

## Dissertations

(at the Chair of IR and Sustainable Development)

### 1. General information

The very intention of a dissertation is to answer a scientifically relevant question or “puzzle”. This has to take place on the basis of a sound theoretical framework, an interesting hypothesis, and its empirical evaluation. It is essential to maintain a clear line of argument throughout the thesis. This instruction sheet lists the most important points as to how dissertations should be composed.

### 2. The topic

The following aspects should be taken into account when selecting a topic:

- The research question must be interesting, in other words relevant from a political and/or scientific point of view.
- The research objective must be feasible in terms of size and available data.
- This research question must be precise: A helpful indicator is outlining the question in one single sentence.
- The research question should be related to IR (including development politics) or environmental politics.

### 3. The structure

Structuring the dissertation systematically reveals the line of thought to the reader. In other words, the structure shows how the overall topic was understood and actually handled. Therefore, the structure should be

clear and functional. The reader should be able to easily recognize the line of argument. A convincing structure of a dissertation could look like the following:

#### I. Introduction

The introduction should specify the subject-matter of the dissertation, demonstrate its relevance, and introduce the chosen research method. **What** is my research interest (research objective) and **why** (political and/or scientific relevance) and **how** (theoretical and methodological approach) am I pursuing my analysis? Moreover, the structure of the dissertation should be outlined.

#### II. Background

Here, some background information may be presented to allow the reader to gain relevant information on the political issue or developments. This section is only necessary, however, if such information helps the reader to fully comprehend the following analysis.

#### III. State-of-the-art

In this section, the state-of-the-art of research and literature need to be presented and discussed in order to identify relevant **research gaps** for the dissertation. The discussion of the state-of-the-art should be both comprehensive and concise and based on high-quality scientific literature.

#### IV. Theoretical framework

This part concentrates on developing the theoretical approach, based on existing and relevant theories and approaches. These need to be presented and critically discussed in a precise and comprehensive manner, drawing on key scientific publications. In doing so, existing frameworks may be developed further. (Should that not be the case, the dissertation’s scientific innovation must be provided by the empirical analysis). In this section, then, one needs to pay attention to the formation of the key concepts used in the dissertation. Finally, the hypotheses need to be deduced from the developed theoretical framework.

#### V. Method

The method used should be appropriate for solving the puzzle and testing the hypotheses. If the research question allows it and the necessary data are available, one may well gain particular mileage from a statistical assessment. Other possible methods include comparative qualitative case studies, network analyses, or discourse analyses. In exceptional cases, one may pursue a solely theoretical question. Such a focus requires an immense in-depth knowledge of different theoretical approaches as well as the ability to apply stringent logic to the chosen question, however. The choice of method needs to be justified and its strengths and weaknesses need to be critically discussed.

In addition, this passage must delineate how the theory (specifically the hypotheses) will be applied to the empirical case. For that

purpose, the variables' operationalization as well as the case selection must be explained and justified. Also, data and data sources need to be described and critically evaluated. **The development of a stringent research design is a necessary precondition for a successful analysis! Thus adequate attention should be paid to this point.**

#### VI. Empirical research

The empirical research has the function of testing the developed hypotheses on the basis of the chosen theoretical framework and research design. Even though knowledge of the case to be examined must be become apparent in this chapter, it should only be discussed in so far as it is relevant to the question analyzed. The research question and the hypotheses should always be kept in mind in the empirical analysis. A common mistake in this empirical part is using a descriptive instead of an analytical approach.

#### VII. Implications

In this section, the results of the empirical analysis should be interpreted with respect to the chosen research question. The evaluation of the outcomes should, above all, consider the political and scientific implications. It also has to address the question of the external and internal validity of the results.

#### VIII. Conclusion

At the end of the dissertation, the results should be briefly summarized with regard to the research question and the state-of-the-art. Perhaps, an outlook on future research questions can be given at this point. The most important political implications can be mentioned, as well.

### 4. Formal Criteria

#### I. Language and Argument

Good dissertations in form and content have to use precise language and stringent arguments, as well as provide clear orientation to the reader. In order to allow for easy reading, it is particularly important to highlight the logical structure of the main arguments. This can be done through subheadings as well as by connecting individual chapters and sections through suitable transitions. One can also include short summaries between the different sections and chapters.

#### II. Citations

The use of correct citations is an essential part of the requirements for academic writing! Dissertations with insufficient or no citations violate the academic code of conduct as well as intellectual property rights. Many different citation styles exist, such as the Harvard- or Chicago-Style. Whatever style is chosen, it has to be applied consistently throughout the dissertation. Footnotes should only be used if and when they include essential comments or information which would impede general readability in the main text.

### 5. Originality/Innovation

As pointed out above, the overall aim of a dissertation is to solve a puzzle in the field of political science within a given period of time. Hereby, the original contribution of the author to science must be clearly recognizable. This contribution can entail relevant theoretical or empirical progress.

### 6. Further literature

There are a number of books covering the topic of „scientific work methods“ and broader questions of methodology. Examples are:

King, Gary, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton: University of Princeton Press.  
 Brady, Henry & David Collier. 2004. *Rethinking Social Inquiry*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.  
 George, Alexander & Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

### 7. Criteria of the chair for evaluating dissertations and final theses

1. Precision, Relevance and Originality of the Research question
2. Clarity and Functionality of Structure and Line of Argument
3. Relevance, correct presentation, and critical evaluation (possibly extension) of theoretical framework; interesting, relevant, and stringently derived hypotheses.
4. Clarity and solidity of research design (method, operationalization, data)
5. Stringently conducted empirical analysis on the basis of a sound knowledge of the case and the systematic application of the theoretical framework; critical reflection (internal and external validity of results).
6. Presentation: Precise use of language, attractive and functional layout, suitable use of illustrations and tables.
7. Formal requirements: citations, bibliography