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A Cartography of Qualitative Research in Switzerland

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Abstract: Our attempt to describe the state of qualitative research in Switzerland starts out with an impressionist sketch which inevitably is selective, subjective and culturally biased. In order to reach a more objective stance, we gather some facts and figures and present them by means of descriptive statistics. Based on the database of the Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences (SIDOS), we analyze a sample of qualitative, sociological research projects funded by national science foundations (Swiss, German and French) between 1995-2004. We compare qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods projects and try to find similarities, differences and trends: Has the ratio of qualitative research projects increased over the last ten years? Can we find cultural differences, e.g. a preference of German or French Swiss researchers for either qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods designs? Do different types of institutions, or do men and women have such different preferences? Which methods are prevailing in Swiss qualitative research? In a second data set collected by a survey of our own, we broaden the perspective to other disciplines and try to identify the most commonly used methods and theoretical approaches. But we have also obtained individual portraits of the qualitative researchers in Switzerland with their preferences of theoretical approaches and methods, their expertise, their research and their teaching courses.

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Does it make sense to ask what is the state of the art of qualitative research in the different European countries? Do national boundaries bear any significance for certain types of research? The state of the art, is it not a matter of quality assessment by an international peer review based on cross-national scientific standards? What is the point in a globalized world to distinguish national traditions of sociology? In our view, it does make sense. The criteria for such an assessment are always context-dependent on a specific theoretical and methodological perspective. Most sociological theories and methodologies have an identifiable historical origin in a certain country (and often with certain authors), and in spite of their subsequent international dissemination we still find quite different quantitative distributions of each approach in different countries. There are still specific national traditions (which may also be reinforced by the policies of national funding agencies). Switzerland may be considered a special case as it encompasses several languages and cultures. [1]

Qualitative research is usually context-sensitive and encompasses a broad spectrum of theoretical and methodological premises. Therefore, the state of the art of an approach is often assessed quite differently by its own representatives than by those advocating another qualitative approach. This situation is aggravated by the fact that each approach has usually many different facets stirring debates among insiders which often seem to be fiercer than those with outsiders. Our contribution tries to avoid these arguments: we skip quality assessments and rather focus on the description of the *present-day state of qualitative research in our country*, and as sociologists we focus above all on qualitative research in *sociology*. After a brief introduction into the institutional structure of sociology in Switzerland, we sketch in the first step a brief impressionist picture. In the second step we analyze what type of qualitative research was used in the sociological projects funded by the Swiss National Foundation. In the third step we investigate the self-descriptions of qualitative researchers using an open questionnaire.[1] [2]

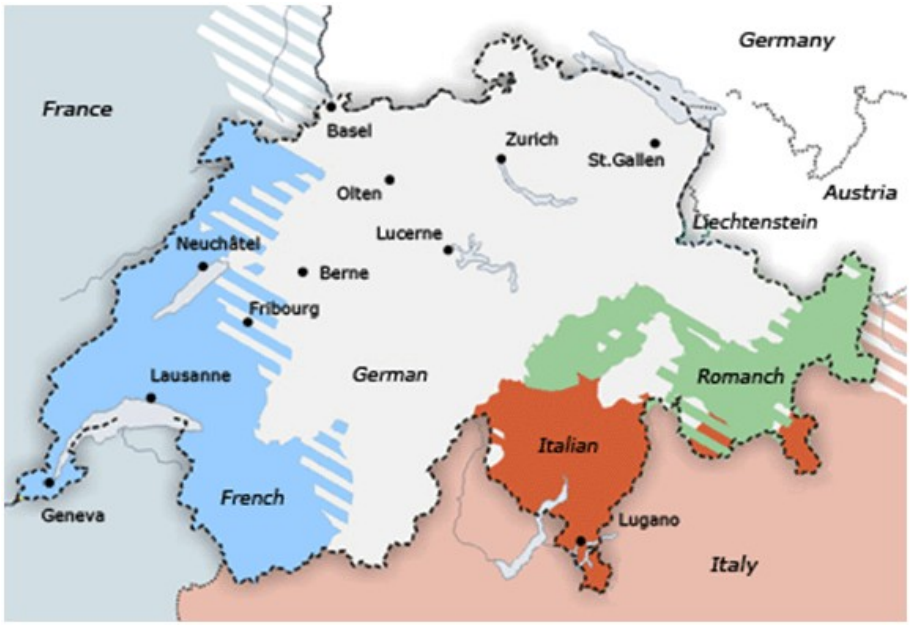
1. A Brief Impressionist Picture

Switzerland is a small country in the Alps located between its five neighbors Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and tiny Liechtenstein. The current population is about seven million and it has four different official languages and cultures which can be identified along geographical lines (see map 1): there are 63.7% German Swiss, 20.4% French Swiss, 6.5% Italian Swiss and 0.5% Romanch Swiss; there are 9% other languages of foreign immigrants across the country.[2] As all science, sociology is practiced in social organizations at concrete geographical locations. There are ten sites with universities: Basel (founded in 1460; 9,200 students), Bern (1834; 12,500), Zurich (1833; 23,400 students), St Gallen (1898; 5,000 students), and Lucerne (2000; 1,500) in the German speaking area, Lausanne (1537; 10,200), Geneva (1559; 14,700), Neuchâtel (1838; 3,300) and Fribourg (1889; 9,000) in the French speaking area plus Lugano (1995; 1,500) in the Italian speaking part (there is no university in the small Romanch speaking area). All of these universities except St Gallen and Lugano offer a degree in sociology at a bachelors', masters', and a Ph.D. level. Up to now, Zurich and Geneva have had the largest sociology departments.[3]

1 We would like to thank several colleagues and friends for information and critical comments, and we would also like to thank all those who have participated in our survey in 2004 (see Chapter 3).

