Methods for Studying Sustainable Foodscapes

METHODS SECTION

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Building on Your Literature Review and Research Question (Assignment 1)

You have already reviewed the literature, justified the study, and developed your research question.

Do not rewrite or resubmit those sections. Continue working with your existing question.

Now develop the methods section: HOW could you investigate that question, and WHY are these methods appropriate?

What Belongs in a Methods Section?

1 – **Research design**: Overall approach, setting, and scope.
2 – **Participants or sources**: Whom or what you would study and how you would select them.
3 – **Materials**: Tools used to collect information (e.g., interview guide, questionnaire, map).
4 – **Procedures**: The steps you would take to collect information.
5 – **Ethical considerations**: Potential harms, benefits, responsibilities, and research relationships.
6 – **Methodological rationale**: Why these methods fit your question; what they can reveal and overlook.

Research Design: Your Overall Strategy

What overall approach fits your existing question (see next slide)?

Would you focus on a particular case, place, community, landscape, or social-ecological system?

What will your design allow you to understand, document, measure, or explore?

How does the design connect to the research question developed in Assignment 1?

From Research Questions to Research Design

Start with your project

- What is your research question, and why does it matter?
- What kind of knowledge would help you answer it?

Choose an approach

- Quantitative: measure patterns, change, or associations
- Qualitative: explore experiences, meanings, and relationships
- Mixed methods: connect numerical and contextual evidence
- Participatory/action research: co-produce knowledge for change

Then choose methods that fit: surveys, interviews, observation, mapping, field measurements, experiments, or facilitated dialogue.

Research Methods from the Readings

System Scoping

Ecological Field Data Collection

Interviews and Surveys

Participatory Data Collection

Facilitated Dialogues

Action Research

Futures Analysis

Scenario Development

Serious Games

Participatory Modeling

Resilience Assessment

Other?

Whom or What Will You Study?

Identify potential participants, sites, cases, documents, or other information sources.

Explain how you would select or recruit participants, sites, cases, or sources.

Identify selection criteria and approximate numbers.

Describe practical considerations such as access, place, and timeframe.

Consider whose experiences and knowledge may be included or overlooked.

Specify Your Data-Collection Methods

Interviews: whom, how many, how selected, and what key topics?

Surveys: to whom, how distributed, and what kinds of questions?

Observations or ecological measures: where, when, and what would you record?

Participatory methods or mapping: who would participate, what would they do, and how?

Other?

Procedures: Explain What You Would Do

Describe your process in a clear sequence, from access and recruitment to data collection.

Identify any tools you would use: interview guides, questionnaires, maps, observation forms, or measurement equipment.

Explain the kinds of information that each procedure would generate.

Give enough detail that another reader can understand the proposed study, including where, how often, how long, and under what conditions data would be collected, where relevant.

Ethics, Power, and Relationships

Consider consent, privacy, confidentiality, potential harm, and data stewardship where applicable.

Think about your position and relationship to participants and communities.

Consider reciprocity, accountability, and who shapes or uses the knowledge produced.

Human-participant data collection requires relevant approvals; this is only a proposal.

Why These Methods? A Methodological Rationale

How will each method help you investigate your existing research question?

What makes it appropriate for the kind of knowledge you hope to produce?

What might alternative methods reveal differently?

What assumptions, limitations, or missing perspectives should you acknowledge?

Use relevant research-methods readings to support your choices. Explain how ideas from the readings informed your decisions rather than simply citing them.

Use the Methods Readings to Make Choices

September 14 to October 26 – Many readings about knowledge production, agroecology, food science, and sustainable foodscapes.

October 26 – Routledge Handbook, Chapters 5–9: Methods for data generation and systems scoping.

November 2 – Routledge Handbook, Chapters 10–15: Knowledge co-production and effecting system change.

Consider: What can each approach help you investigate? What forms of evidence and participation would it involve?

Choose methods appropriate to your question and justify them. You do not need to use every method presented in the readings.

Example: Bishop's Campus–Community Research

Study: Strengthening Farm–Campus–Community Connections at Bishop's University.

Question 1: How can the Educational Farm strengthen connections with campus and surrounding communities to contribute to food sovereignty?

Question 2: What can Bishop's learn from campus farms at other post-secondary institutions?

Design: Exploratory, qualitative and collaborative; informed by participatory and action-research principles.

Two linked phases: (1) comparative campus-farm interviews; (2) a local World Café informed partly by those interviews.

Phase 1: Campus-Farm Interviews

Participants: People working with campus farms at other post-secondary institutions.

Selection: Purposive sampling, considering different farm purposes, scales, organizations and community relationships.

Procedure: Student teams of two or three recruit participants, obtain consent and conduct 20–30-minute semi-structured interviews online.

Materials: A four-part interview guide covering farm activities, campus/community connections, lessons for Bishop's and additional perspectives.

Documentation: With consent, interviews are recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams.

Phase 2: Bishop's World Café

Participants: Too be determined. Bishop's students, faculty, staff, and farm personnel from SAFS as well as invited community partners.

Recruitment: To be determined. Campus and community networks, targeted invitations, posters and other outreach.

Procedure: Approximately 90 minutes of facilitated small-group discussion, using successive rounds and shared questions.

Materials: Three questions on possibilities, enabling conditions and continued participation.

Documentation: AGR 260 students take notes at discussion tables; no audio or video recordings.

What the Two Methods Contribute

Campus-farm interviews: Document practices, challenges and lessons from other institutions.

World Café: Create a space for locally grounded priorities, concerns and possibilities to be discussed collectively.

Together: Comparative experience can inform community dialogue without prescribing a development plan for the farm.

Ethical considerations: Informed consent, confidentiality choices for interviews, and limits to confidentiality during group discussions.

Benefits: Create conditions for the Educational Farm to distribute food to campus and community partners.

What to Submit

500–1,000 words, written in the future tense.

Build on the literature review and research question already submitted; do not redo them.

Include research design, participants or sources, materials, procedures, ethical considerations, and methodological rationale.

No data analysis section is required; we will address analysis later.

Cite relevant readings where useful, and include references, word count, and the course-required AI-use statement.

Check Your Methods Section

Is your research design connected to your existing research question?

Have you identified whom or what you would study, including selection criteria?

Have you described materials and data-collection procedures with sufficient detail?

Have you used relevant readings to justify your methodological choices?

Have you addressed ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and feasibility?

Activity

What Are You Trying to Understand?

- What topic or problem are you investigating?
- Why is this research important? What does the existing literature tell us?
- What is your research question?
- What assumptions inform your research? Whose knowledge and perspectives matter?

How Will You Study It?

- What research design will you use, and why?
- Who or what will you study? How will you select or recruit participants?
- What methods, materials, and procedures will you use?
- What ethical considerations, potential benefits, and limitations should you address?
- How might you analyze and interpret your findings?