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Introduction

Thomas S. Eberle & Manfred Max Bergman

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Abstract: This special issue presents reflections of international scholars on selected core issues of qualitative inquiry. They were produced in the context of an initiative to promote qualitative research in Switzerland, notably to build a network among qualitative researchers, to reflect on possibilities for a consensus on quality standards and teaching requirements, and to explore the viability of an archive and resource center for qualitative research.

In the first part on the why and how of qualitative methods the reasons and objectives of the initiative are delineated, and the process of resurgence, legitimation, and institutionalization of qualitative methods is described. Then three major conceptual breaks in the field of qualitative inquiry are identified, and quality concerns in qualitative methods are discussed.

In the second part on the why and how of archiving qualitative data, the situation in different European countries is presented. While France is just starting to collect qualitative data for archiving, the Qualidata archive in Great Britain has already existed for more than a decade. In Germany, the Bremen Life Course Archive has the longest experience with systematic archiving of qualitative data. Crossing national borders, the Internet brings new challenges and potentials of providing resources and services on-line. It is also argued that the qualitative-quantitative divide is not very helpful, neglecting the complementarity and proximity of the two groups of methods in research, education, and archiving. It also prevents integrated data analysis and integrated styles of research, creating different archives and different types of software. Finally, crucial experiences of the Qualidata archive in the area of user support are described and future measures discussed which should be taken.

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While qualitative inquiry is becoming increasingly important in the social sciences, it has not yet reached the same significance and reputation in Switzerland as it has in many other countries. The Social Science Policy Council, a committee of the Swiss Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences, has therefore launched an initiative to promote qualitative research in Switzerland. The goals are to build a network among qualitative researchers, to facilitate a consensus on quality standards and teaching requirements, and to explore the viability of an archive and resource center for qualitative research. As a first step, an invitational workshop was organized to learn about the experiences from our colleagues in other European countries. It was co-organized by the Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences (SIDOS) and took place in Neuchâtel on 26-27 April 2002. [1]

Extended versions of most of the conference presentations have been published in a book produced by the Swiss Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences in

2004. In this *FQS* on-line publication these papers are republished, and some of them have been updated.[1] We have grouped them into two parts: first, *the why and how of qualitative methods* and, second, *the why and how of archiving qualitative data*. [2]

Thomas S. EBERLE delineates the major objectives and reasons of this initiative. Herein he argues that the juxtaposition between qualitative and quantitative methods is problematic. Nevertheless, two camps have been formed within the scientific community, at times fighting each other and at other times proclaiming that they are complementary. However, there are few scientists who are able to practice both groups of methods competently. In fact, at most Swiss universities, mandatory training in empirical methods is restricted to quantitative methods. It is therefore no surprise that we are facing a quality problem in qualitative research: non-statistical approaches are assumed to be "qualitative" by default, which is all the more problematic as qualitative methods have become quite fashionable not only in the social sciences, but also in areas related to the social sciences, including business administration, social work, and marketing. Due to the increasing popularity in academic and applied settings in conjunction with the fuzziness of quality criteria, we must reflect more systematically about quality standards. This is a huge task, given that qualitative research encompasses a wide variety of different methods. Beyond this task, more rigorous training of our students is necessary not only in quantitative, but also in qualitative methods, as training is the most effective investment in the quality of future research. And this is what our initiative strives for. [3]

Nigel FIELDING describes the resurgence, legitimation, and institutionalization of qualitative methods. The Chicago School, using ethnographic methods, was the champion of qualitative method in the first decades of the 20th century. With PARSONS' and macro-sociology's rise at Harvard, and Columbia's growing dominance in survey research and opinion polling, US sociology shifted to a quantitative paradigm. The resurgence of qualitative method was initiated by GLASER and STRAUSS' development of Grounded Theory in 1967, and soon, methods were politicized with quantitative methods serving the establishment, while qualitative methods were democratically accessible, the method of the underdog. In the past 20 years, qualitative methods have been increasingly legitimized and institutionalized. Technologies, such as the audio-recorder, the Internet, on-line interviewing, and software to process qualitative data have helped their legitimization, while better archival resources enable follow-up studies and provide new teaching resources. New responsibilities arise: we need to address the traditional weaknesses of qualitative research, including issues relating to quality issues, generalizability, and the relationship to other methods. [4]