2 Swiss Federal Statistical Office, http://makeashorterlink.com/?Y2DC137CB (retrieved 15 July 2005).

3 All data retrieved from the Internet sites of the universities on 15 July 2005. The dates refer to the official foundation of the universities. These were sometimes preceded by other academic institutions (in Berne dating back to 1528, in Lucerne to 1579).



Map 1: Language Regions and University Sites [3]

When talking of a cartography of qualitative research in Switzerland, we indeed think of geographical locations: there are concrete persons at concrete institutions at concrete places either teaching or doing qualitative research. All of us have an impressionist picture of the sociological scene in our country. Which university would you recommend for studying qualitative methods? Which sociologists from which institution are known in qualitative research? To study qualitative methods, you would certainly not go to Zurich, as this has been a stronghold of quantitative sociology with only marginal interest in qualitative research. And up to now, you would not have gone to Basel, which has not been known for empirical research. In the German part of Switzerland, the only place to get a reputable training in qualitative research during the past 15 years was Berne, with the research group of Claudia HONEGGER. The scene in the Romandie, the French part of Switzerland, is a little less transparent to us. But it seems fair to state that so far there has been no systematic training in qualitative research, neither in Geneva, nor in Lausanne, Fribourg or Neuchâtel. In recent years, you could get some training in qualitative (as well as quantitative) methods at the doctoral level, in the newly introduced summer schools sponsored by the Swiss Priority Programme "Switzerland: Towards the Future" 1996-2004. And the situation is rapidly changing: new professors have been hired in many places, and in the context of the "Bologna reform,"[4] new courses and curricula are being developed. Getting a bachelor degree in sociology at Basel, for example, now requires an equal share of training in quantitative and qualitative research. It will be the first site in Switzerland with a mandatory training in qualitative methods. [4]

4 The "Bologna reform" consists of the introduction of a two-level study program with two different degrees, B.A. and M.A., based on the declaration of Bologna, Italy, which was signed by the European ministers of education.

At most Swiss universities, however, a considerable amount of qualitative research has been conducted, mostly by doctoral students. And it obviously encompasses a vast variety of different methods and approaches. A cartography also means to map the different approaches which dominate at the different locations. Indeed, certain specialties have developed: Berne is well known for objective hermeneutics, St. Gallen for ethnographic sociology; at Fribourg and Lausanne we find interesting work in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, and in Geneva there has been some research using observation, content analysis and interviews (in the French tradition of BOURDIEU and KAUFMANN). We also observe some differences in theoretical orientation: Semiotics (de SAUSSURE, GREIMAS), for example, seems to play a much more important role in French (as well as Italian and Spanish) sociology than in German sociology, which is reflected in different theoretical traditions of the French and the German part of Switzerland. There is also a lot of interesting work done at other places, e.g. at the renowned Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and Lausanne and at the newly founded Universities of Applied Sciences and similar institutions. In all these places you cannot study sociology as a major but there is often intriguing work going on using qualitative methods. [5]

Has Switzerland produced a school of qualitative research of its own? Or has it just imported approaches which were developed abroad? And have Swiss social scientists contributed to methodological debates in a way that was received and respected abroad? The most encompassing Handbook of Qualitative Research of Uwe FLICK, Ernest von KARDOFF and Ines STEINKE (2003, pp.72-84) and its English edition (2004, pp.40-47) mentions Anselm STRAUSS, Erving GOFFMAN, Harold GARFINKEL and Harvey SACKS, Paul WILLIS, Clifford GEERTZ and Norman K. DENZIN, but also a Swiss group of researchers, namely Paul PARIN, Fritz MORGENTHALER, and Goldy PARIN-MATTHEY, the founders of ethnopsychoanalysis. During several trips to West Africa, the three psychoanalysts became aware of the enormous influence of social forces and the interdependency of psychological and social processes. They focused their analyses on the interplay between individual and social structures, while keeping the model, the techniques and methods of psychoanalysis. Their research was qualitative as they used case studies and story telling, observed sequences, interpreted meanings in their situational and subjective contexts, and they made the relationship between researcher and researched persons transparent (NADIG & REICHMAYR 2003, pp.72-84). Interestingly enough, they created an approach of their own but were not affiliated with a university. [6]

