# 2.4. Training for Field Inquiries. Practices, Networks and Strategies Linked to Market Gardening in Peri-Urban Areas

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The aim of this workshop is to introduce the trainees to the methods and tools for the inquiries that are specific to qualitative research in social sciences. The first stage focuses on introducing the techniques and methods of field inquiries; the second involves a concrete application involving the execution of a short field inquiry, which encompasses and follows the principal stages of a scientific approach from the development of a research objective to the processing and analysis of the collected data.

The field inquiry is carried out on two distinct sites: the commune of Liên Nghĩa, the main town of the Đức Trọng district, and the village of Quảng Hiệp in the Hiệp Thạnh commune.

The workshop is required to carry out a comparative study of two systems of market garden production: an intensive system composed of six big farms, each one covering several hectares and combining soil-less production methods; a specialised, semi-intensive, family-based system covering an area of several hectares.

The initial crosscutting research themes are the following:

- An assessment of the individual operations of the two production systems;
- Identification of the links between the two systems: Are we dealing with two hermetic, linked or interdependent systems? Are the supply and trading networks compartmentalised or do they intersect?;
- Identification of the limiting or competitive factors concerning commercialisation, market access, water management, inputs, labour, etc.

The trainees are divided into three sub-groups, which are then sub-divided into four pairings. Each sub-group is accompanied over the three days by a trainer and an interpreter.

The training for the field inquiries proceeds as follows:

- One sub-group will work at Liên Nghĩa. This group will examine the intensive market gardening practices in the six big "production farms" in the district's main city – inquiries into their management, workers, suppliers of inputs and agricultural material, members of the flower and vegetable cooperative; the marketing chain – functioning of the district's wholesale and semi-wholesale market: type of produce, purchase price paid to producers, product labelling, collection and sorting centres, distribution networks, clients; intervention and role of public authorities (support, regulations, monitoring) – surveys of the district's local authorities, farmers' association, women's association, etc.;
- Two sub-groups will work in the village of Quảng Hiệp. They will be divided between the two housing zones located on the two sides of the main road: inquiries into family economies entirely devoted to commercial market gardening – farmer producers (history and family trajectory), agricultural input suppliers, collectors of market garden produce, households having abandoned agricultural activities in order to focus partially or exclusively on the service sector or other sectors; inquiries into the role and intervention of public authorities at a communal and village level.

The first day of training is devoted to the presentation of a few concepts and key notions and to the development of an inquiry "strategy" – tools, techniques and inquiry methods. Attention is paid to the elaboration of the methodology, inquiry protocol and interview grids. It finishes with a presentation of the socio-economic context of the inquiry zone (*cf.* reading material distributed to the workshop).

The fifth day is devoted to the summarising and organisation of the gathered data with a view to preparing the presentation of the workshop's results on Tuesday 29th July:

- In pairs: *i)* inventory of gathered data; *ii)* collating of data according to a grid used by the four pairings in the sub-group;
- By sub-group: *i)* data synthesis; *ii)* ordering of data sets according to the research theme.

The trainers' work is organised into three phases:

1) Before the three days of the inquiry: identification of the concepts, the analysis framework and the theories-debates linked to the research;
2) During the three days of the inquiry: observations and support for the workshop in the carrying out of their inquiries (choice and expertise of survey techniques, interaction with the people questioned, etc.). The daily monitoring of one or several

pairing(s) and the end of the day meeting in order to allow a progressive construction/ reconsideration of the research objective according to the progress of the interviews and cross-checking of information from the daily feedback of each pairing. The objective is to show the trainees that the fieldwork phase includes the simultaneous task of processing gathered information according to an iterative logic combining production and interpretation. During the evening meetings, the gathered elements lead to the evolution of the research objective without having to wait for the post fieldwork phase: the relevance of the initial results and the survey patterns may thus be assessed. The research objective develops as the work progresses according to a dynamic inductive approach;

3) Use of results: this entails exploiting the fieldwork results by having the pairings interact within a group in order to make the participants familiar with a cumulative approach.

One of the particularities of the field-workshop thus consists in making the trainer an active member of the sub-group and not only a simple observer. Interaction between sub-groups is not a priority during the fieldwork phase, but is the objective of the preparation day for the presentation of results – seeking to establish links between the data and analyses of the three sub-groups. Each sub-group's presentation of results will explicitly include the phases outlined above. The result is a real-time rendering of the trainees' appreciation of their method and progression over the days spent in the field: introspection and assessment of their understanding of the inquiry's methods and techniques.

*(Transcript)*

## Day 1, Thursday 24th July

[Olivier Tessier]

For seven years now, we have been organising this training workshop for field inquiries within the framework of the JTD. Our workshop will be facilitated by four trainers. I shall briefly present the workshop's structure and then each of us around the table will introduce ourselves.

The challenge consists in introducing you to all the phases of a field inquiry in a few days. This thus involves introducing you to an exercise that normally demands several months' work.

This morning, there will be three presentations/discussions by Emmanuel Pannier, Pierre-Yves Le Meur and Trương Hoang Trương concerning field inquiries and our specific field in a peri-urban area.

We shall take our time discussing the content and form of these presentations, by insisting upon the specificities of the relationship between the researcher and the field. Then, we shall split up into three sub-groups of four to six trainees in order to develop the template of the inquiry and the content of the study that we shall be developing over the next week. These sub-groups will be divided into pairings in order to carry out the inquiries on-site from tomorrow morning. We shall spend three days in the field. Each sub-group will meet every evening in order to discuss the information gathered that day. It will be an opportunity to adjust the hypotheses made and discover new avenues of research according to the information collected. At this stage, the objective is not to compare the

results obtained by each group. Indeed, this work will be done upon our return to Đà Lạt. It will be then be a question of synthesising the collected data, assessing the part of them that remains hypothetical or have become certainties, of comparing the results obtained by each of the sub-groups and organising the principal elements that feed into and enrich our initial research issue.

The main objective is to learn to develop and adjust the research objective as the inquiries progress, to acquire a certain autonomy *vis-à-vis* our research objective: not to think twice about transforming it or enriching it according to what we have learned during the day.

