



European
Sociological
Association

Research Network 20 Qualitative Methods

Biennial Report

2017–2019

Membership

The RN 20 has currently (as of November 2019) 123 formally affiliated members. The members are from 27 different countries worldwide.

Outgoing Coordinators 2017–2019

- Coordinator (inactive): Lukas Marciniak, l.t.marciniak@gmail.com
- Co-coordinator (acting coordinator): Florian Elliker, florian.elliker@unisg.ch

Incoming Coordinators 2019–2021

- Coordinator: Florian Elliker, florian.elliker@unisg.ch
- Co-coordinator: Ulrike T. Kissmann, ulrike.kissmann@uni-kassel.de

Further members of the active board

- Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson, VIVE – The Danish Centre of Applied Social Science, Denmark, TTB@vive.dk
- Gerben Moerman, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, gmoerman@uva.nl (former chair and vice-chair)
- Silvia Cataldi, Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy, silvia.cataldi@uniroma1.it

Midterm conference 2018 “Unexplored realities” (St.Gallen, Switzerland)

The ESA RN 20 Qualitative Methods Midterm Conference was held in St. Gallen, Switzerland from 6-8 September 2018, organized by Florian Elliker (co-coordinator RN20) and Niklaus Reichle with the support of Prof. Dr. Peter Schallberger (University of Applied Sciences FHS St.Gallen), Prof. Dr. Christoph Maeder (Zurich University of Teacher Education), and Prof. em. Thomas S. Eberle (University of St.Gallen). The theme of the conference was “Unspoken, Unseen, Unheard of Unexplored Realities in Qualitative Research”. Keynotes addresses were held by Prof. em. Patricia Adler (University of Colorado, USA), Prof. Ross Koppel (University of Pennsylvania, USA) and David Howes (Concordia University, Canada). Vaike Fors (Halmstad University, Sweden), another confirmed keynote speaker, had to cancel her lecture (on sensory ethnography) on short notice. Ross Koppel spoke about the often invisible yet highly relevant reality of IT information systems that undergird and shape the organizational world of hospitals and health care in general (“On the Four Voices Negotiating Your Medical Care: Your Body, Your Medical Record, Your Clinician – and, Now, Your Personal Data”). Patricia A. Adler presented a study conducted together with Peter Adler about how the digitization of contemporary life-worlds changed the practice of self-injury from an individual, isolated form behavior to a form of action that is much more informed by socially derived knowledge on self-injury and its technologically mediated representation (“The Demedicalization of Self-Injury”). David Howes spoke of the challenges and opportunities of employing more than just the visual and auditory sense in qualitative and particularly in ethnographic research, not only focusing on means of collection and on using corresponding artefacts, but also concerning the communication of research results (“Sensory Ethnography and the Method of Participant Sensation”). In his opening address, Florian Elliker situated the upcoming sessions and keynote lectures in the broader conference theme “unexplored realities”, particularly highlighting both the challenges that transposing signs, symbols, and sensory impressions from one medium into another pose methodological and the contemporary challenges and opportunities qualitative research methods face, also (but not only) in the face of automation technologies and digitization.

The conference attracted over 100 participants from Europe and beyond. On the day before the conference, the keynote speakers held three full day qualitative methods workshops: Participant observation and membership roles (Patricia A. and Peter Adler), “Multiple Methods in Social-Scientific Medical Research – On Using Qualitative Methods to Start and End Research— and Quantitative Methods In-Between” (Ross Koppel), and “Sensing Objects and Environments” (David Howes).

In line with one of the thematic strands of the conference – that of media transposition –, art works by Jan K. Coetzee (a member of the senior board) as well as paintings that originated from a collaboration of Jörgen Sparf with a visual artist were on display throughout the conference. While Jan K. Coetzee used and combined historic material artefacts and objects to reflect on the fundamental (sociological) themes of the *conditio humana*, the paintings articulated the findings of a qualitative research project on rural resilience (led by Jörgen Sparf) using artistic means of visual expression in addition to the conventional use of text.

Manchester conference 2019

The RN 20 has organized a stream of qualitative methods sessions, joint sessions, and a semi-plenary session.

The semi-plenary session hosted Ruth Wodak, Prof. em. at Lancaster University, UK and Elijah Anderson, Sterling Professor of Sociology and of African American Studies at Yale University, USA as keynote speakers. Titled “What Boundaries are (not) needed for: Conceptualizing boundaries beyond the metaphor”, the aim of the semi-plenary was to discuss how boundaries are experienced empirically and how these experiences in turn inform the sociological conceptualization and theorisation of boundaries. In her presentation titled “Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Racialization of Space”, Ruth Wodak discussed the securitization, economization, and moralization of borders via specific discursive forms of argumentation and legitimation of exclusion. Complementing this discourse-analytical approach, Elijah Anderson spoke of his experiences both as urban ethnographer and academic of the boundaries experienced by black persons in the USA: “Living while Black: What Black folk know”. The semi-plenary drew a large audience and was very well received.

