

## **FQS—Some Final Remarks on the First Issue**

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### **1. Opening Remarks**

The aim of the *FQS* opening issue was to give a fragmentary overview on approaches, methodical procedures, developments and (possible) perspectives for qualitative social research in different disciplines and countries. [1]

Many contributions in the first issue are available in both German and English. Among these are contributions dealing with the implementation of a qualitative research orientation, e.g. in disciplines or countries where they have previously only existed in the periphery of debates surrounding qualitative social research. Other contributions present methods/approaches that to date have only been nationally known and critically acknowledged. [2]

The main emphases and authors included in the first issue evolved to some extent pragmatically. People who were known in the "scene" or contacts which the editors had already had, were asked to participate. In the long run, we are interested in systematizing and supplementing information regarding approaches, disciplines and countries which, up until now, has been necessarily incomplete (see Section 3.). [3]

In the following, some considerations which emerged while reviewing the contributions included in the first issue will be briefly mentioned. [4]

### **2. The First Issue**

By reading the contributions included in this *FQS* issue, one may suppose that the qualitative social research approach has in many ways grown out of its "baby shoes" and—spoken in biographic-metaphoric terms—now finds itself in the pubescent phase of development. (Although this diagnosis does not apply to all of the different scientific disciplines and countries in the same way.) This impression arose from the following observation: In many social science disciplines "quantitative" methods constitute the mainstream, while minority or rather peripheral groups work "qualitatively", seemingly in opposition to the "quantitative" scientific orientation. The representatives of the mainstream usually prescribe to a (fictitious) ideal model for scientific knowledge production and often discredit (openly or behind closed doors) "qualitative" approaches as being unscientific. Authors that principally prefer qualitative methods (or rather,

"believe" in these) find themselves in a much criticized position: They must confront the seemingly very powerful "quantitatively" oriented scientific community and are to a great part influenced by this critical attitude. The "repression" through mainstream proponents is often complained about, and the doubtful voices are responded to with defensive justifications. Often, an enormous argumentative effort is made in the hope of finding legitimization and scientific dignity for one's own methodical approach. It is not always clear which potential reader one is trying to reach or to convince through such, often very global, argumentative efforts. (We, functioning as both editors and reviewers for this *FQS* Issue, oftentimes bid the authors to refrain from this kind of justifying argumentation). One can conclude that many of the proponents of qualitative social research could use a bit more self-confidence and matter-of-factness in terms of the scientific value of their own way of thinking and working. [5]

The constructive aspect, which is likewise inherent in the "pubescent" situation, is that scientists are working on developing and formulating programs for an alternative (qualitative) research approach, thereby considering important methodological aspects, investigating methodical postulates, etc. These conceptions have not been able to fully prove their problem-solving potential. The proponents of qualitative research live to a great part on the promise and belief that they are working with the "better" and "more appropriate" instrument. Their concrete and methodological postulates are very heterogeneous. And now and then we should heed the warning not to try and match the "quantitative mainstream" by turning around the relationship between methods usage and the research question under consideration. [6]

The fact that *FQS* was founded—strangely enough in a time where many "qualitative social research" journals and books were likewise appearing offline on the German-language scene—is possibly a sign that a new development phase is being entered, upon which the pubescent phase can be left behind. The "young people" are becoming self-reliant, even in disciplines whose more recent traditions are quite the opposite. They are making their own way, building their own structures and communication networks, publishing their own journals, etc. They have started upon the "road through (instead of against) the institutions". It seems quite possible that the qualitative method will come to its own in the near future, stepping out of its peripheral position and playing a stronger role in those social sciences, where, until now, this way of thinking has been barred or rather discredited. [7]

### **3. Following Issues**

Certain basic principles for qualitative social research, that already appear in the first issue, will be successively unfolded, specified and systematized in coming issues. A first step will concern the various orientations of disciplines: Issue 2 will deal with the continuing debates, the focus on problems, and the (sub-) cultures working in qualitative research in (German-language) Psychology. Issue 6 will attempt to cover Cultural Sciences, Issue 7 Criminology. We would like to offer a

similar synopsis for other disciplines, e.g. Sociology, Ethnology, Educational Sciences, History and so on. [8]

Other issues of *FQS* will encompass content that is essential, on a level that goes beyond national and disciplinary discourse. Among these is Issue 3, which will deal with important questions regarding documentation, archiving and re-analysis, Issue 4, which will delve into the relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods, and Issue 8, which will take a look at the usage of technology in the qualitative research process. While this part of qualitative social research is presently receiving a lot of attention, and seems to be interesting even for quantitatively oriented researchers (and to have potential for research funding), a second part is less favored though equally important. This part, while for funders a less attractive topos, deals with the very important and central implications that an interpretive paradigm has. That is why both Issue 5 ("Interpretation – One Text, Varying Readings ") and 9 ("Subjectivity and Reflexivity within the Qualitative Research Process ") are devoted to uncovering this otherwise neglected area. [9]

Other topics for future issues are currently being discussed: This includes the application of qualitative methods in fields that have (re-)formed themselves and that to some extent now stand askance to the old academic disciplines: Evaluation, Knowledge Management, Health Sciences and so on. Also included is the methodical and methodological move to the medium Internet, without which *FQS* would not exist, and the challenges for online research and teachings that are integrally connected to this change. (The question of the teachability and learnability of qualitative research—online and offline—will be discussed in a separate issue.) [10]

By aid of online offers (discussion boards, chats, comments), debates, inquiries, criticisms, etc. with persons from many different fields of study, all gathering around the following *FQS*-Issues and the contributions they will contain, an intensive exchange should be made possible. We hope that even the first Issue will initiate this process, which surely calls for much patience, tolerance and willingness to cooperate! [11]

## Authors

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