There are only a few researchers from Switzerland mentioned in FLICK et al.'s handbook. Thomas S. EBERLE is a co-author of "phenomenolocial life-world analysis" (HITZLER & EBERLE 2003/2004). Further citations include, in alphabetical order: EBERLE for his work on phenomenology and methodology (1984, 1993, 1999a, b), phenomenology and economics (1988) and ethnomethodological conversation analysis (1997); MAEDER for his work on expert knowledge (HITZLER, HONER & MAEDER 1994) and his ethnographic studies (MAEDER 1995); Eberhard ULICH for his analyses of work (1994); and Jean WIDMER for his work on GOFFMAN (1991). Cited are also several researchers

who worked with Thomas LUCKMANN and who either spent a considerable amount of research time at the University of St. Gallen or had regular teaching assignments there, like Hubert KNOBLAUCH, Ronald HITZLER, Anne HONER and, coming from a different background, Michaela PFADENHAUER. The bibliography of the handbook contains publications of additional Swiss researchers, who were not cited in the text. [7]

Of course, consulting a handbook is only a lose indication of what is going on in the Swiss scene of qualitative research. That is why we did it under the heading of an "impressionist view" which is always subjective and selective. We also would have to consult an equivalent handbook in France to check if French Swiss researchers are received there more prominently than in a German handbook. Mais alas!, we do not know of such a handbook in France. This fits finally another impression we have: that to write on methods and methodology independently from substantive matters and actual research, is much more common in the German tradition of social science than it is in France. Which implies that our view of such issues is inevitably culturally biased. [8]

2. Quantitative Distribution of Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods

Let us move to a more systematic analysis now. The general impression is that qualitative research has gained more ground in the last ten years. However, when we asked the major research funding agency, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), they could not confirm it. And nobody knows which methods are primarily used or which theoretical premises and research approaches are applied. We therefore endeavored to analyze the databank of the Swiss Information and Data Archive (SIDOS). SIDOS is located in Neuchâtel and was founded in 1992. Since 1993 it has been conducting regular annual surveys in order to maintain an inventory of research projects. Addressees are academic institutions, public administrations, and private research institutions. It is the most complete databank on social scientific projects in Switzerland, but it does not contain all the research projects as their declaration is still voluntary. However, the SNSF asks each researcher who gets a grant to notify SIDOS of the new research project[5] and also to deliver the data after completion of the project.[6] The SNSF also delivers the lists of funded projects to SIDOS which contacts the project leaders directly if they do not initiate action themselves. [9]

2.1 Data selection

The description of the research projects in the SIDOS databank is based on the information provided by the researchers. It is organized in several categories such as "institutions," "authors," "disciplines," "methods," "project description,"

5 The guess of a SIDOS employee in July 2005 was that about 80-85% of the SNSF-projects are in the SIDOS-databank. See also Note 11.

6 So far it is above all quantitative data which have been handed over to SIDOS after completion of the projects. The archiving of qualitative data poses special problems; cf. BERGMAN and EBERLE (2005, part two: the why and how of archiving qualitative data).

"financial funding," "beginning/end," etc. Most of these categories invite free descriptions, whereas some of them also provide pre-structured answers (e.g. "scientific disciplines").[7] As of July 15, 2005, the databank had 6422 research projects. For our analysis, we used the following criteria for data selection:

- The project was started between 1995 to 2004. This does not take into account the first years (1992-1994)[8], based on the assumption that the database was far from representative in the early years and that the practice of declaration spread considerably during that time. (Of a total of 6270 projects registered until the end of 2004 there remained 5392.)
- The project assigned itself to the discipline of sociology. (There remained 762.)
- The project was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation or by the German Research Community (DFG) or the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). As the databank encompasses all kinds of research projects we needed a criterion which allows to assess the scientific quality of the research project. Each project funded by the SNSF[9], the DFG or the CNRS has been evaluated in a peer-review process by experts in the corresponding field. (There remained 261, most of them funded by the SNSF.)[10]
- The project dealt with empirical data. We disregarded theoretical and methodological projects, even if they discussed qualitative research. We only counted projects, which were *practicing* qualitative research and produced data. (There remained 246.)[11]
- Of a total of 6470, there finally remained 246 projects fitting these criteria. Each project was counted only once, namely in the year when it started (in order to include the most recent projects).[12] [10]

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7 The form can be retrieved as a pdf-File in German at http://www.sidos.ch/research/survey/Quest-D.pdf, in a French version /Quest-F.pdf (retrieved 15 July 2005). The form contains 19 questions (F1-F19) asking for information concerning project title, institution(s), researcher(s), research area(s), scientific discipline(s), project description, time range, geographical area, important findings/intermediate results, research method, publications, unpublished reports/working papers, type of research, financial funding, progress of work, time span of project, archiving, notes, contact person(s).

8 In these years there were also many research projects from the past reported, dating several years back.

9 "With its a federal mandate, the SNSF is Switzerland's foremost institution in the promotion of scientific research. It supports research in all disciplines, from philosophy and biology to the nanosciences and medicine." (SNF-Portrait, http://www.snf.ch/en/por/por.asp, retrieved 15 July 05)

10 The question may arise why we did not use the databank of the Swiss National Science Foundation (http://www.snf.ch/prodb/webforms/frameset.aspx) which is complete in this respect. The reason is simple: most projects have no information in the column "abstract" where the research approach and the methods should be specified.

