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Conference Report:

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# 18th Conference on Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQD) 2016: MAXQDA User Conference. Berlin, Germany, March 2-4, 2016, organized by Marburg Research Group for Methods & Evaluation

**Key words**: qualitative data analysis; qualitative software; MAXQDA; mixed methods; conference; computer-assisted qualitative data analysis; CAQD

**Abstract**: During the first week of March 2016, 120 researchers from 12 different countries, including Syria, Japan, the USA and Turkey, met in Berlin (Germany) to learn more about their computer-assisted qualitative data analysis skills. The 18th Conference on Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQD) offered several workshops, a research methods poster session, and the opportunity to share and discuss best practice between attendees, trainers and speakers (informally and through the user forum). The conference also hosted three seminal keynote speakers in two presentations: John CRESWELL, and Udo KUCKARTZ and Stefan RÄDIKER, who shared, respectively, the state of the art of mixed methods and the ways that software can support these approaches.

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## 1. Introduction

The software programs for qualitative data analysis have long lagged behind counterparts in the quantitative arena. It is relatively easy to answer a question such as "What software/package would you use to analyze numerical data?" The answer will depend on several conditions, but if you are my contemporaries you will be probably answer MS Excel. If you also happen to share a similar research background with me, in the social sciences, you may come up with alternatives such as BMDP, SPSS, SAS, STATA, Minitab and R. Now let's turn our attention to the focus of this conference: "What software/package would you use to analyze qualitative data?" If you can come up with anything other than Word or Excel then I am probably preaching to the converted. The answer for researchers in the know, besides the former two, would be something along the lines of ATLAS.ti, Ethnograph, HyperRESEARCH, MAXQDA (formerly MAX), NUD*IST

(later turned into NVivo), and QDA Miner. It is tempting to conclude that there seem to be as many qualitative software packages as quantitative ones, and it may be true for today, but one must remember that while BMDP and SPSS were developed around 1957 and 1968 respectively, it was not until the 1980s that Ethnograph, MAXQDA, and NUD*IST were available. [1]

The use of different software applications for analysis of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrates the diverse needs of research communities, as substantiated by several research paradigms, but also how this progression has steadily remained dichotomous both in theoretical and analytical tools—roughly speaking between the two major social science paradigms or approaches, namely positivism/empiricism and constructivism/phenomenology (GRAY, 2004; GUBA & LINCOLN, 1994; TASHAKKORI & TEDDLIE, 1998). [2]

Over the last three or four decades there has been increasing recognition that a pragmatic philosophy that distinguishes itself from both purely quantitative approaches (based on a philosophy of positivism) and purely qualitative approaches (based on a philosophy of interpretivism or constructivism) (DENSCOMBE, 2007) may actually afford researchers a "better understanding" of their object of study. Briefly, pragmatism can be characterized by the following (adapted from CRESWELL, 2007, p.23; DENSCOMBE, 2007, p.117; JOHNSON & ONWUEGBUZIE, 2004, p.18; SNAPE & SPENCER, 2003, p.15; TASHAKKORI & TEDDLIE, 1998, p.5.):

- Knowledge is based on practical outcomes and "what works" whereby the main criterion for judging knowledge is its perceived usefulness when applied to a practical problem.
- There is no single, best "scientific" method that can lead the way to indisputable knowledge. Quantitative research is not considered better than qualitative research and vice versa.
- Traditional dualisms in the field of philosophy and science are regarded as unhelpful.
- Pragmatism recognizes both the natural or physical world and the emergent social and psychological world.
- It endorses eclecticism and pluralism—for example observation, experience, and experiments can be useful in understanding people and the world.
- It recognizes human inquiry and experimental or scientific inquiry as analogous. [3]

It is this commitment to pragmatism that has underpinned the developments of the qualitative software community to open up new opportunities for mixed methods analytical tools. The 18th Conference on Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQD) has been at the center of such developments (see SILVER, 2013), and now in its eighteenth year it provided the opportunity to hear first-hand from leading thinkers and developers about how this exciting world of software and research is moving forward. The CAQD conference is hosted under

the auspices of the Marburg Research Group for Methods & Evaluation and MAXQDA 12, one of the software pioneers in qualitative and mixed methods data analysis. [4]

## 2. The Conference

The 18th CAQD conference provided attendees with the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences with each other both formally and informally over the course of three days. The formal agenda included several workshops, a research methods poster session, a user forum, and two keynotes—one by John CRESWELL and one by Udo KUCKARTZ and Stefan RÄDIKER. [5]

### 2.1 Conference keynotes

There were two keynotes. John CRESWELL, an expert in mixed methods for over 30 years, has pioneered the seemingly very simple idea of intersecting qualitative and quantitative data: "one plus one equals three." Methodologies unfold over time; quantitative paradigms have been at the center of most methodologies, while qualitative approaches have gained momentum over the last 30 or so years. In CRESWELL's view this is the time for mixed methods, and researchers are beginning to see its value. However, there ought to be best practice about integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data, and now mixed methods has the designs on how to do this. [6]

During his presentation, CRESWELL dealt with the key ten advances in mixed methods research over the last five years. These ideas come from the new recommendations from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (CRESWELL, KLASSEN, PLANO CLARK & CLEGG SMITH, 2011), which became the most heavily visited website for mixed methods research. These eventually turned into an NIH R25 program called "mixed methods research training program" (mmrtp). at the Johns Hopkins Harvard University. A further influence that is helping catalyze this work is the "qualitative article reporting standards" (qars), which aims to turn into the equivalent of the Working Group on Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS) (APPELBAUM, COOPER, MAXWELL, STONE & SHER, 2008), from the current American Psychological Association (APA) Working Group. It also draws on "a concise introduction to mixed methods research" (CRESWELL, 2014) that was taught at the Harvard masters class lectures in 2013. The key ten advances in mixed methods research over the last five years are:

1. *Current knowledge of skills assessment or the "skills needed to do mixed methods research"*: There are books/training manuals to prepare the new generations of mixed methods researchers. Now one can use the proficiency framework (GUETTERMAN, 2016) to "assess mixed methods proficiency" (p.395) which covers the professional experiences, personal characteristics, mixed methods knowledge, and mixed methods skills necessary for this.
2. *Justification* and *validity*: As mixed methods research matures and becomes normalized, the rationale behind such designs becomes less of a shock to

journal reviewers, and it is becoming more common to see mixed methods studies in the mainstream research literature.