*Presentation of the trainers and trainees (cf. trainers' biographies, list of trainees added at the end of this chapter)*

## 2.4.1. The Stages of a Qualitative Study Based on Field Inquiries

[Emmanuel Pannier]

*The Research Cycle*

My presentation concerns the different stages of a research cycle and addresses a few major theoretical and practical principles.

What are the principal stages of socio-anthropological research?

- Definition of a research theme and an initial research issue – this basis for reflection will evolve throughout the research;
- Development of the research subject: pre-field, theoretical and bibliographical reading, assessment of the scientific relevance of the research subject and its feasibility, axes of reflection and hypotheses;
- Choice of methods;
- Field inquiries: implementing the tools and techniques of data production;
- Processing and analysis of data: interpretation and theorisation;
- Presentation of results, scientific writing.

Although the presentation of the different stages of research is chronological, the process is not so linear: the field causes the research subject, hypotheses, research issue, etc. to evolve. A qualitative study works by going to and fro between empirical reality, theory, research subject, research axes, methods and interpretations.

Let us specify from the outset four classical terms employed in the wide domain of science and which sometimes create a certain confusion: method, approach, technique and methodology.

Method. Method is a logical procedure of a science implemented in order to clarify the demonstration and theorisation. It is a group of organised intellectual rules and operations that validate the different stages of scientific research in order to corroborate the hypotheses developed within the framework of a research issue and research subject. In more concrete terms, method thus encompasses all the operations and strategies that a researcher implements to gather information, produce data, demonstrate, verify and establish interpretations.

Let us take two very general examples:

- The deductive method is grounded in general laws and moves towards specific laws;
- The inductive method proceeds in the opposite direction: using concrete cases as a basis, it is a case of constructing a hypothesis of more general scope.

These two different methods are not exclusive and can be combined in a system that goes to and fro between the case study and generalisation.

Approach is an intellectual process that does not involve any particular stage or path: it is a school of thought, a particular way of understanding perceived reality – approach in terms of networks for example, which differs from *Rational Actor Theory*: the former places social relationships between individuals at the heart of the reflection, whereas the latter focuses on individuals and their rational calculations.

Technique (the tool) identifies a specific means of attaining a partial result; techniques are developed in the service of the method in order to attain global results about the research subject – production of data or gathering of information through interviews, questionnaires, observations, and censuses. We can also talk about modes of data production.

It is important to differentiate between method and methodological tools (or modes of data production). Method is the way of proceeding in order to attain objectives and seek answers to questions; tools are the techniques used and combined to implement the method – open, semi-open and closed inquiry grids are only tools in the service of method.

Methodology is the study of the proper use of methods and techniques: the reflexive dimension and necessary objectivity of the researcher in the spirit of critical thinking and adjustments.

*Development of the General Research Issue*

The research issue is composed of the research subject, the general context of which it is part, and the principal questions asked and hypotheses made. It answers a dual questioning: what we know about the subject and what we do not. These questions are indispensable to the construction of the general research issue:

- "What we know"
  This entails presenting the general context in which the research project is placed:
  • The cultural, economic, political and social environment related to the subject of study;
  • The national and international scientific context in which the research subject is placed;
  • The theoretical context: the available literature, meetings with specialists, inquiries that have already been carried out, theories already elaborated, etc.

On this basis, it is always useful to clarify "what we know": prepare a draft, organise the data found in the literature by theme and sub-theme, establish a plan of the known elements (which will help to identify the missing elements).

- "What we do not know"
  This covers all the questions that are not satisfactorily answered in the literature (scientific, "grey areas") or in previous inquiries and field studies.

This perspective ultimately allows us to demonstrate the relevance and legitimacy of the identified research subject. To achieve this, different arguments may be advanced: the research theme is innovative because it has not yet been addressed from the proposed angle; the subject has already

been addressed but in an unsatisfactory manner; previous studies are outdated and the evolution of the current context requires new research work on the subject; access is available to previously unknown sources, for example certain archival holdings, etc.

The formulation of the scientific and theoretical context must work towards identifying the theoretical frameworks, the concepts or existing scientific currents of which you are going to use for your inquiry (even if this means abandoning them according to your discoveries in the field). However innovative it may be, a scientific approach is in part the product of earlier research and progress that constitutes the foundation upon which lies a thesis project for example. It is therefore essential to proceed with a bibliographical inventory of the specialised literature before launching yourself into the actual research work itself.

The aim of this indispensable preliminary stage is to develop a cumulative approach, that is to say build an analysis from existing scientific work and literature. Establishing a bibliographical inventory creates an ethical scientific posture – a barrier against an eventual questioning of the originality of the results obtained – and raises the method, which is based upon a foundation of knowledge and scientific achievements, to the rank of premises that will no longer have to be demonstrated. This also means positioning your study and method in relation to existing scientific thinking and approaches.

Finally, the formulation of the general research issue is a synthesis of the previously examined dual questioning. It is accompanied by hypotheses that take the form of general questions, which are raised, empirically, during the first field phase in order to test their relevance.

### Box 17 Formulation of a Research Issue

- *The general theme and context (social, political, economic, cultural, etc.) in which the subject is placed;*
- *The general questioning: questioning about a given subject in a specific context;*
- *What led you to deal with this subject?;*
- *Temporal and spatial framework;*
- *Other research linked to the subject, theories and concepts in relation to the theme. Every theory is based upon a coherent assembly of concepts specific to the domain;*
- *The question. It involves putting the problem in concrete terms in the form of a clear and precise question. A research problem may lead to a multitude of research questions; well-constructed research does not directly address only one question at a time;*
- *The hypotheses – the presumed answers to the questions raised;*
- *The method. In the formulation of the research issue, it is important to indicate the operations involved in the research and test hypotheses.*

*Sources: Authors' construction; Tremblay and Perrier (2006).*

*Construction Process of the Research Object*

The object – or the subject – is the concrete aspect that will be studied, assessed and on which the survey will focus and provide information to answer the initial questioning – which implies practices, situations, places, people, etc.