11 The databank of the SNSF has 328 projects in our time period. The guess of the SIDOS employee (see Note 5) was right: our 261 projects make 80% of the 328. As only 15 of the 261 are not empirical we suspect that above all theoretical projects of fundamental research were not reported to SIDOS while the empirical projects may be quite complete.

12 For some analyses we employed further criteria (see paragraph 2.2.2).

2.2 Data analysis

2.2.1 Comparison of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods

In the first step we divided our data into quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods projects.[13] This allows us to ask a range of questions which are apt to make the empirical research scene a little more transparent:

- What are the proportions between quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods projects and how have they developed over the past ten years?
- Are there any striking differences between these three types concerning language area, gender or institutions? [11]

Table 1 shows that on the average, quantitative projects clearly dominate the research scene. Of the 246 projects, 121 (49%) used a quantitative, 69 (28%) a qualitative, and 56 (23%) a mixed methods design.[14] Changes in the proportions occur from year to year—the percentage of qualitative research ranges from 20 to 47%—but over the 10 years there is no recognizable trend in these proportions. The general impression that qualitative research has increased during the last decade, cannot be substantiated by our data, i.e. we cannot observe an increase of the (relative) number of qualitative research projects funded by the SNSF.

13 We coded all the research projects based on the descriptions of used methods, either in the rubric "method" or in the column "project description." We did not assign projects to "mixed methods" if an additional use of other methods (quantitative methods in qualitative projects and vice versa) was obviously marginal.

14 The numbers are approximations as it was not clear in some cases to which type the project really belongs as the descriptions were sometimes insufficient in this respect. 25 projects left the rubric "methods" empty; 14 of them could get assigned on the basis of the project description and became part of our sample of 246, while 11 were excluded.

	Number				***Percentage***			
Year	Qual.	Quant.	Mix	Total	*Qual.*	*Quant.*	*Mix*	*Total*
1995	5	6	2	13	*39*	*46*	*15*	*100*
1996	7	19	8	34	*21*	*56*	*23*	*100*
1997	12	31	16	59	*20*	*53*	*27*	*100*
1998	6	8	5	19	*32*	*42*	*26*	*100*
1999	8	5	4	17	*47*	*29*	*24*	*100*
2000	10	20	8	38	*26*	*53*	*21*	*100*
2001	8	13	5	26	*31*	*50*	*19*	*100*
2002	4	11	3	18	*22*	*61*	*17*	*100*
2003	8	7	4	19	*42*	*37*	*21*	*100*
2004	1	1	1	3	*33*	*33*	*33*	*100*
Total	69	121	56	246	*28*	*49*	*23*	*100*

Table 1: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects 1995-2004 [12]

Are there any preferences for quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods designs in the different language areas? And is qualitative research better represented in the German or in the French part of the country, based upon their different sociological traditions? Table 2a shows in what language areas the projects were located (according to their institutional affiliations[15]). The percentages approximately reflect the respective distribution of the Swiss population: 64% stem from German, 27% from French Switzerland, and some have a cooperation of institutions across the language borders (7% in German and French, 1% in Italian and French and 1% in German and Italian Switzerland). Italian is clearly underrepresented. Concerning qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods projects we find no significant preference for the one or the others by the two major language areas. There are only slight differences (Table 2b): While 31% of the German Swiss projects are qualitative, 46% are quantitative and 23% employ mixed methods. Of the French Swiss projects 28% are qualitative, 53% quantitative, and 19% use mixed methods. Taking into account that we are dealing with relatively small numbers, we may conclude that the distribution is fairly similar.

	Number						***Percentage***					
Language	G	F	G-F	F-I	G-I	Total	*G*	*F*	*G-F*	*F-I*	*G-I*	*Total*

15 We determined the language area of a project by the criterion where the institutions carrying out the project are geographically located. It was also often reflected in the language used for project description. As the University of Fribourg is bilingual, we decided from case to case based upon the institutions, the project members and the language of their publications. Of course, there are also German Swiss doing research at institutions in the French part of Switzerland, and vice versa, which renders it difficult to draw the line between the two different language cultures.

	Number						***Percentage***					
Qualitative	49	19	0	1	0	69	*71*	*28*	*0*	*1*	*0*	*100*
Quantitative	72	36	12	1	0	121	*59*	*30*	*10*	*1*	*0*	*100*
Mixed	37	13	4	0	2	56	*66*	*23*	*7*	*0*	*4*	*100*
Total	158	68	16	2	2	246	*64*	*27*	*7*	*1*	*1*	*100*

Table 2a: Language Proportions in Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects[16]

	Number				***Percentage***			
Language	Qual.	Quant.	Mix	Total	*Qual.*	*Quant.*	*Mix*	*Total*
German	49	72	37	158	*31*	*46*	*23*	*100*
French	19	6	13	68	*28*	*53*	*19*	*100*
German and French	0	12	4	16	*0*	*75*	*25*	*100*
French and Italian	1	1	0	2	*50*	*50*	*0*	*100*
German and Italian	0	0	2	2	*0*	*0*	*100*	*100*

Table 2b: Language Specific Preferences for Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects [13]

