distinguished the following types of social thinking after Vilfredo Pareto: communicative, scientific and derivative, based on residues. In the latter, apart from ideological thinking, there are religious, tribal, post-tribal and vegetative types of thinking. In our times, fundamentalist thinking and its extreme form – totalitarian political

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[1] In Poland, the title of professor is awarded by the President of Poland, usually during a ceremony held at the Presidential Palace [translator's note].

gnosis (Bäcker, 2011) – are specific types of thinking based on the semantic foundation of a given ideology or religion.

The above shows that it is both possible and sensible to use existing theoretical paradigms. However, it is even more interesting and curious to criticize, interpret and transform the existing grids of theoretical categories. In this case, however, it is necessary to remember that their usefulness is always limited to a given case or type of cases, or a given civilization or era. In other words, we have casual, short, medium and long-range theories. Universal theories are extremely scarce and usually quite banal.

If we do not use any theoretical approach whatsoever, we will not be able to study the sources. It is necessary to be able to interpret and criticize sources. If we do not have the theoretical tools to evaluate them or, worse – we cannot think abstractly – then we usually adopt the language of the sources. Consequently, sources control the researcher, not the other way round. It is therefore advisable to learn about the criteria of methodological accuracy for the assessment of theoretical categories, and the explanatory and classification schemes constructed by Joanna Rak (2018, pp. 20–54).

Research field

A research field is somewhat reminiscent of arable land. The most important similarity is the presence of boundaries, or very clearly marked borders between one field and the other. In the case of arable land, plowing the boundaries, and therefore moving the border, can trigger an angry reaction from the neighbor. In science, however, failing to observe the boundaries of the research field can bring much worse results, namely the unreliability of research results. Such results cannot be regarded as true, and all the effort turns out to be pointless.

The boundaries of the research field in the social sciences are primarily identified within temporal frames. Their beginnings and ends are set according to when a given process or event began and ended in a more or less natural way. For example, in the case of World War I the situation is clear (although the specific day depends on the country), but for other processes, entities and events, their time frames cannot always be determined in such a precise way. Biographies usually start from birth and end with death, but in the case of intellectual biographies, the initial moment is usually determined by the first serious text written on a given topic. Depending on the definition of the 'serious text' category, we can get different starting points. In the case of ideological biographies, is their ending determined by death, or maybe by the end of the intellectual influence being exerted? In my opinion, the former is the case. The latter is a different cup of tea.

Russian Eurasianism emerged with a founding manifesto, that is a collection of texts written by its creators, eminent Russian intellectuals and emigrants, in 1921 (Iskhod k'Vostoku, 1921) and withered slowly in the second half of the 1930s. However, the interwar Eurasianism was not the only one. Today, the most famous Eurasian is Alexander Dugin, born in 1960. He is young enough to keep writing significant books in the future. Does this mean that we have no right to examine his views? We do, but we have to set a different time frame than in the case of a classic biography. Its final point can be determined by a groundbreaking event that must have impacted the way he perceives

the world. In the recent history of Russia, such major events include Putin assuming the office of president in 2000, and the 2014 annexation of Crimea beginning the war with Ukraine. It is extremely risky to determine the end of the time frame by choosing an event that (we believe) will definitely happen in the future. Even if it is Putin's death, rather than his losing the social role of the 'leader' of Russia, we cannot be sure whether or not this event will take place in the next few years. Meanwhile, at a certain point in time, research needs to be completed and conclusions have to be developed. It is better not to take this risk.

The ending moment of the research process cannot be set when the researcher resolves to finish 'because they have read everything.' Researchers should not examine themselves, but other phenomena. Thus, the time limit can only be determined by the end of the existence, or a significant breakthrough in the subjects studied, not in the researcher.

In addition to time limits, it is necessary to specify the boundaries of the subject matter. Whom are we researching? In the case of intellectual currents, we have to decide whether we will only investigate the most important creators of ideas, or also the politicians implementing them (including Eurasians, but not the President of Kazakhstan, who repeatedly refers to Eurasianism?). Maybe we will include imitators, followers and epigones? We need to answer these questions, if only in order to identify what sources we need. Such an answer always has to be justified by the research objective. The same actually applies to all subsequent answers to the questions that need to be asked when designing a research project.

This also pertains to the question about the thematic scope of the research field. We are never able to discuss everything, however ambitious our intentions are. This is the case even of the biographies of intellectuals who have not written much. We can, for example, determine which thematic areas of Eurasianism will be of no interest to us from the point of view of the research objective.