The research subject answers the general question "what are we looking for?" (Giordano and Jolibert, 2012): "*unlike the research theme that defines a general field of study (women, media, sport, money in sport, etc.), the research subject for its part is a more precise definition of the envisaged project, with a constructed research issue that questions how the theme should be addressed.*" – *cf.* http://staps.univ-lille2.fr/. The fundamental principle is that the researcher's point of view creates the subject and not the opposite: the research subject is an intellectual construction that tends towards a synthesis of the scientific and cultural context, the research issue, the hypotheses, the available resources, etc.

The first precision is to measure the feasibility and relevance of the subject according to the empirical reality. This is done by the conducting of a pre-field phase.

The objective is to assess the relevance of the research subject in relation to reality. This entails adopting an open attitude in order not to be restrained, from the outset of the research cycle, in an ideological and methodological straitjacket. At the end of this phase, it is necessary to be able to question the initial hypotheses, and even the research subject.

The pre-field phase shows that certain questions and hypotheses were not relevant or useful for understanding the research subject and new questions then emerge. There are no precise rules for assessing the relevance of such or such a question, this depends upon the researcher's "know-how" and the rigour with which the research issue was elaborated and the pre-survey phase carried out. The scientific relevance of the research subject is however linked to certain requirements of socio-anthropological practice:

- The contextualisation of social groups and practices: placing social facts and social behaviour in their right place in the period and social framework where they are observed and studied. The method thus consists in interpreting individual practices by relating them to their social and historical conditions of possibility and sequence;
- The construction stage of the subject should refer to the identification and taking into account of the categories of thought. It is necessary to avoid any ethno-centrist ideology by bearing in mind that the thought categories of the studied group (*emic*) are potentially different from ours (*etic*).

This also involves assessing the concrete feasibility of the study. This assessment is dependent on the major constraints that affect the research process, for example available time, financial means, number of surveyors, access conditions to the field and sources. Let us examine these last two points.

Defining the subject involves establishing a prospective inventory of available sources. All research and work of scientific development is based upon the exploitation of raw materials, primary and secondary data, and written and oral sources. By their very nature, the sources and fields that may be used are extremely varied according to the disciplinary field in general and the research subject in particular. Two types of source may be differentiated:

– For pre-existing sources (generally written or fixed sources – films, photographs, audio-visual recordings), we should ask questions about their availability, accessibility and volume. For example, the bank of village archives produced during the colonial period in Việt Nam is so vast that it would be unrealistic to embark upon an exhaustive processing of it. The selection of a fraction of the archives is made on the basis of geographical, chronological and thematic criteria, etc.;
– For original sources – created by the researcher through interviews, observations, systematic surveys, the compilation of dispersed data series, photographs, cartography, etc. – it is necessary to raise questions about the conditions and possibilities of their production. This effective limit is fixed by our production capacity and area of freedom linked to the material – institutional, political and social environment. For an anthropologist who is interested in the agrarian rites that precede rice transplanting, the capacity for direct observation will be limited by the number of annual rice harvests.

Time management is another fundamental point.

The chronogram consists in breaking down in time the different stages of the research cycle. This exercise is difficult because it is of a prospective nature and must include different factors:

- The imposed global time limit or that which the researcher devotes to the study;
- The frequency and duration of field trips;
- The succession of certain key events in the global research programme in which the study is included – notably conferences and seminars, teaching periods, etc.;
- The availability of the person in charge of the programme;
- Periods of low activity in universities and institutions;
- The researcher's personal and/or family constraints.

In short, both scientific relevance and the concrete feasibility of the study must allow us to frame the research subject in order to avoid vexatious discrepancies:

- Too vast a research subject that is difficult to estimate;
- A too partial or narrow research subject.

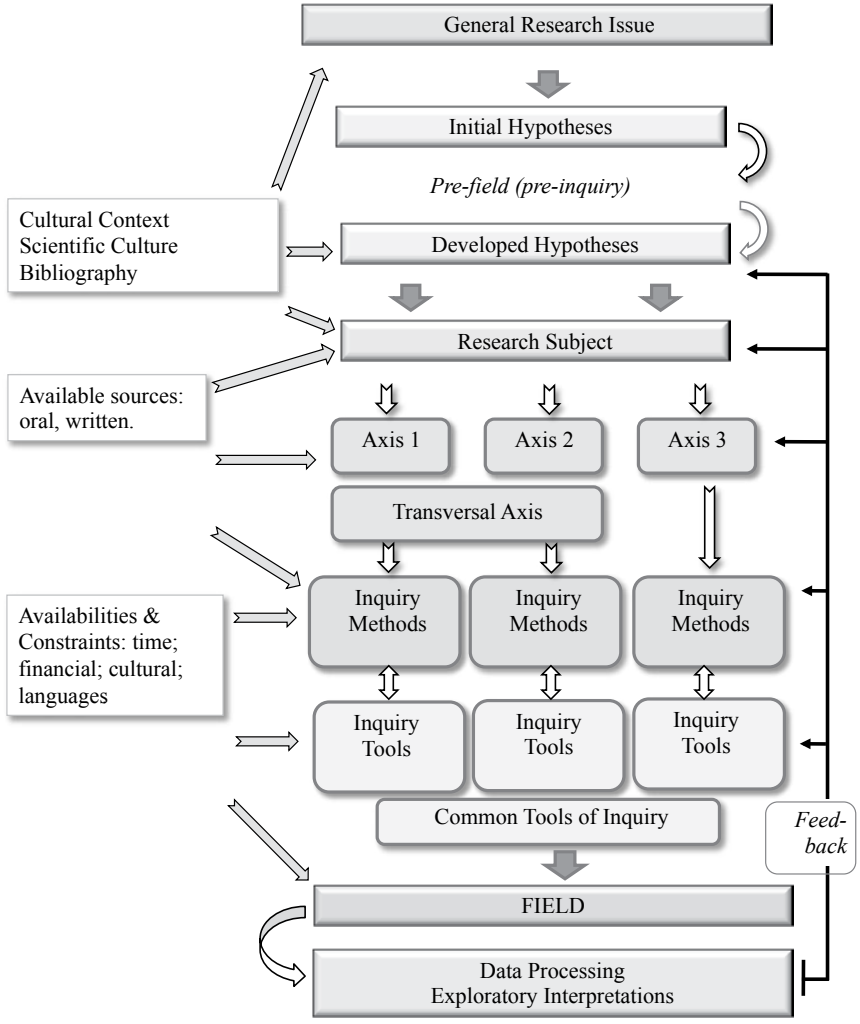
When defining the research axes and hypotheses, it is also important to pay attention to two major risks: the search for exhaustiveness, which is a mirage and renders the project impossible; the choice of disparate research axes without any real link between them: the interdependence of the axes and their logical sequence are the strong point of a research project.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, you should associate to each proposed research axis one or several hypotheses that your research work will confirm or disprove.