3. *Designs*: According to CRESWELL, a big challenge is that the average researcher will not easily be able to position his or her project. Developing new mixed methods designs has been advanced to the point that we can talk about three core designs, and these can be applied to other designs, theories, and methods. This can be seen as design as lynchpin: explanatory sequential design, exploratory sequential design, and convergent design. The rationale is that mixed methods are part of a larger framework, which can allow the researcher to use qualitative and quantitative methods during different stages of the research process for maximum benefit. This has also resulted in mixed methods designs opening up discussions about the entire research process.
4. *Diagrams*: A fundamental and sometimes overlooked issue is how to visualize the research process. There are now good diagrams to show how mixed methods can do this.
5. *Implementation matrix*: This is a table or figure used to give an overview of a (mixed methods) project in order to describe the precise research plan and how the different methods are mixed and during which stages of the research process.
6. *Conceptual frameworks*: There is sufficient literature to support researchers on the theoretical underpinnings of mixed methods approaches.
7. *Integration*: It is now well accepted that mixed methods can be achieved by merging, connecting, and embedding qualitative and quantitative data.
8. *Joint displays*: These are tables that can display both qualitative and quantitative data together, and which are becoming more common in the literature (GUETTERMAN, METTERS & CRESWELL, 2015). Together, both the research process and its analysis and reporting generate
9. *multiple writings and possibilities*, which enable researchers to expand on their research and analytical prospects. [7]

While CRESWELL focused on the overarching characteristics of mixed methods research, KUCKARTZ and RÄDIKER turned the audience's attention to the fact that both the methods and the software used to carry out data capture, management, analysis, and reporting have a profound impact in the real world as well as in the academic world. But the impact of different methods and software does not stop there: it goes to the discipline level, the geographical level, the historical traditions behind these disciplinary boundaries, and most particularly the very people that do this research. This, KUCKARTZ said, is best explained by the metaphor of having children:

> "You have one kid and you can devote your life to him or her, you have a second kid and then you not only have two of them but now you have to deal with the dynamics between them; in other words, how do you integrate them and live with them?" [8]

This is the same in mixed methods analysis and research: it is all about integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Up to this day, KUCKARTZ argues, "We do a lot of quantitizing but little qualitizing." [9]

One of the issues with regards to integration is that only a few attempts have been made to represent qualitative and quantitative data in a visually integrated way. One of these attempts is that of joint displays, which are still in the early stages of development, but we can expect to see more discussions about them in the coming years. [10]

### 2.2 Conference workshops

The CAQD conference provides a variety of workshops on research methods that participants can sign up to. This year, 28 workshops were available, covering training over the entire research process—from literature reviews through to the basics of qualitative analysis using software through to mixed methods, category building, and teamworking. Although the outline content of the workshops is fixed, the setting allows for close interaction with the trainers, who are specialists on the topic and can provide solutions to attendees' specific research challenges. The workshops were available in English and German and included a full-day intensive workshop with John CRESWELL. [11]

### 2.3 Poster session and award

During the poster session we were able to look at eight posters focusing on the special methodological aspects of the research process. The poster session was a great way to include an international perspective on some enlightening methodological challenges and how they have been faced by the presenting researchers. This was an opportunity for further dialog with regards to the decision-making process during the data analysis. The poster session closed with the presentation of an award to the best poster, followed by a "wine and cheese" social gathering. [12]

### 2.4 Conference user forum

The CAQD has at its core what is called the "user forum," a space that allows participants, keynote speakers, and workshop trainers to interact around seven roundtables. An expert on a particular topic hosts each roundtable and is at hand to support attendees with particular research challenges and to ensure that the MAXQDA programming team receives feedback on particular functionalities of the software, including a functions wish list that gets incorporated through the development of the software. Attendees can take part in the roundtable that is more relevant to them and/or move around them as they see fit. This year the roundtables were: teamwork (how to structure projects where more than one person access the same file), mixed methods, teaching qualitative data analysis (QDA), analyzing and transcribing media, organizing a project, visualization, and the implementation of research methods. [13]

## 3. Learning and conclusion

The CAQD is a unique opportunity for researchers wishing to gain knowledge and skills on computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods analyses using MAXQDA. It provides a comprehensive suite of workshops that cater to beginner and highly experienced researchers alike. Above all it provides attendees with the environment to go beyond the practicalities of learning and using software, where they can meet like-minded individuals who are on a similar research path. During the "informal" sections of the conference (before, between, and after sessions), one can equally share personal research experiences to new-to-Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) researchers and hear from the legendary names in the qualitative and mixed methods literature. Without attending CAQD I would never have learned what led Juliet CORBIN to work with Anselm STRAUSS or how Udo KUCKARTZ decided that his very own programming code could be opened up to other researchers wishing to conduct qualitative data analysis back in the 1980s. Experiences like this are knowledge that you do not get through reading textbooks and the reason why conferences take place, as it is tacit knowledge that still cannot be replicated through non-face-to-face communication. This, I would argue, is what makes this conference a special event, to the point that it has become my annual academic pilgrimage. [14]

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