

## Review

# A Guide to Understanding Social Science Research for Natural Scientists

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**Abstract:** *Natural scientists are increasingly interested in social research because they recognize that conservation problems are commonly social problems. Interpreting social research, however, requires at least a basic understanding of the philosophical principles and theoretical assumptions of the discipline, which are embedded in the design of social research. Natural scientists who engage in social science but are unfamiliar with these principles and assumptions can misinterpret their results. We developed a guide to assist natural scientists in understanding the philosophical basis of social science to support the meaningful interpretation of social research outcomes. The 3 fundamental elements of research are ontology, what exists in the human world that researchers can acquire knowledge about; epistemology, how knowledge is created; and philosophical perspective, the philosophical orientation of the researcher that guides her or his action. Many elements of the guide also apply to the natural sciences. Natural scientists can use the guide to assist them in interpreting social science research to determine how the ontological position of the researcher can influence the nature of the research; how the epistemological position can be used to support the legitimacy of different types of knowledge; and how philosophical perspective can shape the researcher's choice of methods and affect interpretation, communication, and application of results. The use of this guide can also support and promote the effective integration of the natural and social sciences to generate more insightful and relevant conservation research outcomes.*

**Keywords:** epistemology, interdisciplinary research, ontology, research design, theoretical perspective, worldview

Una Guía para Entender la Investigación de Ciencias Sociales para las Ciencias Naturales Katie Moon

**Resumen:** *Los científicos de la Naturaleza cada vez están más interesados en la investigación social porque reconocen que los problemas de la conservación comúnmente son problemas sociales. El interpretar las investigaciones sociales, sin embargo, requiere por lo menos un entendimiento básico de los principios filosóficos y las suposiciones teóricas de la disciplina, las cuales están embebidas en el diseño de la investigación social. Los científicos de la Naturaleza que se dedican a las ciencias sociales pero que no están familiarizados con estos principios y suposiciones pueden malinterpretar estos resultados. Desarrollamos una guía para apoyar a los científicos de la Naturaleza en el entendimiento de las bases filosóficas de las ciencias sociales que respaldan la interpretación significativa de los resultados de las investigaciones sociales. Los tres elementos fundamentales de la investigación son la ontología, lo que existe en el mundo humano y del cual los investigadores pueden adquirir conocimientos; epistemología, cómo se crea el conocimiento; y la perspectiva filosófica, la orientación filosófica que guía las acciones del investigador. Muchos elementos de la guía también aplican para las ciencias naturales. Los científicos de la Naturaleza pueden usar la guía como asistencia al interpretar las investigaciones de las ciencias sociales para determinar cómo la posición ontológica del investigador puede influir en la naturaleza de la investigación; cómo la posición epistemológica puede usarse para apoyar la legitimidad de los diferentes tipos de conocimiento; y cómo la perspectiva filosófica puede formar los métodos de elección del investigador y afectar la interpretación, comunicación y la aplicación de los resultados. El uso de esta guía también puede apoyar y promover la integración efectiva de las ciencias sociales y naturales para generar más resultados profundos y relevantes de la investigación de la conservación.*

Paper submitted June 10, 2013; revised manuscript accepted February 26, 2014.

# Understanding Social Science Research

**Xiaolong Qi**



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