The metaphor "avenue of research" is quite fitting. We explore "an avenue" and throughout their progression the researchers are confronted by choices. In the final analysis, we may have to abandon one avenue (insurmountable obstacles, straying too far from the initial direction we wanted to take) and open a new one.

Finally, the research subject and its analyses develop throughout the study thanks to feedback or a reflexive loop, which consists in observing oneself thinking in order to step back and continually adopt a critical regard of one's hypotheses and interpretations. The major challenge for young researchers and students is to carry out this introspective task and thus accept to continually develop their research subject! In practice, the development of the subject demands going constantly to and fro between the theoretical field and a practical grasp of the problem. As P. Bourdieu (1972) said, we must reject the division and opposition theory/field such as it is often practised in today's research work: it is based upon a false perception of the relationship between the "theory" obtained by a compilation of textbook knowledge and the field approach conceived outside of any development of the subject. In concrete terms, the field inquiry phase includes a simultaneous task of processing and interpreting the gathered information, a task that already mobilises the conceptual and theoretical frameworks: "*the empirical and the interpretive continually overlap, intertwine and respond to each other*" (Olivier de Sardan, 2008). There is thus a permanent effort to be made at the very moment of data production of which we must be aware and regard critically in order to avoid interpretative bias (Olivier de Sardan, 1996). Subsequently, back in the "office" during the intermediate phases of data processing, the end of the survey work (transcripts) and gathered elements (data and interpretations) are cross tabulated and placed in relation to each other and then brought face to face with the theoretic and conceptual frameworks. It is here a question of a second level of analysis that allows us to put a greater distance between the field and ourselves. Through this process, where theories and field intertwine without getting confused, the research subject progresses without our having to await the final phase of post-field processing and analysis: thus, the relevance of the initial hypotheses, the survey and analysis grids are assessed and, if necessary, progressively redefined as our knowledge becomes greater. This is why we believe that "*the data production phase may thus be analysed as a continual restructuring of the research issue when in contact with this data, and as a permanent development of the interpretative framework as the empirical elements are gathered*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995).

## Diagram 36 The Research Issue in the Field




*Source: Culas and Tessier (2008).*

### *Choosing and "Creating" Our Method*

As we have already seen, method refers to the logical process of constructing the survey so as to answer the hypotheses developed within the framework of a clearly defined research subject and issue. It concerns just as much the methods employed to produce data as those used to process and analyse the data.

Whatever the case, there is no methodological recipe: there are no pre-established methods before research that can be applied "as such". It is thus necessary to develop and adapt our method according to the subject studied, the questions to which we seek answers and the type of data we need and which are accessible. Finally, we need to be able to justify the methods we are going to implement in terms of the subject and empirical realities. Nevertheless, even though each concrete method is unique in the way it is implemented, there do exist general methodological approaches. Six principal methods in social sciences may be thus defined:

- The above-examined deductive and inductive methods. These first two methods are not exclusive; they may be combined in a system that goes to and fro between the case study and generalisation;
- The analytical method consists in breaking down the subject by going from what is most complicated to the most simple. The most evocative image is that of the chemist who takes an object and breaks it down into molecules and then atoms and particles in order to arrive at the object's very essence;
- The chemical method is generally used in sociology and anthropology. It consists in directly and continually observing the subject studied as it evolves and transforms itself. It is always a question of direct observation, there is no interface or intermediary, the researcher is generally directly confronted by the subject studied. This method is founded on the combined use of the principles of the inductive and deductive method;
- The experimental method is rarely used in sociology-anthropology because it is difficult to place populations in a "laboratory" situation. This method is used in psychiatry and psychology;
- The statistical method that is more largely used in quantitative sociology and demography.

These methodological approaches may be understood and implemented in a wide range of ways, among which we find field surveys and the qualitative method, which "*(…) refers to a research method that is interested in the sense and observation of a social phenomenon in the natural milieu. They process data that are difficult to quantify. They do not reject numbers and statistics but do not simply give them prominence*" (Beaud and Weber, 2010).

For our workshop, we are going to carry out an in situ inquiry that focuses on a particular subject: the production and sale of market produce in two places, which are part of a wider phenomenon – the market gardening sector in Đà Lạt, through a comparison of the two production systems.

Let us now address the subject of data production: sources and field.

"*The field inquiry, or ethnographical inquiry, or socio-anthropological inquiry, is very broadly based upon the combination of four important forms of data production: participatory observation (the prolonged presence of the surveyor in the living environment of the interviewees), interview (discursive interaction that is deliberately triggered by the researcher), data gathering processes (use of constructed systems for systematic investigation), and the collection of written sources.*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995).