Striking differences are found in relation to gender. Tables 3a+b show the gender proportions of the project leaders[17]. As the same persons were sometimes engaged in several projects or co-responsible for a project in cooperation with other project leaders, we counted them each single time. This amounts to a total of 307 project involvements. All in all, 70% of the project leaders were male, 30% were female. If male and female project leaders had the same preferences we should find 70% male and 30% females in qualitative as well as in quantitative and mixed methods. Table 3a shows however that males are overrepresented in quantitative (85%) while underrepresented in qualitative (53%) and mixed methods projects (60%), while females are overrepresented in qualitative (47%) and mixed methods (40%) and underrepresented in quantitative methods (15%) projects. Table 3b takes the view from the persons and asks in which kind of projects males and females are involved. 60% of the males worked in quantitative, 22% in qualitative and 18% in mixed methods projects. Only 25% of the females are involved in quantitative but 45% in qualitative and 30% in mixed methods projects. It is fair to conclude from our data that there is a gender-specific

16 G=German, F=French, G/F=German French cooperations, F/I=French-Italian cooperations, G/I=German-Italian cooperations.

17 As the number of persons per project differs, we only took the gender of the project leader into account. The data at hand would not allow for a different procedure, as the project descriptions do not indicate which researcher did which part. The project leader however takes the responsibility for the whole research design.

preference of Swiss researchers to employ qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods designs.[18]

	Number			***Percentage***		
Projects	Male	Female	Total	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Qualitative	47	41	88	*53*	*47*	*100*
Quantitative	129	23	152	*85*	*15*	*100*
Mixed	40	27	67	*60*	*40*	*100*
Total	216	91	307	*70*	*30*	*100*

Table 3a: Gender Proportions in Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects

	Number				***Percentage***			
Projects	Qual.	Quant.	Mix	Total	*Qual.*	*Quant.*	*Mix*	*Total*
Male	47	129	40	216	*22*	*60*	*18*	*100*
Female	41	23	27	91	*45*	*25*	*30*	*100*
Total	88	152	67	307	*28*	*50*	*22*	*100*

Table 3b: Gender Specific Preferences for Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects [14]

Our final question regarding the distribution of these different types of research designs is what kind of institutions are involved and to what degree they cooperate. The total number of institutions involved in our sample of 246 research projects is 104. As with the project leaders above, we counted each institution in each single case. As several institutions were involved in more than one project, there resulted a total of 354 institutional project involvements. Table 4a shows in which of the three types of research the major institutions were involved: Universities are engaged in about half of the project engagements, the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology in about 7%, the Universities of Applied Sciences in about 14%, others in about 29%. The numbers across the three different kinds of research are fairly even. [15]

Table 4b tackles the question if we can observe a clear difference in the degree of institutional cooperation across the three research types. Our guess was that we would find lower numbers in qualitative projects and the highest numbers in mixed methods projects. The numbers point indeed into that direction but only in a slight manner: there are no significant differences in that respect either.

18 It has often been argued that this reflects different gender cultures, females having a more relational, concrete and context-bound orientation while males operating rather with abstractions detached from specific contexts (cf: "Real men don't collect soft data," GHERARDI & TURNER, 1999). We do not go into this at this point as we do not believe we should interpret aggregate figures without studying the micro-mechanisms involved.

	Number				***Percentage***			
Projects	Qual.	Quant.	Mix	Total	*Qual.*	*Quant.*	*Mix*	*Average*
Universities	51	84	44	179	*55*	*49*	*49*	*50*
Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology	6	14	5	25	*6*	*8*	*6*	*7*
Universities of Applied Sciences	13	20	15	48	*14*	*12*	*17*	*14*
other Federal Institutions	2	2	3	7	*2*	*1*	*3*	*2*
other Institutions	21	51	23	95	*23*	*30*	*25*	*27*
Total	93	171	90	354	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*

Table 4a: Proportions of Different Institutions in Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects

	Number			***Percentage***		
Projects	Single	Cooper.	Total	*Single*	*Coop.*	*Total*
Qualitative	52	17	69	*72*	*25*	*100*
Quantitative	85	36	121	*70*	*30*	*100*
Mixed	37	19	56	*66*	*34*	*100*
Total	174	72	246	*71*	*29*	*100*

Table 4b: Proportions of Single and Cooperation Projects in Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Projects [16]

2.2.2 Analysis of the qualitative sample

What can we learn from our data in respect to the Swiss scene of qualitative research in sociology? We can identify the institutions involved in qualitative research, the methods used by qualitative researchers and the theoretical approaches they prefer. For these analyses we introduce some additional criteria. We observed that the self-assignment to the discipline "sociology" proved to be very vast: "sociology" was often used by researchers who were not sociologists, and in combination with other disciplines (some projects were assigned to as many as eight disciplines). We created therefore a sub-sample of "truly" sociological projects by the criterion that the project had to be affiliated with a sociological institution (e.g. an institute of sociology). We then added the projects from researchers at other institutions whom we knew that they were sociologists. This allowed us to make some comparisons between the 69 qualitative projects

and the sub-sample of 30 projects, which were "sociological" in a narrower sense. In these 30 projects there are 15 institutions involved. [17]

Table 5 shows the ranking of institutions in regard to the number of project engagements. Not surprisingly, the University of Berne is at the top and has at least twice as many qualitative projects as each of the other institutions; it also ranks at the top among sociological institutions. The University of Geneva ranks second overall but only at position six in sociology. The University of Zurich had 6 qualitative projects but only 1 in sociology, the University of Basel 5 but only 1 in sociology. The University of Lausanne on the other hand has 5 of 6 qualitative projects in sociology. Not seen in this lists are the cooperations. If we would take into account, for example, that there existed a close cooperation between the sociologists of the University of St Gallen and the University of Applied Sciences St Gallen during the time-span of our sample, St Gallen would then rank second (provided the same does not hold true for other institutions as well).

