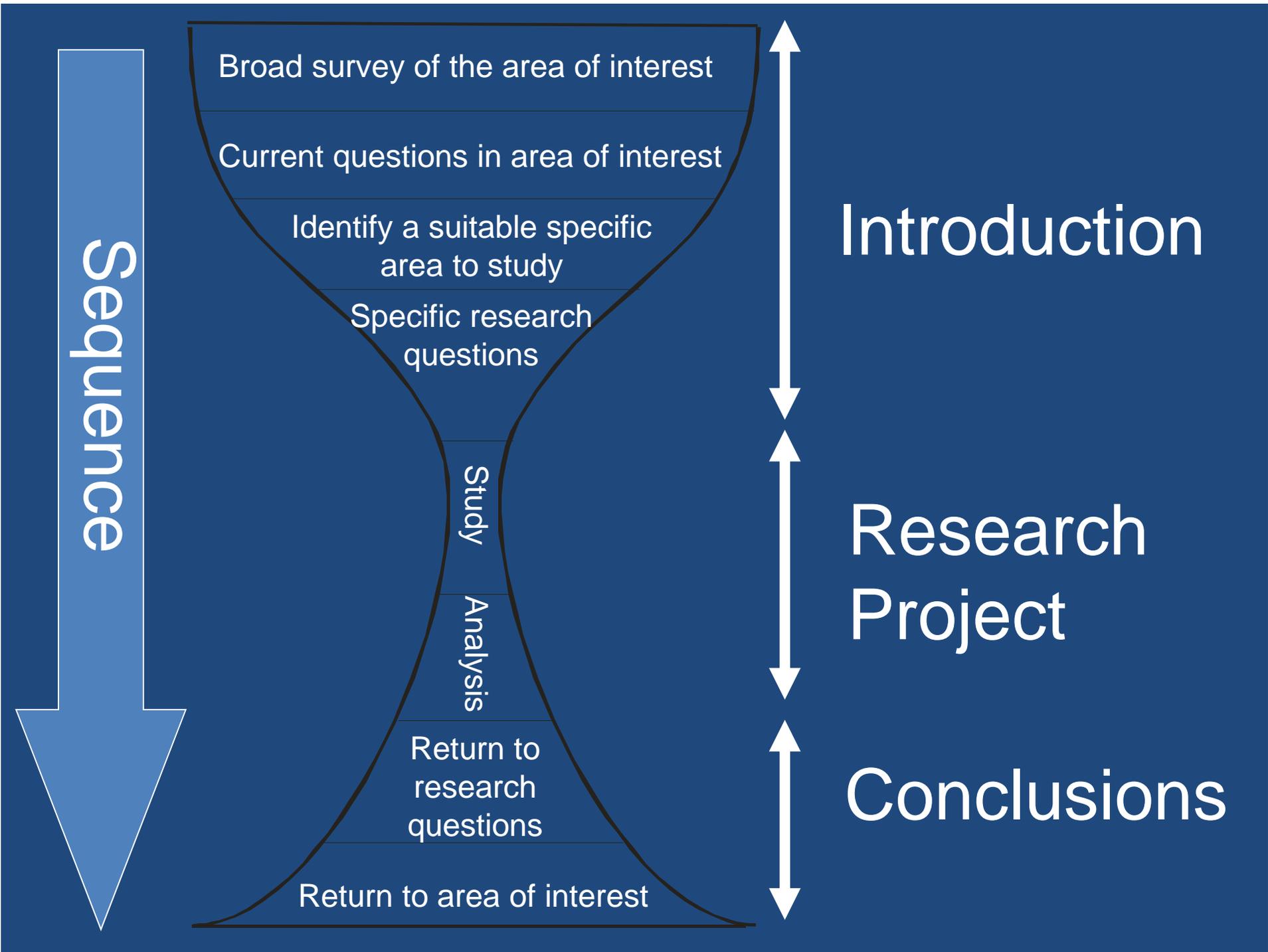


Research design: from a hazy idea to a dissertation

With thanks to Ben Page (UCL):