**Box 18 Field Inquiries and the Qualitative Method: Objectives, Interests and Principles**

*Objectives:*
- *Produce precise data about the concrete practices of a population, understand a phenomenon from its effective manifestation, take note of actions, relationships and interactions in particular and real situations;*
- *Gain a detailed understanding of attitudes, behaviour, motivations, logics and exchanges between players in a particular context;*
- *Convey the point of view of the interviewees.*

*Interests:*
- *Refine the analysis of the subject studied;*
- *Bring to the forefront the mechanisms at work and the diversities of all that is possible;*
- *Propose action that is adapted to this reality because it is based on it.*

*Principles:*
- *Immerse oneself in the reality;*
- *Long presence in the field;*
- *Establish a close relationship with certain interviewees and gaining their confidence;*
- *Share moments in the life of the interviewees;*
- *Participate in the interviewees' activities.*

*Source: Author's construction.*

– Participative observation

"*By spending a prolonged period in the field (and often by learning the language), the anthropologist "brushes against" the reality that he/she wishes to study (…). We can break this basic situation down into two types of distinct situation: those that belong to the field of observation (the researcher is witness) and those that belong to the field of interaction (the researcher is a co-player). Ordinary situations combine different doses of the two components.*"

The researcher proceeds by "*taking notes in the field or* a posteriori*, and attempts to organise data conservation in the form of written descriptions or recordings (audio, visual) – the production of a basic corpus that can be dealt with later or indeed partly recycled as descriptions in the final text. These corpuses are not like those of an archive historian, they are in the form of field notes where the anthropologist systematically catalogues everything he/she sees and hears.*"

"*Far from being a simple witness, he/she is permanently immersed in verbal and non-verbal social relationships: conversations, chat, games, requests, etc. The anthropologist progresses in the register of everyday conversation, 'he adopts the forms of ordinary dialogue', he meets local players in everyday situations, in the world of their 'natural attitude'. However, many of the words and acts in the register of everyday conversation of which the anthropologist plays an active part concern his/her*

*professional curiosity, that is to say that they directly or indirectly concern the research theme." (…) "The researcher strives (…) to transform these relevant interactions into data, (…) organise their trace, description (…)."*

- The interviews

  "*The production of data based upon the indigenous discourse that the researcher has solicited is a central element of any field research. Participative observation does not allow us to access a lot of information: to do this it is necessary to resort to the knowledge and memories of local players. Furthermore, the representations of local players are an indispensable element of any understanding of the social situation. Giving an account of the player's 'point of view' is in some way the anthropologist's greatest ambition. The interview remains the favoured means, and often the most economical, of producing discursive data that gives us access to emic, native, indigenous and local representations. The interview notes and transcripts make up an essential part of corpus data.*"

*Emmanuel Pannier presents certain interview techniques: consulting and making an account; the interview as interaction; the interview as conversation; the recursiveness of the interview; the interview and length of time.*

Two types of question must be clearly distinguished. These questions demonstrate the transformation of a researcher's questions – from "office questions", to those actually asked in the field – "field questions"; "*(…) the questions asked by the researcher are specific to his/her research issue, to his/her subject and discourse. They are only relevant in his/her universe of meaning. They do not spontaneously make sense for the interviewee. It is thus necessary to transform them into questions that make sense for the latter. It is here that the informal 'know how' that has been acquired through participative observation (just like through the difficulties and misunderstandings of the first interviews) is ploughed back, often unconsciously, in the ability to converse in the very field of the interviewee by using his/her codes*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995).

The challenge is therefore to translate and reformulate the themes, subjects and questioning that have been defined by the researcher, that is to say outside the reference universe of the interviewees, into questions adapted to the interviewees, to their experiences and universe of meaning. This operation requires a minimum knowledge of the field.

- Inquiry processes

  "*Within the framework of either observation or guided interviews, it is sometimes necessary to use special data production operations referred to as 'data gathering processes': the systematic production of a finite number of intensive data – inventories, nomenclatures, map plans, genealogies, etc.*"

  The data gathering processes provide quantified data, they thus introduce a "quantitative" dimension; intensive quantitative data about small groups.

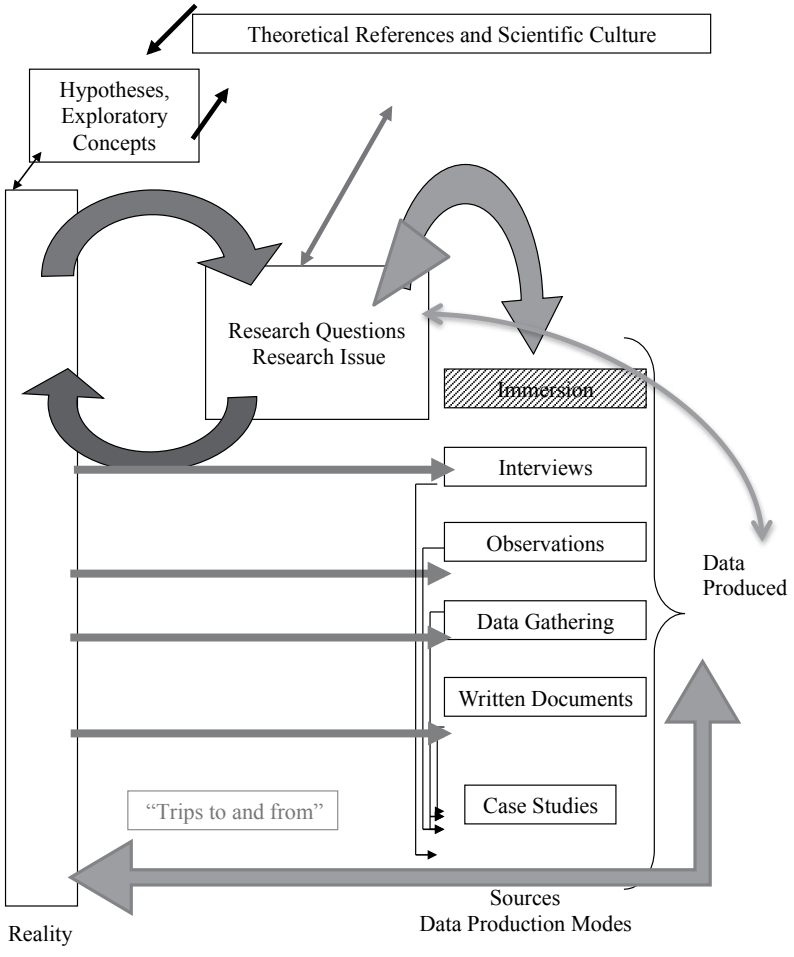
  "*The data gathering processes are observation or measuring systems that anthropologists construct in their field by calibrating them to their (constantly evolving) research issue, their (continually renewed) questioning, and their (relatively cumulative) field knowledge.*"

- Written sources

  "*Although they are more classical, and are not specific to the field inquiry, written sources must not be (…) minimised*": *scientific literature, "grey literature" (reports, assessments, master's studies, etc.) press reports, archives, local written productions (pupils' school books, letters, accounting books, etc.), etc.*