Veronique MOTTIER emphasizes that the choice of qualitative research techniques depends on the research question being asked: it is problem-driven rather than method-driven. Reviewing the field of qualitative inquiry, she identifies three major conceptual breaks: the "orthodox consensus" of positivism which

1 The articles by CORTI & BACKHOUSE, EBERLE, MRUCK and OPITZ & WITZEL.

conceives the social world as a collection of external facts and attempts to eliminate bias and subjectivity; post-positivist philosophy of science, which concedes that objective observation of pure data is impossible but nevertheless tries to establish criteria of "good" research practice; and the interpretive turn, which rehabilitates subjectivity and views data collection as a mutual construction of meaning. The interpretive turn has implications for history, memory, and storage of data. The researcher is engaged in "double hermeneutics" (GIDDENS), or interpretations of interpretations. However, we should not overemphasize the interactionist and contextual nature of data collection as many postmodern strands of interpretive research do. We produce objectivations, and the storage of qualitative data allows for feedback and dialogue. [5]

Manfred Max BERGMAN and *Anthony P.M. COXON* focus on quality concerns of qualitative inquiry. The crucial question is what interpretive limits, if any, are imposed on data. Neither positivistic and post-positivistic, nor an exaggerated subjectivist position are particularly helpful for empirical research, and the established concepts of validity and reliability cannot simply be transposed from one theoretical basis to another. Making analytical distinctions between the elaboration of a research question, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of research results, BERGMAN and COXON discuss examples of quality issues in each step of the research process. In addition, they ponder how a national resource center for qualitative methods can contribute to the establishment and maintenance of certain quality standards. Although many detrimental research decisions are made long before data collection has begun, it should not interfere with a researcher's choices of meta-theory and assumptions, the research topic, the definition of the constructs and the scope of the study. However, it can assist in improving the quality of data collection. The authors make a distinction between the quality of the method of data collection and the quality of the data obtained by this instrument. Illustrated by examples of interviews and focus groups, they explore criteria such as internal consistency and credibility, and advocate research designs in which the collection of meta-data allows for an empirical assessment of the meaning construction within the immediate context by the respondents. This helps also in assessing the quality of data analysis and interpretation. A national resource center could help establish and maintain quality criteria in numerous ways, including teaching, consulting, maintaining an information base, and active research. [6]

The second part of the book on *the why and how of archiving qualitative data begins with the article by Françoise CRIBIER* who reports on the current situation in France. CRIBIER was appointed by the Ministry of research to reflect on ways of preserving biographical type qualitative data from surveys conducted during the last 40 years. Neither the universities nor the "Centre national de la recherche scientifique" (CNRS) have systematically preserved the interviews, which is now seen as a considerable waste of source material. While the value of qualitative data was contested by quantitative researchers for a long time, the quantitative-qualitative relationship is less controversial nowadays. Besides the heritage value of this material, three reasons are put forward why qualitative data should be preserved: First, fresh perspectives can be gained by asking new questions to the

data analyzed in past work. Secondly, methodological groundwork can be enhanced by analyzing the practice and methods researchers apply to their data. Thirdly, qualitative data are complementary to quantitative data. The following steps were designed to build up the project: taking an inventory of existing documents as well as of all past surveys from the last 30-40 years; developing a culture of preservation; creating a single resource database which can be searched on-line via a "portal" and developing ethical principles and legal rules for its use. [7]