Setting territorial borders is very rare. Comparative studies are an exception here, in which the selection of the object of research in territorial terms is extremely important. World War II was waged with varying intensity practically everywhere at different times. This does not mean, however, that we need to study the whole world. In this case, however, it is necessary to justify what territory will be studied.

The farmer knows in advance (and often from early childhood) where they will plow and sow. Unlike him, researchers determine the fields in which they will work for themselves. However, this freedom must be subordinated to the requirements arising from our research intent. These two have to be aligned.

Problems and hypotheses

The same applies to research problems and hypotheses that must precisely correspond to the research field. They may neither go beyond the research field nor cover only part of it. What a research problem and hypothesis are has been explained many times (e.g. Rak, Bäcker, 2015) so I will limit myself to a handful of comments. The problem cannot be a trivial one, because such problems do not need to be solved. It cannot be insoluble, either, because then there is no point in dealing with it.

In the social sciences (unlike in the pure sciences) we rarely need to establish facts. These are usually clear and terribly banal. When we are uncertain about the credibility of facts, or primary sources are absent or unavailable, the researchers can demonstrate their inventiveness. It is advisable to review several examples of such research and see, for instance, how the sources were examined to reveal whether or not Eurasians had been controlled by the NKVD. We deal with classification much more often (at least since Linnaeus) establishing to what type, genre and species an entity or event belongs. Social sciences began when the relationship between dependent and independent variables began to be addressed. Emil Durkheim was the first to do so in his studies on the relationship between suicide and the social situation of the perpetrators. The vast majority of quantitative research in sociology, psychology, pedagogy and political science concerns solving the problems contained in the question of the level of significance of the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

The final type of research problem is a question about the problem's position on a continuum between two opposite ideal types. This type of research problem is typical of qualitative research. Instead of wondering whether Poland is a democratic or authoritarian state, the researcher-political scientist will ask: what is the direction and pace of change of the political regime in Poland in 2015–2019 between the ideal types of democracy and authoritarianism? In the case of interwar Eurasianism, I designed two basic research problems: what was the direction and pace of change between the ideal types of nativist counter-acculturation and vitalism, and between fundamentalism and totalitarian political gnosis.

A research hypothesis is simply a putative answer to a research problem. Our research task is to falsify or confirm it (partially, or as a whole). The difference between researchers and madmen is that the former do not seek the confirmation of their hypothesis. While madmen collect only the arguments that confirm the certainty they developed in advance, researchers take into account all relevant arguments and counterarguments. In order to be even more certain that this is the case, the main problem and hypothesis are often split into specific problems and detailed hypotheses.

Choice and selection of sources

Medievalists are required to familiarize themselves with all possible sources. Every shred of information may be important, if only because very few written sources were produced, and extremely few other types of sources have remained. Today, there are many more kinds of sources, primarily written ones, than you can imagine. Thus, source selection is necessary.

We use primary sources first and foremost, that is those that were produced by the objects of our studies. We only examine secondary sources (created in the environment of the objects of our studies) if there are no primary sources, and if the latter are contradictory to an extent that prevents us from determining the truth. We usually analyze currently existing sources (i.e. those created to meet the specific needs of the objects of our studies). However, when examining, for instance, social awareness, researchers are obliged to obtain induced sources. Studies by other researchers are not sources, and therefore should not

be used to obtain information about the facts for or against our hypothesis. Of course, there are exceptions. Many archival sources burned down during World War II, and thus we can treat the studies conducted before that war as secondary sources.

We consider only those sources that allow us to verify the research hypothesis. We do not need any other sources. If there are a lot of such primary sources, we must select them. We choose the most valuable or significantly differentiated sources (for instance in focus studies) or those that meet the requirement of representativeness. We simply ignore all others. The fewer sources we have, the more time we have to read, understand, interpret and criticize them. If we do not have this time, even if we gather all sources possible, we will not be able to solve the research problem.

While in a bookstore, I once saw a book about Russia written solely on the basis of articles published in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper in Polish language. I did not buy the book. There have been plenty of publications about the heroic struggle of Tibet with communist China based on texts in English. The value of studies that are not based on primary sources, but on some remote accounts, or secondary sources, is negligible. There is no point in trying to solve a research problem without the command of the language of primary sources.

In the case of the texts authored by interwar Eurasians, it was not only necessary to speak the somewhat archaic Russian language of the interwar period, but also to access the original publications issued in various European countries inhabited by Russian emigrants. Fortunately for the researcher (but not necessarily for the local population), the victorious Red Army was followed by the relevant services, which on the occasion of widespread looting gathered these publications and transported them to Moscow; they were declassified during the perestroika and the *Smuta* of the 1990s. Although various types of source editions were published, it was not certain whether all the important texts were included in such publications. Curiosity, caution and a large measure of distrust are the basic properties necessary for the choice and selection of sources.