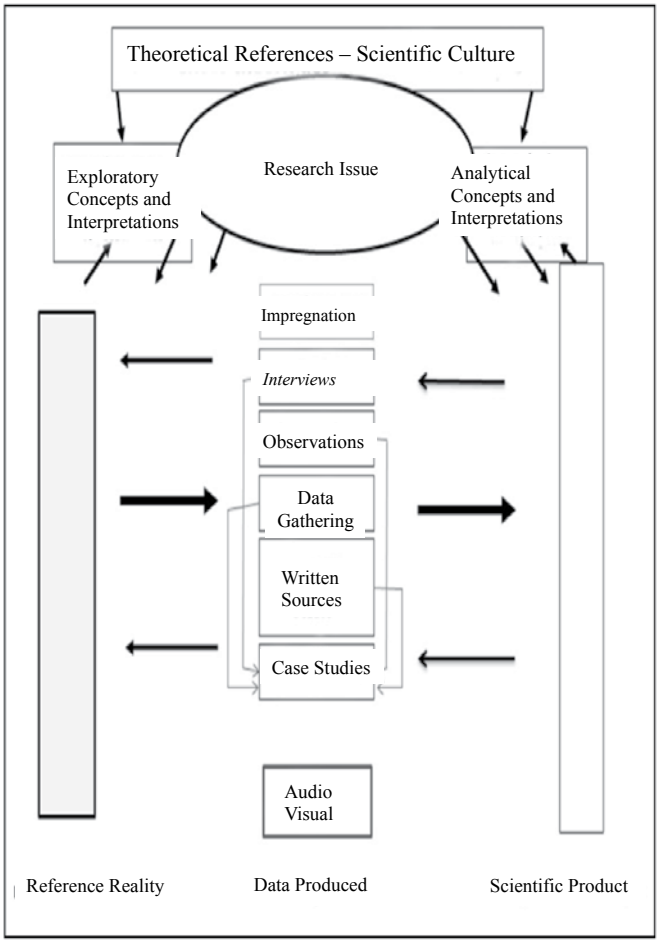
*Certain data are gathered before the field inquiry and the development of exploratory hypotheses and specific questioning; others are indissolubly connected to the field inquiry – the players' written productions, local archives, local press reports, etc. – or indeed the subject of autonomous corpuses that are distinct from and complementary to those produced by the field inquiry – press reports, archives*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995).

**Diagram 37 Data Production**




*Source: Authors' construction.*

## Diagram 38 The Reality of the Scientific Product




*Source: Olivier de Sardan (2008).*

### *Data Processing and Analysis: Classification, Interpretation and Theorisation*

What are the concrete operations that must be applied to the collected data?

- Classifying the material, establishing an inventory of the different gathered material: data from observations, interviews, discussions, written sources and scientific texts;
- Shaping and study of each piece of material: going over each interview, as well as the notes and commentaries written in the field notebook, the observations of situations, practices and events, written sources. It is then necessary to transcribe in digital form all the important material – a simple file for each class of material;
- Organising, classifying and selecting information according to the themes

(Database): developing a thematic grid for data classification and inserting the data from each source; extracting information from each class of material and classifying it according to themes;
- Comparing and contrasting the material: comparing and contrasting of data.

The cross-tabulation of data (triangulation) is essential during field inquiries: it involves comparing and contrasting information from the same source (information about the same subject gathered from different interviews) or different sources (direct observations of practices, written sources, data from census operations, discourse). This ensures that we are being rigorous and is a means of producing reliable data to understand reality in all its diversity. Information from one person or one source is rarely sufficient to produce solid data; it must be compared with other sources and verified.

Example. Recurrent elements of the discourse concerning agricultural mutual support have a tendency to idealise the system; work exchange is described as being disinterested and generalised. However, direct observation of practices and the systematic recording of mutual support groups carried out during rice transplantation and harvest gives a more nuanced picture of the practice, which is not generalised and greatly pressurised, and allows us to obtain reliable data about the local social networks (close relatives and neighbours) in which it is rooted.

Following the same logic, iteration, the practice of visiting the field several times, is an efficient way of producing relevant data and formulating critical analysis. Going to and fro between the office and the field allows us to efficiently combine immersion and distancing and thus carry out "*(…) a continual restructuring of the research issue through contact [with data] and (…) a permanent reworking of the interpretative framework as empirical elements are gathered*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995).

### *A Methodological Process is a Non-Reproducible, Original Construction*

One of the essential challenges of successfully carrying out a field inquiry is to develop a relevant methodological process in order to produce solid data and answer the questions raised. This development is always an original production that is developed from an array of assumptions and hypotheses with regard to the realities and conditions of the field:
- All inquiries are specific: the risk of the exercise is to transform the precepts of the method into "cooking recipes"; in social sciences, there can be no methodological processes conceived as tools that are independent of the research issues that they serve and the empirical reality in which they are placed; the consequence of this is that a technical operation can never be identically duplicated.

Let us again remember the importance of differentiating between the "methodological process" and the "methodological tools" – the tools are there to serve the methodological process. In concrete terms, saying "*I am going to proceed with a field inquiry and do some interviews*" does not constitute the presentation of a methodological process, but the presentation of a general approach and the identification of a tool. The method will be the strategies adopted to carry out the inquiry and the specific ways in which the methodological tools have been used

(and combined) to produce data and interpretations.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that "*the choice of method does not only depend on technical considerations. Each method corresponds to an approach mode, to a representation of social reality and consequently to the choices the researcher makes to favour a certain type of conduct*" (Touraine, 1984); all these are elements we need to objectify so as not to get lost in our own scientific representations. The researcher always approaches social reality from the point of view of a particular standpoint, which must not be denied, and of which he/she must be aware:

- The illusion of neutrality: the choice of sources is never unequivocal.
  "*Quite clearly, the data, in the sense of the word that we understand here, are not 'pieces of reality' gathered and conserved as such by the researcher (positivist illusion), no more than they are the pure constructions of his/her mind or consciousness (subjectivist illusion). The data are the transformation into objectivised traces of 'pieces of reality' such as they have been selected and perceived by the researcher*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995).