Qualitative Sample	**Sociology Sample**
University of Berne (14)	University of Berne (8)
University of Geneva (7)	University of Lausanne (5)
University of Fribourg (6)	University of Fribourg (4)
University of Lausanne (6)	University of Applied Sciences Solothurn (4)
University of Zurich (6)	University of Applied Sciences St.Gallen (4)
University of Basel (5)	University of Geneva (3)
University of Applied Sciences St.Gallen (4)	University of St.Gallen (2)
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (4)	1 project involvement: the Universities of Basel, Regensburg (Germany), and Zurich as well as private institutions in Aubonne, Immensee, Luzern, Neuchâtel and St.Gallen
University of Applied Sciences Solothurn (4)	
University of St.Gallen (3)	
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (2)	
other institutions	

Table 5: Institutions Involved in Qualitative Research, Ranked According to the Number of Project Involvements [18]

Which methods are used most often in qualitative research? The SIDOS registration form has a rubric "research method" where it asks for a) the basic methodical research approach and the general procedure, and b) the method of

data collection in case of empirical research. In the early years, it was left to the researchers to specify the method of data collection. Since 1998 the form has offered standardized categories to choose from, like "content analysis," "document analysis," "experiment," "psychological test," "observation," "group discussion," "qualitative interview," "standardized survey," "secondary analysis," most of them with some sub-categories.[19] There is no distinction between the methods of data collection and those of data analysis. As with GARFINKEL's (1967, pp.186-207) "bad clinic records", the forms remain often incomplete and we do not know the "good reasons" for that. Of 69 project descriptions, there are 23 without any information in the column "method of data collection." It was however possible to retrieve some information from within of the project descriptions. All in all, we identified 172 instances of method descriptions.[20] [19]

Table 6 shows the "hit list" of the employed methods. Not surprisingly, interview is number one: it is used in all the projects, more often than any other method. Observation is next, followed by document analysis, content analysis, group discussion and case study. And there is a wide array of more special and more rarely used methods.[21] It is interesting to observe that the top six of qualitative methods are equally ranked in the qualitative sample of 69 as well as in the sociology sample of 30.[22]

Qualitative Sample	**Sociology Sample**
Interview (59)	Interview (28)
Observation (28)	Observation (11)
Document Analysis (22)	Document Analysis (9)
Content Analysis (15)	Content Analysis (5)
Group Discussion (11)	Group Discussion (4)
Case Study (9)	Case Study (3)
others (28)	others (8)

Table 6: "Hit List" of Methods of Data Collection in the Qualitative and Sociology Sample (SIDOS Data) [20]

We also tried to identify the theoretical approach used in each research project. However, only 25 of 69 projects specified their theoretical approach. This share is too small. We therefore decided to rely on another set of data. [21]

19 The Information Center (IZ) in Bonn, Germany, has similar categories (http://www.gesis.org/Information/FORIS/Erhebung/Preview/index.htm [cf. "Datenerhebungen bei empirischen Arbeiten," retrieved 15 July 2004]).

20 We had 5 columns per project for method descriptions. Often, more than one method was mentioned. Very rarely more than 5 were mentioned.

21 The "ranking" of methods in a "hit list" omits the combination of different methods in the same research design, which is a common practice. We have the data, but it proved too complex to be presented here.

22 The "hit list" may not overshadow the fact that usually different methods are combined in the same research project.

3. A Survey Among Qualitative Researchers

In 2004, we started an initiative to network the qualitative researchers in Switzerland. It was part of a demarche of the Social Science Policy Council, a committee of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, to promote qualitative research in Switzerland (cf. EBERLE 2005; BERGMAN & EBERLE 2005). First, we tried to identify the key players in the field. Our primary concern was to find all the professors and permanently employed persons[23] who do qualitative research. Second, we asked them to fill in a questionnaire, which was designed to make the scene of qualitative research more transparent. Third, we used a snowball procedure to find more and more people doing or teaching qualitative research. A practical goal was to join forces and strengthen ties as the Bologna reform stirred fundamental reforms of study programs. This opened the chance to establish qualitative methods more prominently in the university curricula. [22]

The basic aim of our survey was to identify who does what and where. In contrast to our analysis of the SIDOS databank we did not restrict our search to sociologists but extended it to all social scientists doing qualitative research. And we focused on those persons who were likely to stay for years to come and who are in a position to influence the micropolitical processes at their universities. We ended up with 42 completed questionnaires from 8 disciplines (18 from sociology, 11 social or cultural anthropology (including popular culture, "Volkskunde"), 4 political science, 4 public media science, 3 history, 1 methodology and 1 linguistics). The questionnaire had only open questions and asked for