The selection of research method and techniques

Research methods are usually divided into those applicable for quantitative research and for qualitative research. A survey is the most common method typical of quantitative research. Observation and content analysis are good examples of methods typical of qualitative research.

Of course, this division is very general. We can, for example, observe the intensity of a phenomenon (e.g. the number of participants at a given stage of a demonstration), which will be a quantitative study. Content analysis can consist of measuring the number of times a given word or phrase features in a large set of documents, which will make it a quantitative study as well.

The question of how to select methods is much more important than their classification. This selection has to be subordinated to the task of solving the research problem. For example, if we are interested in the behavior of demonstrators, we should probably use the observation method. If we are studying the texts of ideologists in pre-IT periods, the only thing we can do is to analyze the content of the sources.

From time to time, the authors of various books confess in the introductions that they will use the historical method. The method is defined as showing the genesis, course and effects of a given process. Since the times of Max Weber (who died in 1919), the view that describing phenomena is not a research method has become increasingly widespread in the social sciences.

While the choice of method depends primarily on the type of research problem, the choice of the technique is determined primarily by the type of sources that we need to examine to solve the research problem. If we believe it is necessary to use the observation method, we choose participatory or passive observation, which can be overt or covert, mainly due to the foreseeable reactions of the social entities surveyed. Content analysis of diplomatic documents is conducted in a different manner than that of the documents from someone's personal life, such as diaries. Research techniques are nothing more than the materialization of research methods which require specific research skills. In order to examine, for example, diplomatic documents, it is necessary to know not only the diplomatic protocol and public international law, but above all the very precise and subtle language of diplomacy.

The study of ideological documents, manifestos, programs or quasi-philosophical ruminations requires the knowledge of intellectual codes, identifying references to this ideological current and not another one, or to the thoughts of a particular writer. For instance, it is impossible to understand the article *What Is to Be Done?* by Vladimir Ulyanov (a.k.a. Lenin), which was fundamental for Bolshevism, if one does not know the nineteenth-century text under the same title by Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

The situation with the texts of the Eurasians of the interwar period was similar. It was impossible to understand them accurately without knowledge of the Russian Slavophilic thought, or, more broadly, of the anti-Occidentalist thought of the Tsarist and following periods. Dugin's thought, in turn, cannot be comprehensively understood without knowledge of extensive literature produced by Conservatives who are rather marginal in Europe.

Recently, desk research has become very popular, that is the analysis of currently existing data. Data, formerly only available in archives, and studies available in libraries, has become consigned to the past for researchers. More and more information is available only on the internet, or via the internet, on all kinds of portals and websites. When dealing with a large amount of data, it is necessary to employ statistical methods, using specialized tools. Qualitative research is also possible and it is carried out in many ways.

Research tools

In each case, a research tool has to be employed or, to put it simply, a set of questions that allows us to verify specific and, eventually, general hypotheses.

Before considering which research tool to select, each researcher has to solve the dilemma of innovation versus certainty. The more innovative the tool, the greater the chance of obtaining original, unprecedented research results. The more proven (empirically tested) the tool has been in earlier studies, the more we can be sure that the results

obtained are reliable, credible and also comparable with those obtained by other re-searchers.

Even when we take the former path (or maybe especially then), it is still necessary to test the tool before we proceed to the actual examination. A pilot study is indispensable mainly because the first version of the tool is not always precise. This is of the utmost importance, especially when collecting induced sources. We do not know whether the language used by the researcher will be fully understood in all the possible social groups studied.

The most popular type of research tool is the questionnaire, which is commonly used in surveys. Depending on the question, we get specific answers (Krok, 2015; Pat-ten, 2016). Therefore, it is impossible to automatically compare the results of research based on different questionnaires. However, questionnaires are not the only type of research tool. Further types of research tools include guidelines for free in-depth inter-views, observation sheets or focus group scenarios (Skoczylas, Brzezińska, Fabiszak, 2016).

What tool do we use for content analysis? This is usually a set of questions that allow you to verify specific hypotheses and be relevant to the type of source. We seek answers in the written sources, regardless of the limitations that are typical of induced sources. While the respondents may feel offended by poorly phrased, sensitive ques-tions that are arranged in the wrong order, the existing sources are unlikely to show emotions.