The idea of the intrinsic objectivity of raw data is thus an illusion because they have been stamped by the inevitable bias that comes from the filter of the observer. It is indeed the observer who chooses the criteria of classification, by dividing into conceptual categories the reality that he/she wishes to describe and analyse. This is valid as much for the production as for the analysis of the data. The development of the questioning and hypotheses influences and guides the process of gathering information, any reasoning inevitably transforms the facts by encoding them and the choices concerning the use of such or such a group of data in the analysis do not exist outside the researcher and his/her conceptual framework.

More generally speaking, the subjectivity of the ethnologist, who seeks to give a scientific account of a cultural reality mostly from the personal impressions of what he/she has experienced in the reality studied, thus becomes part of the scientific method, within which the researcher acts as an "*instrument for collecting data*" (Aktouf, 1987). We must thus think of the inquiry, in spite of all the distance it is necessary to take, not as a process of objective observation, but as a relationship between particular social players and the observation, from a point of view that is always specific, of this relationship. This is why we believe that there is no such thing as objective anthropological formulation, but interaction between the researcher and the social players that has to be taken into account as an integral part of the inquiry, or even as one of the points that needs to be analysed in order to understand or at least represent social reality. Rather than deny this subjectivity, it seems to us more relevant to exploit it.

### 2.4.2. General Framework of Action in the Field

[Pierre-Yves Le Meur]

Developing action for the field implies making choices, firstly in terms of the questions that are raised. We also have to listen to what the field tells us, place ourselves in a situation of discovery. This is an open and practical notion. The aim is to explore the reality that we progressively discover.

When preparing the field, and during the inquiry, researchers can rely on a small number of exploratory concepts that can be used both for understanding and exploring social realties. These are notions of the social player, strategic group, social interaction, and mediation and intermediation. These exploratory tools are situated at the interface of the general theoretical framework and the techniques and methods of the field: it implies establishing a framework of operational reflection with a view to constructing an approach that is adjusted to the field, which is itself made up of the interaction between social reality and the research issue.

### *Social Players*

Even in extreme conditions, every person has the capacity to act: competences, knowledge, capacity to judge and reflect, values and norms. Every person has competences and capacities that allow him/her to reflect on personal experiences and evolve, an idea that is summed up in the notion of reflexivity.

A field inquiry aims to catalogue the points of view of the different social players and their logics of action, which are both anchored in representations of the world ("representational" logics) and in their objectives and strategies ("strategic" logics). We must therefore listen to the points of view and reasons given, and take seriously, narratives, knowledge, judgements and social players' expectations.

However, it is also necessary to compare these with other discourses, and especially confront discourse and practices, which is difficult to do in the short time of this workshop.

### *Strategic Groups*

"*Strategic groups appear (...) like social groups (...) empirical and of varying scale, which defend common interests, particularly through social and political action*" (Oliver de Sardan, 2003).

The notion of a strategic group is based upon a simple hypothesis: groups of players share common points of view in relation to a given issue (but they do not necessarily constitute organised communities that are aware of themselves). This is an exploratory hypothesis that is very different from an analytical framework that would be posed *a priori*, for example, in terms of social class. This exploratory hypothesis will have to be refined as the field inquiry progresses. In order to do this, we will take an interest in the players' trajectories, their social origins, the forms of capital they have at hand (land, economic, physical, political, social, etc.), in order to identify common characteristics shared by the players and/or the internal differences within a "strategic group". We will then see if any organisational modes (associations or diverse groupings, etc.) appear that give a specific organisational and institutional form to a strategic group.

In the framework of our inquiry into peri-urban market gardening, we can *a priori* identify two strategic groups: capitalist farms with salaried workers and rural family farm operations (in another context of inquiry – in terms of the place and/or question – we might have started out with strategic groups, Kinh migrants *versus* autochthonous populations for example).

Two groups of interviewers will be trained on this basis: the first group will work on the intensive market gardening production practised in the six big "production farms", the second group will concentrate on family agriculture. The situation of our field is also characterised by the existence of an autochthonous population from the Highlands and a growing inflow of Kinh migrants from the lowlands. We shall see during the inquiry in what way this distinction between natives and newcomers interacts with the capitalist/family operation configuration.

We shall seek to characterise the differences between the members of each of the two groups, according to the criteria of operation size (land and workforce), specialisation, degree of commercialisation and multi-activity (in relation to the possible functions of the producer, collector, trader, input supplier, creditor, etc.). We shall also have to study the internal organisation of the operation (family/salary workers) and thus the roles, responsibilities and socio-economic differences/inequalities between players (boss/salaried worker, gender, generation, etc.).

As well as the farmers, we shall also have to take into account other categories of player – traders, various intermediaries, authorities at different levels, technical services, etc. – according to what the respondees tell us. We shall also have to remember the peri-urban aspect of the workshop's title and carry out our inquiry among urban planners, real estate agents, etc.

For the different possible strategic groups – farmers' intermediaries, traders – we shall also have to verify whether or not certain players in the chain combine several activities and/or functions, and wear "several hats". Does remuneration come from the family or outside sources? Who is really paid? Who contributes to the enterprise's functioning and is paid by the enterprise according to their needs?

*Social Interaction*

Social interactions are the fabric of everyday life. They may be spoken about by the players who are interviewed or observed (meeting, demonstration, transaction, etc.). Clearly, it is always extremely rich to observe the "natural" interactions of daily life – within the family, at work, in social places, etc., but our inquiry time here is too limited.

We shall concentrate on a specific group of interactions that allow us to see moments of negotiation, alliance, transaction, conflict, sanction (infringement of a regulation), arbitration, etc. The aim is to understand the position of the players in relation to each other in the framework of interaction.

Conflict analysis presents a specific interest as it is present everywhere (but in different forms) and may serve as an "entry gate", or "reveal" divisions or different positions (and also different treatments according to the situations, contexts, players, etc.).