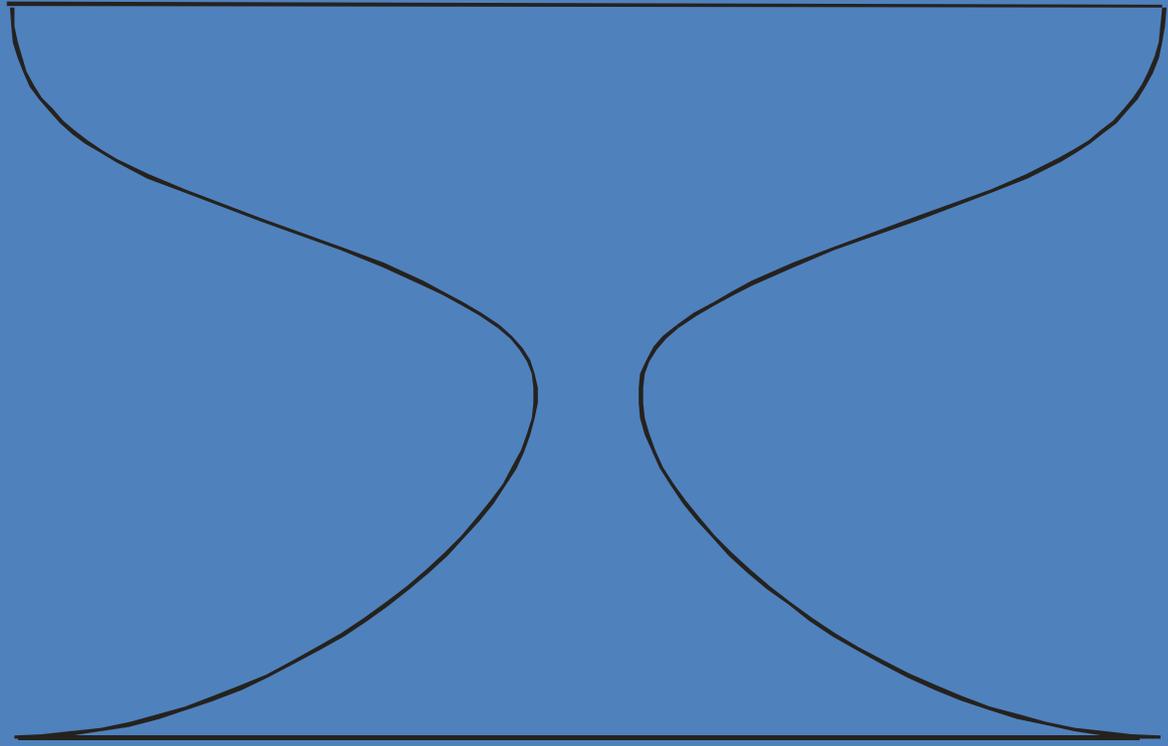
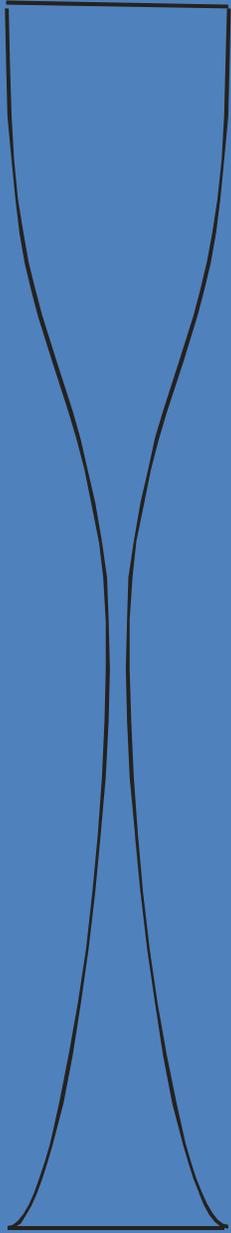
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ98zbUNqU8>



