

**Centro Internazionale di studi  
sul Religioso Contemporaneo  
International Center for Studies on Contemporary Religious**

***XV International Summer School on Religions in Europe***  
**San Gimignano 27-31 Agosto 2008**

***La natura e l'anima del mondo. Le frontiere della globalizzazione***

***Methodology in Sociology of Religion***

Presentation at Sangimignano Summer School 2008

By **Ole Riis**, Professor at University of Agder, Norway.

**Abstract**

Sociology of religion uses methods developed for empirical studies in other fields of social science. Rather than following textbooks in a fundamentalist manner, or following the path of ancestors in a traditionalist manner, we must consider: Which methods can serve as a backing for an empirical warrant which can sustain a theoretical conclusion about religion in society.

Methodological textbooks are often based on simplified philosophical premises, and on providing standard solutions to simple standard problems. The divide between quantitative and qualitative methods is based on such a simplification, and it is unfruitful. Standard quantitative methods often lack a hermeneutical foundation while standard qualitative methods often lack transferability. We ought to consider which combination of methods can give the best support for the argument of the study. This consideration can be clarified by an appropriate research design which combines methods in order to provide cross-control, comparability, and complementary information about different aspects of the issue. Causal studies especially calls for a combination of methods, which can include and combine aims and motives, material conditions, mechanisms for change and latent forces of dynamics. To cover all the aspects of causality involves a combination of methods.

When the theme is religion, some special methodological questions are raised. One of these refer to the request for a comprehensive understanding of the subject on the one hand and an analytical distance on the other. Analyzing religious emotions raise special questions, because these are often not expressed in a logical language but by illustrations and metaphors. Again, a methodological triangulation is a possibility, studying how human agents relate to symbols as individuals, how a community proclaims its emotional regime and agents participate in it, how a community consecrates symbols and find inspiration by symbolic references.

**Ole Riis.** Curriculum vitae Studies for the former research degree in sociology at University of Copenhagen, completed with defending a thesis on methodological problems in political sociology, 1975. Lecturer in sociology and methodology of the social sciences at several university institutions and at an open college (højskole). Consultant on public planning at Moller & Gronborg, and partner in prize-winning teams of planners and architects. Associate professor in sociology of religion at University of Aarhus 1985-1999. Since 1999 associate professor sociological methods, Univerisity of Aalborg. Member of the council of the Department of Social Research. Visiting scholar at London School of Economic, and guest lecturer at several universities in Europe. Participant in several international studies, i.e. a study group on slum cities in developing countries, the European Values Survey, the European study on Religious And Moral Pluralism.