



# **Seminario sulle metodologie della ricerca**

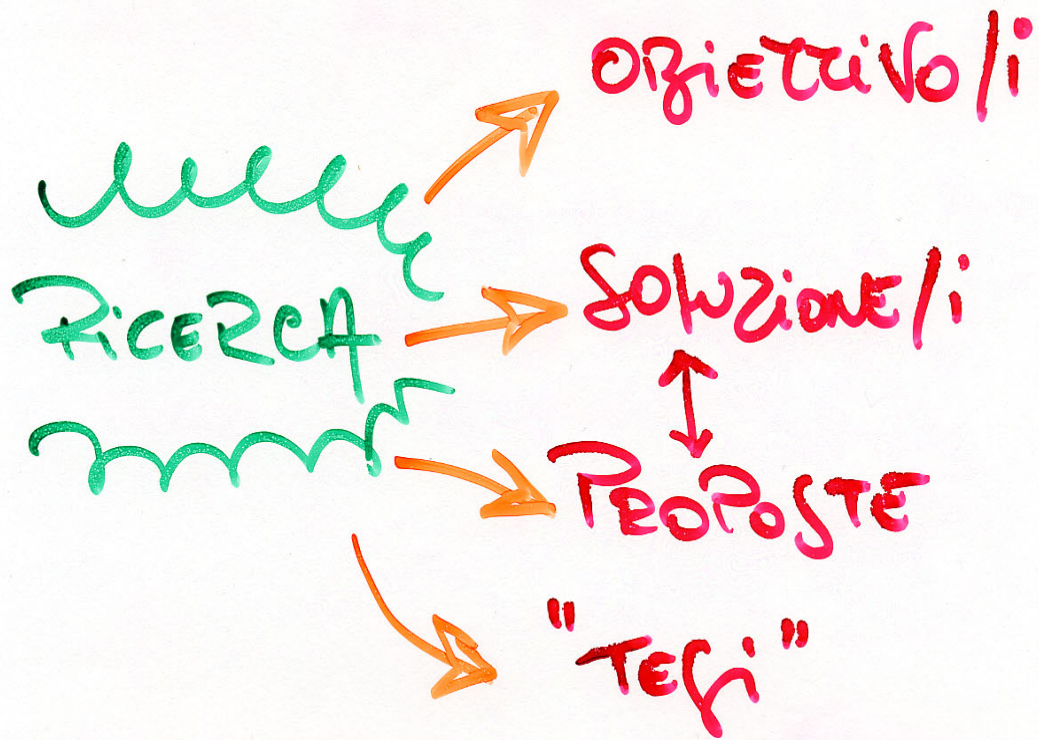
**(Parte prima)**

**Prof. Arch. Francesco Lo Piccolo**

**Dottorato di Ricerca in Pianificazione Urbana e Territoriale**

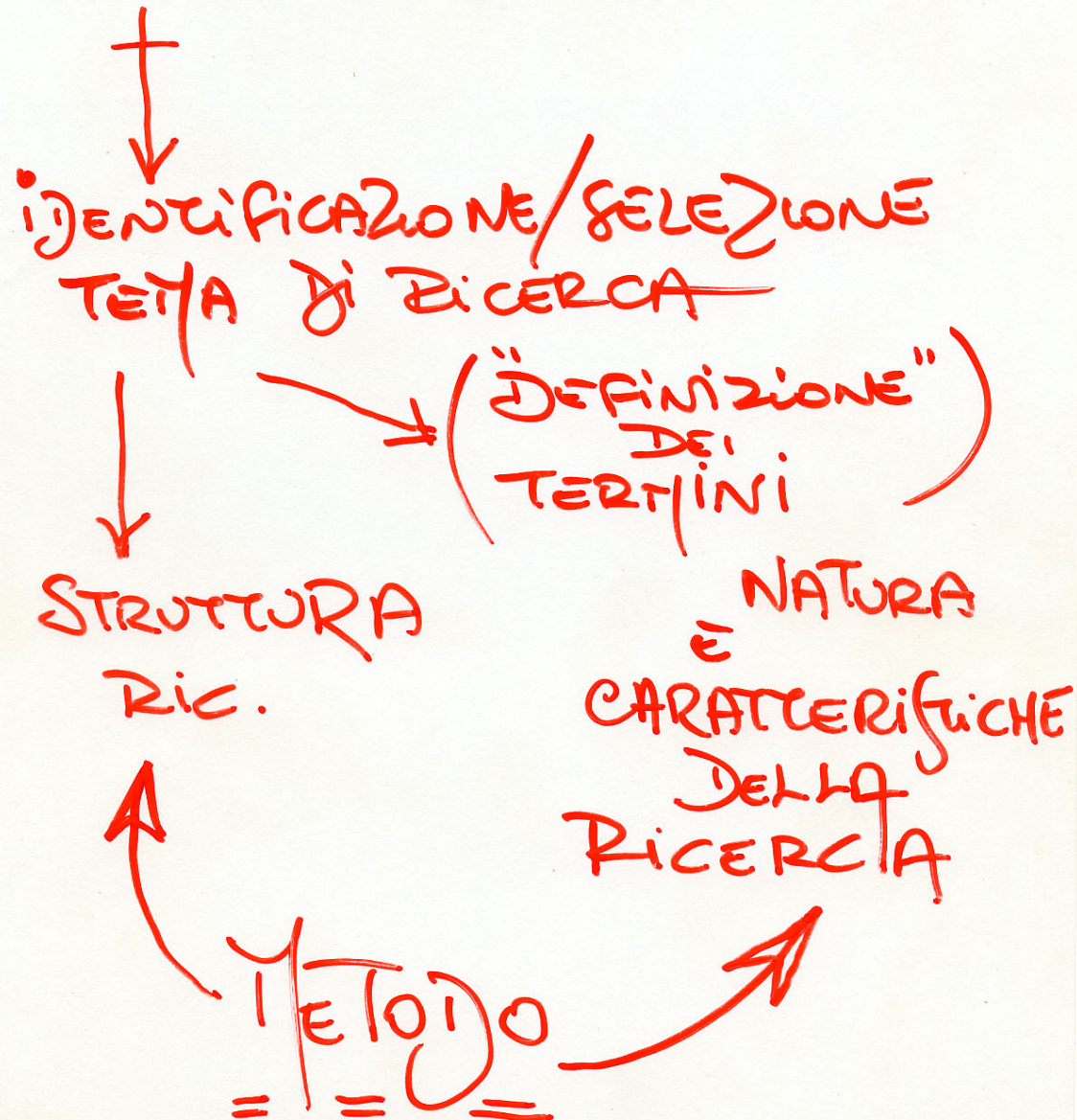
**Dipartimento Città e Territorio**

**16 Febbraio 2006**



ESPERIENZA  
DIRETTA  $\leftrightarrow$  INDIRETTA

# COS'È UNA RICERCA?



\* ASSEZIONI  
ASSIOMATICHE  
E/O APPLICATIVE

\* TRATTAMENTI

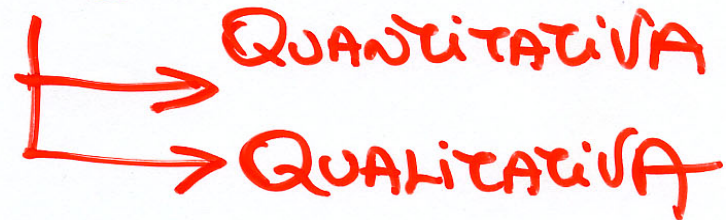
\* SALTI LOGICI

\* FALSIFICAZIONI

\* USO STRUMENTALE

- NATURA/OBIECTIVI

- CARATTERISTICHE



- RUOLO DELLA  
TEORIA

- RUOLO DELLA  
LETTERATURA

- RUOLO DEI  
DATI E DEI FENOMENI

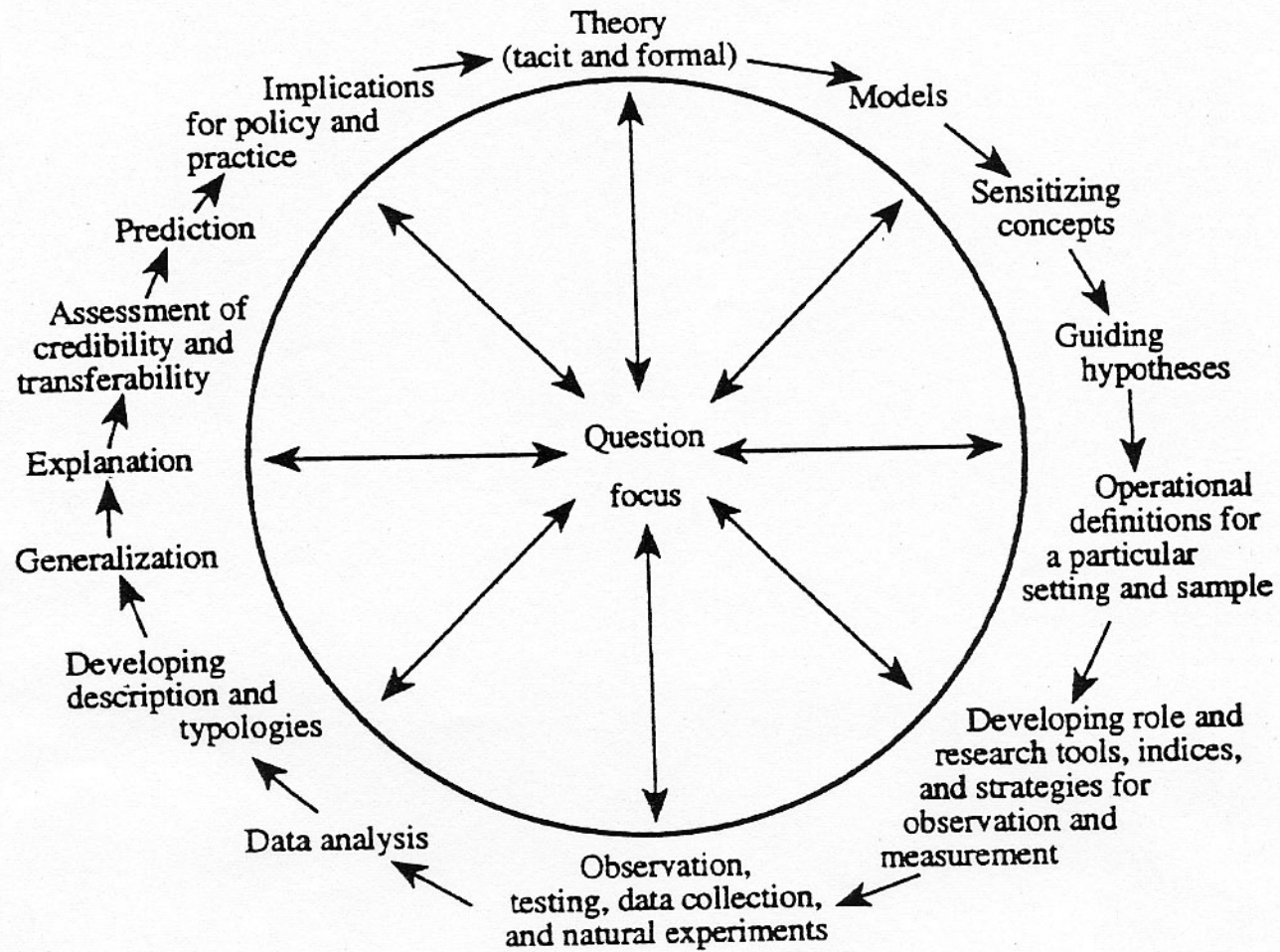


Figure 2.1. A Model of the Research Cycle

## "RICERCABILITA' DI UN TEMA DI RICERCA"

Next consider whether this topic is researchable. One needs criteria for making this decision. Below are questions often asked by individuals as they plan a study:

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Is the topic researchable, given time, resources, and availability of data?

Is there a personal interest in the topic in order to sustain attention?

Will the results from the study be of interest to others (e.g., in the state, region, nation)?

Is the topic likely to be publishable in a scholarly journal? (or attractive to a doctoral committee?)

Does the study (a) fill a void, (b) replicate, (c) extend, or (d) develop new ideas in the scholarly literature?

Will the project contribute to career goals?

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Before proceeding with a study, one needs to weigh these factors and to ask others for their reactions to a topic. Seek reactions from colleagues, noted authorities in the field, academic advisors, and faculty committee members and colleagues.