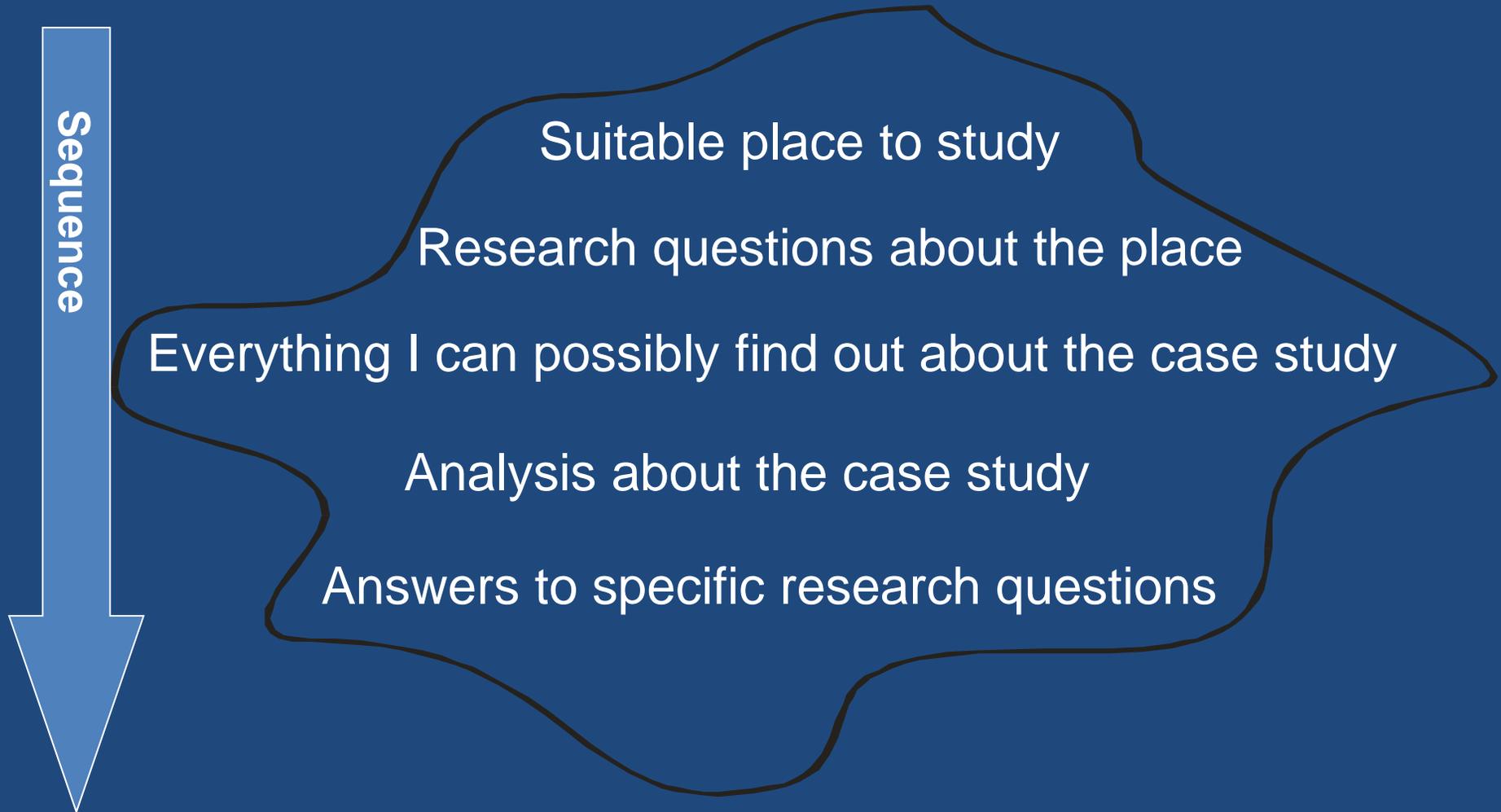
1. Urban governance - urban and political geography, gender
2. How is urban governance changing?
3. Attempts to make urban governance more participatory
4. How is the implementation of 'empowered' local governance in India affecting women's participation?
5. Study of urban governance in Trivandrum, Kerala
6. Analysis of data from a slum upgrade programme
7. Participatory governance legislation is altered in practice because women's 'official' role is undermined by existing informal leadership structures.
8. Kerala's reforms shows intelligent institutional design, but even under positive political conditions, there are difficulties in supporting/sustaining women's participation.
9. Governance studies needs an 'ethnographic turn'!