Yet it is necessary to remember that these documents were created for a purpose other than to be useful for the researcher. Thus CVs, memoirs, autobiographies, and especially letters to loved ones and court testimonies are not completely reliable evidence of per-sonal biographies. The first question that needs to be asked with reference to documents is not only the matter of their authenticity, but also the level of credibility of the facts and events presented therein.

Further questions should concern, first, the presence and then, the significance of arguments and counterarguments allowing the hypotheses to be confirmed or not. It is necessary to remember though that direct questions are much more likely to be answered in the negative than when we begin to ask very precise indirect questions. No one will admit that they are a thief, but sometimes it is worth asking a question about their official income and the property gathered when they were in a given job and then compare these two amounts. Lech Wałęsa never writes that he collaborated with the Security Service at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. What he does write in his memoirs is who he, an ordi-nary young electrician, spoke to during the December events (Wałęsa, 1989).

In the case of broadly understood journalistic texts, it is necessary to search for key-words, analyze the selection of arguments, identify the scales of melioration of friends and pejorativization of enemies. It is also important to read between the lines ('Aesopian language') even when texts were not necessarily written under very strict censorship. Another question that should always be asked is what is absent from a given text, and which ought to be there.

Before reading the sources, it is therefore necessary to draw up a list of questions that we ask in each case, and specific questions directly related to the verification of the main hypothesis.

The course of research – self-reflection

Just before formulating the final conclusions, self-reflection is necessary. It should concern the level of certainty of the research results (Krauz-Mozer, 2005). To what extent are our research results reliable? To answer this question, it suffices to find answers to some specific questions.

How precise are the theoretical categories on the basis of which the research problems have been formulated? What 'wiggle room' do the research tools allow? In other words, does a given research tool allow the researcher to identify the 'intermediary' phenomena located between the alternatives indicated? Further questions pertain to the course of the research. What sources could not be accessed? How did this affect the reliability of the research results? In surveys, you usually ask about the percentage of refusals when completing survey questionnaires. The higher that is and, additionally, the more unevenly distributed in individual social groups, the higher the error rate. Finally – was the critique, interpretation and reasoning adequately performed?

It is advisable to answer these questions before critics of our text do it for us.

Hypothesis verification

We usually conduct research in social sciences not to gather as much data as possible, but to solve the research problem. All data is only valid if it allows the hypothesis to be confirmed or rejected, as a whole or partially. Collecting all other data which is related to the examined entity in this way or another is redundant. Only arguments and counterarguments are taken into consideration because they ultimately decide whether the hypothesis is or is not accepted.

The first measure is to estimate the gravity and significance of individual arguments and counterarguments. This is quite simple for quantitative research, and requires very careful reflection in qualitative research. In the latter case, it is of course conceivable to determine a quantitative scale thereby designing a quantitative substitute. A much better solution is to create sub-stages, e.g. on the continuum between two opposite ideal types (see e.g. Szewczak, 2010; Rak, 2017).

In this case, it is very rare to be able to firmly state that the hypothesis has been completely falsified or accepted. We most often talk about acceptance or rejection to a larger or lesser degree. The more precisely we determine, for example, the position on the continuum between two opposite ideal types, the more accurate the research result will be. It is therefore necessary to use the most precise tools, as well as very accurate terms when formulating our final conclusions.

The world is not black or white. To render the multicolored tree of life best, research theory and practice cannot be gray.

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Metodologia badań politologicznych na przykładzie eurazjatyzmu

Streszczenie

Tekst odpowiada na pytanie: jaki jest sens prowadzenia badań politologicznych? Wtedy, gdy ma się odpowiednią motywację i (co równie ważne) wie się, jak to można zrobić. W tym drugim przypadku musi się postępować w odpowiedniej kolejności. Po pierwsze, należy wyznaczyć granice pola badawczego, a po drugie, określić oryginalne, niebanalne problemy i hipotezy badawcze. Po trzecie, konieczny jest odpowiedni dobór i sposób selekcji źródeł pierwotnych i ewentualnie wtórnych. Czwartym etapem jest dobranie adekwatnych metod i technik badawczych, a następnie skonstruowanie narzędzia lub narzędzi badawczych. Po określeniu poziomu prawdziwości i stosowalności zebranych informacji możliwe jest dopiero przystąpienie do weryfikacji hipotez. Im bardziej ten ostatni proces będzie rzetelny, a badacz dociekliwy, tym ciekawsze uzyska się rezultaty badawcze.

Słowa kluczowe: metodologia, metody i techniki badawcze, eurazjatyzm