While France is just starting, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in Great Britain started a Qualitative Data Archival Resource Centre (Qualidata) at the University of Essex already in 1994 after a survey showed that most social science qualitative research material from projects funded by the ESRC was at risk or already lost. *Louise CORTI* and *Gill BACKHOUSE* report on the history of this resource center and their practices and experiences in acquiring and making available qualitative data. In the early years Qualidata undertook a salvage operation to rescue the most significant material generated by research in previous years. In an initial survey, existing repositories of qualitative research material across the UK were identified and a significant amount of archived data revealed. Three more surveys were conducted by contacting researchers who had collected qualitative data, sometimes as far back as 1945. Important data could be gathered just before it was to be destroyed, and a database with thousands of records was developed. To avoid the unnecessary waste of the past, Qualidata worked with the ESRC and the ESRC Data Archive to develop a Datasets Policy, established in 1995, which requires all award-holders to offer for deposit copies of both machine-readable quantitative data, and machine and non-machine-readable qualitative data. Depositors are advised to contact the two Resource Centers early in the research process to ensure that datasets are well-documented, free of confidentiality or license constraints, and usable for secondary analysis. Meanwhile, Qualidata has succeeded in gaining acceptance for the deposit and re-use of qualitative data material amongst the academic community. In several tables, CORTI and BACKHOUSE give an overview of the acquisitions of the past years. They then describe the criteria Qualidata uses in evaluating qualitative data for archiving and compare them with those of the US national qualitative data archive, closing with a summary of the main points for a successful qualitative data acquisition strategy. [8]

Diane OPITZ and *Andreas WITZEL* report on the situation in Germany. Although qualitative research plays an important role in current German Social Sciences, and although the development of text analysis software nowadays allows for a systematic organization of qualitative data, hardly any qualitative data is archived in Germany. Quantitative data of funded research projects, however, must be handed in to the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research in Cologne (ZA) since 1960. The Bremen Life Course Archive is an exception: based on a recommendation from the German Research Council (DFG), the last phase of research for the Special Collaborative Center 186 "Status Passages and the Risk of Life Course" was dedicated to develop the concept and architecture of an archive of a large number of qualitative interviews which have been made

anonymous and documented in a computerized format. The archive organizes approximately 700 interview texts from four different projects with a system of a text data bank especially developed for this purpose. Before creating the archive, a detailed concept of anonymity and data protection had to be developed in accordance to the German Federal Law. The data are very sensitive as most interviewees in biographical interviews give very detailed reports about their lives. On the other hand, secondary analysis of qualitative data requires information on the whole context. The authors describe the strategies of anonymization that were finally chosen. The extension of the Life Course Archive to a nation-wide central archive is presently under consideration. A pilot study showed that more than half of the researchers expressed their willingness to make data material available for secondary analysis and comparative studies, and that the majority would (re-)use data material already found in archives for their own projects. A feasibility study aims at further exploring these issues and developing an innovative concept for putting qualitative data into archives, in collaboration with archives and institutions in other countries. [9]

Katja MRUCK ponders the challenges and potentials of providing resources and services on-line. The Internet has become a place to exchange concepts but also to network with qualitative researchers, nationally as well as internationally. New ways have arisen to directly provide and share resources and services, and it is time to think about these issues more concretely and systematically: Which kinds of resources and services should be provided for a national audience, and which of these—by means of the Internet—should be provided collaboratively by partners from different nations? Which resources and services are actually essential for the field of qualitative research? Which should be provided off-line, and which on-line? MRUCK names three obvious tasks of national centers for qualitative research: data archives and support for researchers to use them, consulting services for qualitative research and teaching, and information and communication bases for qualitative researchers. She adds new tasks which pop up on the horizon, like the combination of on-line and off-line publishing, and she discusses issues with which services have to struggle, like discourse or translation problems for different audiences. MRUCK proposes a general orientation which is interdisciplinary and international and suggests that we closely inform each other, share and coordinate resources and services, and delegate some parts which are too big. In order to network the networkers, she describes how one can learn from others, and she calls for a joint effort to advance and institutionalize qualitative social research. [10]