- the name, institutional affiliation, position and discipline of the researchers;
- their major areas in research and in teaching;
- their expertise: for which epistemological, methodological and theoretical approaches and for which empirical methods they consider themselves as experts (e.g. for SNSF-reviews);
- their courses: do they regularly teach empirical methods and, if so, how (in form of (theoretical overviews, practical application, etc.)? And what are the textbooks they use?
- their research: which are the epistemological, methodological and theoretical approaches they use in their own research and which empirical methods have they been employing? Have they published themselves on methods? And which are the research projects they are presently working at?
- the curriculum of methods training at their university, and which other permanently employed persons are teaching or doing qualitative research at their institution. [23]

We ended up with a rich database of 42 individual profiles, which made the Swiss scene of qualitative research much more transparent. We also got some valuable information on the state of qualitative research at the different institutions. On one

23 We had to interpret these criteria in a pragmatic manner as there were also professors hired for a limited period of time.

hand, the students of sociology, political science and public media science throughout Switzerland didn't have thus far any mandatory training in qualitative methods but only in quantitative methods. On the other hand in social or cultural anthropology (including popular culture, "Volkskunde") it was exactly the opposite: no training in quantitative but only in qualitative methods. It is also interesting to note that qualitative methods in the anthropological as well as in the historical disciplines are always taught in the context of a concrete research subject and not in separate methods courses as in sociology. In the context of the Bologna reforms, there were intense discussions at most places to develop new concepts of methods training. [24]

We constructed once more a "hit list of methods," one for the whole sample and one for the sub-sample of sociology, which allows for a comparison to the respective "hit list" of the SIDOS data. Table 7 shows that the self-descriptions of qualitative researchers vary greatly. The 42 researchers use no less than 51 different methods, the 19 sociologists no less than 29. The "top-six" methods of the "hit list" in Table 6 (SIDOS-data) spread this time over 12 ranks in the sample "all disciplines" and are added by categories like "discourse analysis," "surveys," "statistics," "hermeneutics," "visual methods," "grounded theory," and many others follow in lower ranks. In the sociology sample this time, group discussion and case study (ranked in the top-six of SIDOS-data) are mentioned only once (in the case of group discussion) resp. not mentioned at all (case study). [25]

An interesting observation is that the self-descriptions of the qualitative researchers rendered not only a great variety of different methods, but also a vast spectrum of further specifications, which are sometimes quite difficult to translate into other languages. To give one example: In our sample of 42 participants, "interview" figured as the most commonly used method (19), but there were 10 different variants: 4 wrote "interview," 3 "narrative interview," 2 "expert interview," 2 "qualitative interview," 1 "ethnographic interview," 1 "focused interview" 1 "open interview," 1 "problem-centered interview," 1 "structured interview," 1 "interpretive interview," 1 "dialogual interview," 1 "in-depth interview." The same holds true for other methods. There are also many methods mentioned only once: 34 methods in addition to the18 methods mentioned in column "all disciplines" of Table 7 (i.e. nearly the double), and 17 in addition to the 12 mentioned in column "sociology" (more than the double). This may be interpreted as an indication of a creative, non-standardized use of methods in qualitative research.

Methods All Disciplines	**Methods Sociology**
Interview (19)	Interview (6)
Observation/Ethnography (13)	Observation/Ethnography (5)
Discourse Analysis (12)	Discourse Analysis (5)
Surveys (9)	Grounded Theory (4)
Content Analysis (7)	Objective Hermeneutics (4)
Hermeneutics (6)	Statistical procedures (3)
Statistics (6)	Content Analysis (2)
Document Analysis (4)	Document Analysis (2)
Focus Groups; Group Discussion (4)	Analysis of Interpretation Patterns (2)
Grounded Theory (4)	Narrative Analysis (2)
Visual Methods and Analyses (4)	Semiotics for Visual Analyses (2)
Case Studies (3)	Typologies (2)
Qualitative Methods (3)	17 additional methods were mentioned once
Analysis of Interpretation Patterns (2)	
Narrative Analysis (2)	
Oral History (2)	
Text Analysis (2)	
Typologies (2)	
34 additional methods were mentioned once	

Table 7: "Hit Lists" of Methods across all Disciplines and in Sociology (Survey Data) [26]

In contrast to the SIDOS dataset we constructed a "hit list of theoretical approaches" based on the survey data (Table 8*).* It tells us at least the common buzz-words used to describe qualitative approaches, like "grounded theory" (also used in the rubric "methods"), "constructivism," "ethnomethodology," "phenomenology," "hermeneutics," and others. The top three are the same (although differently ranked) in sociology as in all disciplines, hermeneutics is also a favored term. It is interesting to observe that phenomenology and ethnomethodology are nowadays quite common in disciplines beyond sociology, while we find "interpretive sociology" and "structuration theory" only in sociology. Once again, there is a vast variety of approaches mentioned only once.