Special attention will be paid to the specific social interactions that make up commercial relations: purchase/sale of produce, work-force (salaried staff or different types of provision of labour: land for labour), credit, etc. The distinction between commercial and monetary transactions will be explored

as well as the question of non-market relationships within the framework of an agricultural economy that is widely merchandised. We shall have to take a look at the links between agriculture and land – what modes of action concerning land lie behind farming strategies? And agriculture and credit – how do the players negotiate credit access?

As well as particular or repeated social actions, we shall also take a look at social networks as chains of relationships: How are these social networks, these chains of interaction organised? What circulates (information, money, knowledge, produce, etc.) in these networks? The question concerning the extension of these networks and their territoriality is also raised (thus raising questions about networks of "local" neighbouring farmers or larger ranging networks). From a commercial point of view, who is involved, who are the key players in the transactions?

In this exercise we shall have to decide how far the commercial sphere extends – does the local network only involve a circle of neighbours?

*Mediation*

We must bear in mind that the fields of action do not necessarily correspond to the localisation of the inquiry and that the interactions between the players sometimes take on an indirect form, when they go through the mediation of a third party. It is also the case when we observe forms of high discontinuity (normative, social, institutional, etc.) between two "worlds": between the state and local society, between the development programme and the community, etc. Certain social players have developed specific competences that they use to act at the interface of these two separate worlds, as well as with players with specific functions, for example between buyer and seller in a commercial relationship (*cf.* the classic examples of the commercial intermediary and the real estate broker). In the case of commercial exchanges, intermediation is a specific relationship that involves three players: the buyer, the seller and the intermediary. We must therefore identify: the players present (sociological profile, differences in resources, etc.), the context of the transaction (more or less formal, more or less hierarchical or unequal), the intermediaries, about whom several questions must be asked:

- What are their functions?
- What type of player fulfils these intermediary roles?
- What are their trajectories?
- What are their competences?
- What capital (social, economic, political, linguistic, etc.) do they have at hand?
- How are they remunerated?

Intermediaries are generally characterised by the fact that they have a monopoly on information that they may seek to block or disseminate according to their own interests. The information that an intermediary may monopolise/disseminate could concern legal rules and norms related to a given sector, such as the decrees that the administration does not succeed in disseminating to their presumed recipients. Intermediaries may also combine the function of mediation with other functions, providing for example interaction between the buyer and the seller and also credit access to the buyer; they may also be the direct provider of this credit.

Intermediaries often operate in a "grey zone", at the edge of formal institutions and are often part of the so-called informal economy, or they may well provide the link between the formal and informal dimensions of the economy and its institutional environment.

*Trương Hoàng Trương gives a presentation of the socio-economic environment of the region using a synthesis of the reading texts transmitted to the workshop (cf. reading texts given at the end of this chapter and available at the site www.tamdaoconf.com). The workshop separates into three distinct groups according to the two inquiry sites: intensive market garden production at Liên Nghĩa; two groups sent to the village of Quảng Hiệp to identify the living zones separated by the main road.*

## Days 2, 3 and 4

*The workshop moves to the Đức Trọng in order to carry out inquiries on the selected sites according to the three favoured axes:*
*- The group monitored by Pierre-Yves Le Meur examines family ties in the migrant families – How and by using which networks did these families come to settle in the province?; aspects of urbanisation; market garden crops (Liên Nghĩa commune);*
*- The trainees accompanied by Trương Hoang Trương and Emmanuel Pannier concentrate on agricultural and livestock production activities and farming environmental issues (networks and the distribution modes associated with them; quality control). (Quảng Hiệp village);*
*- The trainees under the supervision of Olivier Tessier work on the network of players: current producers; ties between the migrants and their region of origin (Quảng Hiệp village).*
*Interviews are carried out with the people's committees of Liên Nghĩa and Quảng Hiệp (president and vice-president, administrative services), with rural family farms, salaried workers employed on the farms and the cooperatives to which they are attached.*
*Thanks to the monitoring of the information collected, readjustments and the first elements of synthesis emerge during the evening meetings.*

## Day 5, Monday 28th July

*The workshop gathers on the campus of the University of Đà Lạt. This fifth day of training is devoted to a summarised consideration of the key issues from the field inquiry.*
*Pierre-Yves Le Meur reminds us of the importance of the notion of network, as a part of the system of production and commercialisation of the market gardening activity, and the central relationship between producers and clients, which is based upon intermediaries. He also emphasises the theme of risk, whether it be linked to price fluctuations or bad weather, and the necessity of identifying the way in which players operate between risk and the norm.*
*Olivier Tessier then brings to the attention of the workshop the following points in order to prepare the "field" summary that will be presented the next day.*
*- Characterisation of the producers.*
*A migrant population from the lowlands where rice farming dominates.*

*In the highlands, primacy of coffee until the end of the 1980s then the development of market gardening, an essential factor of migration to the region.*
*The migrants are from the provinces of Central Việt Nam but especially the north of the country: Hà Nội, the Red River Delta, middle and upper regions. The migrations are recent, the populations are young.*
*The men settle here because of land resources (bachelors, military).*
*The new settlers retain links with their native village.*
*- Situation since 2000.*
*Access to land is through purchase (but the shortage of land is a big constraint: high cost, lack of plots) or by rent.*
*Water quality is a limiting factor.*
*The farming of land is done above all through the hiring of a workforce.*
*- The collectors*
*First stage collectors: direct buying from the producer, with their own money or for another producer.*
*Second stage collectors: buying from first stage collectors.*
*Three different types of initiatives: advances, choice of treatments, freedom to choose type of crop. The collectors are present from the production to market stages – vertical integration.*
*- Circulation of information*
*The information is in the hands of the intermediaries, it circulates – or not – according to the context, the current interests. The farmers do not systematically apply the recommendations given by the local authorities and suppliers.*
*Production sale prices must be regulated in order to avoid bad practices.*

*Based on the results of the confrontations and exchanges between the trainees, a first plan for the presentation of the results is proposed:*
*- The historical and geographical context of the region;*
*- The family-based system of production and the collectors;*
*- The network and associated farms;*
*- The question of norms.*
*The objective is to begin a process of collective analysis for the final presentation of results.*

## *Reading texts* (www.tamdaoconf.com)

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