Dominique JOYE emphasizes the complementarity and proximity of quantitative and qualitative approaches on three different levels: in data archiving, education, and research. In archiving, there are a number of technical issues to solve as qualitative data are, compared to quantitative data, less standardized and have many formats. Archiving is more than conservation, it means distribution, that is, publication. For teaching it is important to create data sets, which can be used for secondary data analysis (which is economical). The creation of exemplary data sets is also essential for further developing methodology because research documentation constitutes, beyond transparency and reproducibility, the

foundation of a "good methodology" and of "standards." Archives also allow for the study of change as they inform on former states. JOYE points to the possible synergies between archiving, teaching, and research, and sees the task of a national archive and resource center to link the local with the global: to develop trust by proximity to the researcher, and to help improve methodological resources and competences in accordance with international standards. [11]

"What does the user need?" is the guiding question of the following article. *Anthony P.M. COXON* infers from the current user's frustration that software and data storage should not be separated. He observes that programs developed and used for data analysis follow user-demand in many ways, but they also embody implicit preconceptions of what is "appropriate" data. In particular, they reinforce the distinction between quality and quantity by effectively dictating what is and what is not taken into consideration. Although this distinction is fairly commonplace, it refers to several levels of discourse and is therefore incoherent. COXON stakes a claim for an integrative middle ground and shows with two examples of his own research that integrated data also have their needs. The main problem he encountered when archiving the data from the first research example was that the Archive would only accept data which could be processed by "quantitative" programs as it had no facilities for storage of the verbal materials which were analyzed by "qualitative" content analysis programs. The second research example again produced different types of data which now are stored at three different archives. COXON concludes that if software producers keep up the qualitative and quantitative divide and archives cannot lodge different types of data, integrated data analysis and integrated styles or research will be prevented. The teaching and practice of data collection and analysis should be restructured so that it assumes integration. [12]

In the last contribution, *Louise CORTI* shares her experiences on the user support of the Qualitative Data Service (Qualidata) and the UK Data Archive (UKDA) Users Service in Great Britain. An archive should not only store data but offer services to its users. CORTI recommends widening the definition of "users" to include all groups and individuals who have regular or systematic contact with the service. She identifies six distinct categories of users: data creators and potential depositors of data; depositors and data suppliers; those enquiring about re-using data; those who are re-using data either for research or for teaching and learning; those who have re-used data; and those who have an interest in acquiring knowledge about the workings of or procedures used by a data archive. CORTI describes the services offered to each of them, the problems involved and future measures which should be taken. She concludes by advocating a user support strategy that is both reactive and proactive to a wide range of communities, from those in research, teaching and learning, to archivists and professional social researchers seeking training and advice. An Archive and Resource Center for Qualitative Research requires good leadership, management and forward-thinking to keep one step ahead of users' needs. And it is critical that its staff is highly trained, can offer one-on-one support and is willing to initiate and take part in outreach and training activities. The better the support

team and program of work, the more likely a culture of sharing and re-using qualitative data will spread. [13]

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Authors

Thomas Samuel EBERLE

Present position: Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Institute of Sociology, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. Currently President of the Swiss Sociological Association. Chair of the Research Network "Qualitative Methods" of the European Sociological Association (ESA) 2001-2003.

Major research areas: phenomenological sociology; sociology of knowledge; methodology; sociology of culture, communication and organizations.

Contact:

Thomas Samuel Eberle

Institute of Sociology
University of St. Gallen
Tigerbergstrasse 2 / Blumenbergplatz 9 (1.10.05)
9000 St. Gallen, Switzerland

E-mail: thomas.eberle@unisg.ch
URL: http://www.sfs.unisg.ch/

Manfred Max BERGMAN

Present position: Professor of Sociology, University of Basel, Switzerland.

Major research areas: quality assessment; data theory; mixed methods design; inequality; stratification; exclusion; discrimination.

Contact:

Manfred Max Bergman

Institute of Sociology
University of Basel
Petersgraben 27
4051 Basel, Switzerland

E-mail: max.bergman@unibas.ch
URL: http://pages.unibas.ch/soziologie/org/personal/index.html

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