## THE DEFINITION OF TERMS

Researchers define terms so that readers can understand the context in which the words are being used or their unusual or restricted meaning (Castetter & Heisler, 1977). In Chapter 4 I discussed a need for a brief definition of key variables and concepts that would enable the reader to better understand terms in the study. Now I focus on a detailed, more elaborate definition that will provide specific guidance for use of terms.

### *Terms to Define*

- ▼ *Define terms that individuals outside the field of study may not understand.* Whether a term should be defined is a matter of judgment; but one might define a term if there is any question from the audience's perspective.
- ▼ *Define terms when they first appear so that a reader does not read ahead in the proposal operating with one set of definitions only to find out later that the author is using a different set.* As Wilkinson (1991) commented: "Scientists have sharply defined terms with which to think clearly about their research and to communicate their findings and ideas accurately" (p. 22). Defining terms also adds precision to a scientific study, as Firestone (1987) stated:

The words of everyday language are rich in multiple meanings. Like other symbols, their power comes from the combination of meaning in a specific setting. . . . Scientific language ostensibly strips this multiplicity of meaning from words in the interest of precision. This is the reason common terms are given "technical meanings" for scientific purposes. (p. 17)



With this need for precision, one finds terms stated early in the introduction to articles. For dissertations, terms typically are defined in a special section of the study. The rationale is that in a dissertation, students must be precise in how they use language and terms. The need to ground thoughts in authoritative definitions constitutes good science.

▼ *Define terms introduced in all sections of the research plan.*

Consider terms introduced in the following sections:

the title of the study

the problem statement

the purpose statement

the research questions, hypotheses, or objectives

the literature review

the theory base of the study

the method section

*Terms in Qualitative and Quantitative Studies*

Terms are defined in both **qualitative** and **quantitative** studies.

▼ **Qualitative studies**, because of the inductive, evolving methodological design, may include few terms defined at the beginning of the plan; terms may be defined as they emerge from the data collection. In a research plan a writer may advance "tentative" definitions because the precise definitions as used in a study will emerge from the conversations with informants in a study. Thus, for example, in an ethnographic study, themes (or perspectives or dimensions) emerge through the data analysis. An author may want to tell a reader that these themes will be defined one by one as they emerge in the study. This approach, then, to delay the definition of terms until they appear in the study, makes **a priori** definitions in qualitative studies difficult to include in research proposals. For this reason qualitative proposals often do not include separate sections on a "definition of terms," but the writer poses tentative qualitative definitions that will be used prior to entry into the