2 advantages:

- The link to the general interest forces the author to explain why the specific case matters to a wider audience
- The proportions of the 'wineglass' can be modified in relation to data collection.



The 'amorphous blob' model



The amorphous blob is bad because:

- It raises dull questions which tend to produce a descriptive, narrative account of events
- It invites other geographers to ask ‘so what?’ or ‘who cares?’ because it isn’t linked into broader questions
- If you get to Kerala to carry the study out and can’t get hold of any data because the Mayor doesn’t like you and the local political boss don’t give you access to the slum... then you are in trouble

Caveats

- Dissertations in development don't have to be **policy relevant**.
- Some research methods emphasize an **openness to the unexpected**, they are willing to make concessions about focus in order to gain flexibility
- Some philosophical approaches would object to the relationship that is being drawn between the particular and the general in this model. Can the study I carry out *in Kerala* tell the reader anything about *Indian cities*, cities *in the Global South* or *cities in general*?

1. Identifying an interest
2. Moving from a general interest to a broad topic
3. From a broad topic to a narrow topic
4. From a narrow topic to a research question
5. From a research question to its significance

An interest	the broad academic area of inquiry that your work sits in
A broad topic	a phrase which names the area of research within the interest
A narrow topic	a name for your topic which introduces the parameters of the study and also implies a claim statement to be tested

1. Identifying an interest

- Find a geographical topic that interests you all
(*e.g. for me it might be 'Cities, Governance and Gender'*)

- Draw up a list of the ways in which you can tell if something really interests you

(3 minutes – nominate one person to report back)

2 Moving from an interest to a broad topic

My Interest = 'Cities, Politics, Gender'

My broad topics

- Urban governance
- 'Upgrade' of informal/slum areas
- Associational life in cities
- Changing gender roles
- Rapid urbanisation

Can you produce 4 or 5 broad topics in your interest
(4 minutes)

If you are having trouble homing in on topics:

- Think about the claims you have heard in lectures or read in books about your general interest. What don't you understand? What do you disagree with?
- Think about the sub-headings that might appear in a textbook about your interest
- Think about the important changes that are taking place in your interest. Think about the differences that occur across space in your interest
- Think about how the interest is covered by the media
- Think about the last time you had a heated conversation about the interest, but didn't have the facts you needed to support your ideas

3 Moving from a broad topic to a narrow topic

To move from a broad topic to a narrower one you need to do several things:

- Introduce 'deverbal' nouns into the topic name
- Draw spatial and temporal limits around the topic
- Where necessary focus on just one aspect of the broad topic

Broad Topic	Narrow Topic
Urban governance	The democratisation of urban governance in Kerala since the 1990s
'Upgrade' of informal/slum areas	The conflicts over informal settlement upgrade within India's cities since 2004
Associational life in cities	The rise of middle class residents' associations in Indian cities since 2000
Changing gender roles	The enrolment of women within participatory governance institutions in Kerala since 1996.
Rapid urbanisation	The dependence of India on new cities in the Delhi-Mumbai corridor to accommodate urban growth