Theoretical Approaches All Disciplines	**Theoretical Approaches Sociology**
Constructivism (17)	Grounded Theory (6)
Grounded Theory (16)	Constructivism (5)
Ethnomethodology (9)	Ethnomethodology (3)
Phenomenology (9)	Hermeneutics (3)
Hermeneutics (7)	Sociology of Culture/Knowledge (3)
Institutionalism (5)	Post- and Genetical Structuralism (3)
(Post-) and Genetical Structuralism (5)	Interpretative Sociology (2)
Systems Theory (4)	Phenomenology (2)
Empirical-analytical Philosophy of Science (3)	Structuration Theories (2)
Rational Choice (3)	11 additional approaches were mentioned once
Sociology of Culture/Knowledge (3)	
Functionalism (2)	
Interpretative Sociology (2)	
Praxeological Approach (2)	
Structuration Theories (2)	
Analysis of Culture (2)	
24 additional approaches were mentioned once	

Table 8: "Hit Lists" of Theoretical Approaches Across All Disciplines and in Sociology (Survey Data) [27]

An additional interesting observation is that there are cultural differences in talking about epistemology, methodology, methods and theoretical approaches. It seems that sociology may be the discipline where the distinctions are clearest. Disciplines closer to the humanities have different understandings, and as we realized at our interdisciplinary conference at Konolfingen in 2004 (EBERLE 2005, pp.13-18), the dialogue across disciplines is very much an intercultural communication, with the usual potential of persistent misunderstandings. A historian with a high reputation pointed out that it was nearly impossible to fill in our questionnaire as historians would have difficulties with the (sociological) distinction between theoretical approach and empirical methods, and with talking about methods detached from an actual research context. This brings us back to the impressionist statement about the French tradition of sociology, which is quite close to humanities (see Chapter 1). [28]

When we finally come back to the geographical locations, we can formulate comparatively detailed portraits of the different disciplines at the different institutions. We do not present this here in more detail, as it is too complex for an article and not really of interest to an international audience. Ultimately, it always boils down to the concrete composition of researchers at a certain institution. Of course, there persists the fundamental methodological problem that portraits which are based on self-descriptions do not really reflect the relative importance and scientific achievements of the persons involved. And the restriction of our survey data to researchers who are (more or less) permanently employed disregards the impact of these researchers on doctoral students and junior researchers. Hence, our data does not allow for the identification of "schools" of qualitative research. To do this, we would have to employ a different research design, which would analyze the publications in the field of qualitative research. This however would be another venture, which we cannot achieve here. [29]

4. Conclusion

Our attempt to describe the sociological scene of qualitative research in Switzerland started out with an impressionist sketch, based upon our everyday knowledge as researchers. The results are inevitably selective, subjective and culturally biased. We tried therefore to take a more objective stance and gathered some facts and figures which were presented by means of descriptive statistics. Basing on the database of SIDOS, we have analyzed a sample of qualitative, sociological research projects funded by a national science foundation in the time-span of 1995-2004. Our data did not substantiate the assumption that the relative number of qualitative research projects has increased during the last ten years. We also did not find different preferences of researchers in the German vs. French part of Switzerland either for qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. There was further no preference for either of these methods detectable among the different institutions (universities, Swiss Federal Institutes of Technologies, universities of applied sciences, and others). We however found a clear connection between type of method and gender. A further analysis of the qualitative sub-sample revealed the quantitative distribution of research projects among the different institutions and their geographical locations, and we constructed a "hit list" of the employed qualitative methods. A "hit list" of theoretical approaches was not feasible as only a minority of projects descriptions delivered data in that respect. [30]

Basing on data of a survey of our own, we broadened the perspective and tried to describe the qualitative research scene as represented by professors and researchers in (more or less) permanent positions. We made another "hit list" of methods, which showed some commonalities but also differences to the one based on the SIDOS data. And we constructed a "hit list" of theoretical approaches and made a brief comparison between a subset "sociology" and "all disciplines." More detailed descriptions of qualitative research in the different disciplines at different institutions and geographical locations proved to be too complex to be presented here. [31]

The cartography of qualitative research is of great use to us as we are presently building a network of qualitative researchers in Switzerland across disciplines. The scene has become more transparent to us and we have obtained detailed portraits of qualitative researchers with their preferences of theoretical approaches and methods, their expertise, their research and the courses they teach. The cartography has just been the most recent step taken in a longer series of a joint effort to advance qualitative research in our country. In 1999, the Swiss Sociological Association organized a congress on "Interpretive Sociologies" (at Fribourg), which has resulted in a thematic issue of the Swiss Journal of Sociology (EBERLE & WIDMER 2000). Shortly thereafter, the Social Science Policy Council, a committee of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, started an initiative to promote qualitative research in Switzerland, which resulted in three invitational conferences so far (cf. EBERLE 2005; BERGMAN & EBERLE 2005).[24] Through the new network we try to join forces throughout the country and across disciplines and hope to develop common views on training contents and practices, on quality standards and evaluation criteria of research, and to secure qualitative methods an adequate place in the university curricula. [32]

Many of our colleagues from larger European countries may be surprised about the small numbers we are dealing with in this article. Switzerland is a small country, and we are always dealing with small numbers. It is probably typical of Swiss that we are used to taking small numbers seriously. Further research on the qualitative research scene will have to investigate the profiles of the publications. That will also be small numbers, but all in all a lot of work. [33]

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