Upon the initiative of the RN20, a new session slot was introduced in which no parallel sessions were held, enabling all RN members to be present. This slot was used to organise a session of the state of the art and the future of qualitative research. It consisted of short contributions by four panellists (Uwe Flick, Paul Atkinson, Ulrike T. Kissmann and Silvia Cataldi) and an open discussion amongst the members of the RN and other audience.

In 12 qualitative methods sessions, 46 presentations were held on the situatedness of data collection, the use of the senses and media in qualitative research, on boundaries in qualitative research methodologies, and on collaborative data collection (amongst other themes). Particularly the themes on using other senses than the visual and auditory sense for research and the increased digitization of contemporary life-worlds and the resulting challenges and opportunities for qualitative research are continuously discussed (at the midterm conference 2018 in St.Gallen, Switzerland and 2020 in Kassel, Germany).

The four joint-sessions reflect the ongoing tradition of the RN20 to collaborate and cooperate across boundaries of methodologies and subject-specific research traditions: “Crossing Methodological Boundaries: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Economic Sociology” (with RN09 Economic Sociology and RN21 Quantitative Methods), “Co-creation/Production/Design in Health and Healthcare: Cutting-Edge Approach or Smart Branding?” (with RN16 Sociology of Health and Illness), “Decolonizing Social Research: Practices and Reflections on the Democratization of Social Research” (with RN27 Regional Network of Southern European Societies), and “Qualitative Research in the Field of Sport and Embodiment” (with RN28 Society and Sports).

With regards to the executive ESA-board, former RN20 chair and current member of the board Gerben Moerman ran as candidate again. As in the last elections in Athens in 2017, he was not voted in by a very small margin.

PhD students and early career researchers

Our network aims to encourage PhD students and early career researchers to participate in our conferences and usually offers qualitative methods workshops on the day before our midterm conferences. In St.Gallen 2018, the

keynote speakers held three full day qualitative methods workshops: Participant observation and membership roles (Patricia A. and Peter Adler), “Multiple Methods in Social-Scientific Medical Research – On Using Qualitative Methods to Start and End Research—and Quantitative Methods In-Between” (Ross Koppel), and “Sensing Objects and Environments” (David Howes). This tradition will be continued at the conference in Kassel, Germany.

Collaboration with other research networks

The RN20 regularly cooperates with other ESA research networks, mainly in the context of the ESA conferences and midterm conferences. At the last ESA conference in Manchester, joint sessions were organized with the RN09 Economic Sociology, RN21 Quantitative Methods, RN16 Sociology of Health and Illness, RN27 Regional Network of Southern European Societies, RN28 Society and Sports. At the last midterm conference in St.Gallen and the future midterm in Kassel, the RN20 cooperated with the RN28 and the RN03 (Biographic Perspectives on European Societies) by offering thematic session that focus on the research interests of the members of the respective research networks.

Midterm conference 2020 “Seeing and the other senses” (Kassel, Germany)

The next RN20 midterm conference will be held in Kassel, Germany from 26–28 August 2020, organized by our co-coordinator Ulrike Kissmann and titled “Seeing and the Other Senses – Making Sense of the Senses Through Language. Opportunities and Challenges in Qualitative Research”. The conference is organized along five major themes: Accountability of the senses, visualization, new forms of data, sensual dimensions of language, and biographies and biographical analysis. The last thematic stream is included to strengthen the collaboration with RN03 Biographical Perspectives on European Societies, the board of which has been invited to propose paper sessions for the conference.

The call for paper emphasizes that the senses have been increasingly recognized as a means and subject-matter of empirical research. Whereas texts have a long-standing tradition as matter of investigation, current studies analyze how sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing are made accountable in interactions. The end of the linguistic turn already changed the focus of qualitative research and provided the non-verbal elements of communication more significance. However, many aspects of interactions are still unexplored. Apart from comparatively few studies, smell, taste and touch have only begun to be of interest for qualitative researchers. Equally, hearing is a neglected field. Sounds as well as language can be heard. Up to now, the sensual dimensions of hearing have been overlooked in empirical studies such as, for example, the sensuality of pleasant sounds or voices. In contrast, many dimensions of sight have been explicated and the related knowledge was made available. Due to the accessibility of visualization techniques, body movements and facial expressions have become observable and are the subject matter of professional assessment, such as in sport or in police conflict training. Seeing and visualization are particularly important for the articulation of implicit knowledge. Although it can hardly be verbalized, it can be observed. The way sailors’ knots are tied, for example, can scarcely be described by

word of mouth. But the related implicit knowledge can be made visible and learned from pictures. Seeing takes a special position among the senses, as it lends itself particularly well to mediate and explicate knowledge. Visual data have been recognized as adequate empirical data and are currently utilized along with textual data. Both are treated as quasi “objective” information such as numbers. However, it is still an open issue which dimensions of the other senses can be explicated and objectified. The conference will therefore ask how we make sense of the senses. How is sense articulated? Which dimensions of the senses can be translated into language and which dimensions elude this translation?

For the former and the present coordinator and co-coordinator of RN20
November 2019,

Florian Elliker and Ulrike T. Kissmann