Narrow Topic suggests...	...a claim that can be tested
The democratisation of urban governance in Kerala since the 1990s	Urban governance has become more democratic in Kerala since the 1990s
The conflicts over informal settlement upgrade within India's cities since 2004	Residents and city authorities have conflicted over the implementation of informal upgrade programmes.
The rise of middle class residents' associations in Indian cities since 2000	Middle class residents' associations have risen to become important players in urban governance
The enrolment of women within participatory governance institutions in Kerala since 1996.	Women have been enrolled with participatory governance institutions in Kerala since 1996
The dependence of India on new cities in the Delhi-Mumbai corridor to accommodate urban growth	India's urban policy has become dependent on building new cities...

3

Turn your group's list of broad topics into narrow topics

(5 minutes)

4. From a narrowed topic to a research question

Choose one narrow topic and bombard it with questions, don't think about the answers – just come up with as many questions as you can.

who, what, when or *where* questions help locate the data you need to gather. They will help guide you when you come to write questionnaires or interview schedules. A lot of your research programme will be governed by them

how, why questions produce more analytical and less narrative forms of dissertation.

The different elements of the topic	What are the component parts of the project and what are the relationships between them?
The structures in which the topic is embedded	What are the larger systems of which your topic is a smaller part?
The history and geography of the topic	Treat the topic as dynamic. What parts of the topic have changed over time and space? How have ideas about the topic changed?
The context of the topic	In what ways is your topic one episode in a larger history?
The characteristics of the elements	How do the parts of the project differ from each other? What is a typical example of your topic? What is the range of variation?
Comparisons with similar topics	What other topics are a bit like yours? How does your topic compare with others? In what ways is it different?
The value of the topic	What is the use of your topic? Are different parts of the topic of different use?

Narrow Topic	Research question
<p>The democratisation of urban governance in Kerala since the 1990s</p>	<p><i>In what ways</i> has urban governance become more democratic in Kerala since the 1990s?</p>
<p>The conflicts over informal settlement upgrade within India's cities since 2004</p>	<p>Why have residents and city authorities conflicted over the implementation of informal upgrade programmes?</p>
<p>The rise of middle class residents' associations in Indian cities since 2000</p>	<p>How have middle class residents' associations risen to become important players in urban governance</p>
<p>The enrolment of women within participatory governance institutions in Kerala since 1996.</p>	<p>How have women been enrolled within participatory governance institutions in Kerala since 1931</p>
<p>The dependence of India on new cities ... to accommodate urban growth</p>	<p>Why is India's urban policy dependent on building new cities...</p>

5. From a research question to its significance.

‘So what?’ ‘Why would any other geographer want to read about the answer to my research question? What contribution does your research make to understanding the general interest?’

- Name your topic
- Name your question
- State the rationale for the question

“I am studying (**insert broad topic**) because I want to find out how/why (**insert research question**) in order to understand how/why/what (**insert your rationale based on the interest**).

I am studying **informal sector upgrade** because I want to find out **why residents and city authorities have conflicted over the implementation of upgrade programmes** in order to understand **what different groups' aspirations are for urban development.**

I am studying **associational life in cities** because I want to find out **how Indian middle class residents' associations have become important in urban governance** in order to understand **how communities can influence urban politics.**

I am studying **gender roles** because I want to find out about **how Keralan women get enrolled within participatory institutions** in order to understand **how social structures impact on governance reform.**



Identify the research questions for your narrow topics, then summarize the projects your group have been working on this morning in a single sentence.

(5 minutes, nominate someone to report back on one of your suggestions)

References:

Kennedy, B (1992) 'First catch your hare...Research designs for individual projects' in Rogers, A, Viles H and Goudie A (eds) *The Student's Companion to Geography, First Edition* (Oxford, Blackwell) 128-134

Booth, W., Colomb, G. & Williams J. (1995) *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)