

## Editorial: About Qualitative Research Centers and Peripheries

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"But along the way, my belief in having a good overview was put into question as my experience with the Internet grew: I began to encounter a great number of colleagues and their contributions from other countries, disciplines, and scientific cultures. After an initial irritation in suddenly finding myself to be a learner/novice instead of an expert (what I had been considered to be after years of practicing with qualitative research methods), my curiosity soon was aroused. I found myself in a state where I could take the opportunity to reevaluate both my understanding of myself and my recognition of qualitative research."<sup>1</sup>

It was this surprise and re-evaluation—a kind of disciplinary, national, professional and personal contextualization—we experienced while working on the first issue of *FQS* near in 1999. In that first issue we published (necessarily incomplete) insights on the state of qualitative research in Germany, Japan, Mexico, the United States, vis-à-vis the usage of qualitative methods even in disciplines as specialized as agricultural economics. Altogether, authors from 10 countries and 15 disciplines participated in the opening issue, and many others followed during the years: we learned about German and Canadian qualitative psychology, about qualitative methods used in criminology, in the cultural sciences, in the sport sciences, and in qualitative market, media and opinion research, to mention just a few of the 19 *FQS* issues and 709 articles published since 2000 (see <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/rubriken-e.htm> to access the tables of content and full texts). [1]

As ATKINSON (2005, p.1) summarizes, there is "no question that qualitative research of many varieties has flourished on a global scale over the past twenty years."<sup>2</sup> Qualitative research in this process has had the enviable, or some might say unenviable, task of forcing researchers employing positivistic methodologies to step back and reflect upon their research practices and epistemological assumptions. Positivism and its concomitant quantification are worthy adversaries, indeed making it a struggle, for many, if not most, social scientists aim for scientific respectability. And respectability is assessed most often through the lens of positivism. Even today with perspectives on knowledge changing rapidly, there is still a need on the part of many social scientists to focus on positivistic approaches. [2]

*FQS* has provided an outlet for those of us who recognize the importance of and need for qualitative research. One gets the sense reading *FQS* of the changes afoot and the urgency of bringing about change in how research is practiced.

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1 In MRUCK in collaboration with MEY (2000, p.1).

2 It should be mentioned that ATKINSON argues against some implications of this variety. From his (sociological) perspective we first "need to retain a structural, formal sense of the multiple orderings of talk, action, things, places and so on. Secondly, we cannot afford to allow such analysis to become the preserve of small coteries of specialists, while a generalised 'qualitative research' proceeds uninformed by such formal analysis" (2005, p.19).

Being a German psychologist, a Mexican sociologist, a Northern American psychologist we learned about the *variety and heterogeneity* of qualitative research and we also thought about possible criteria for what *unity* of qualitative research might mean under a transdisciplinary and international perspective. [3]

Sociologists contributed to all *FQS* issues. But it took until today to publish an *FQS* issue, collaboratively organized by qualitative sociologists, more precisely, qualitative sociologists from Europe<sup>3</sup>. The contributions, published today provide unique insights into the variety and richness of qualitative social research in Europe (without limiting the issue to a solely European perspective). It is our hope that they will help to bring scientific knowledge and experiences, partly until now limited to national audiences, to the attention of the international research community, so that in the future international references to this knowledge will be possible. We will use this very special opportunity to summarize possible future lines of discussion, and we welcome—as for the whole issue—comments, critique, and feedback. [4]

Interestingly, the issue is not titled "Qualitative Methods in Various Disciplines V: *Sociology*", but *FQS* 6(3) is titled "The State of the Art of *Qualitative Research* in Europe." This partly reflects the state of the art of qualitative research not only in Europe, because sociology is often recognized as a kind of "qualitative main discipline," while others are regarded as "secondary disciplines" (for a more extensive elaboration of this relation for German sociology and psychology see MRUCK & MEY 2005). Similarly, a kind of center-periphery structure is not only working (and constructed) on a disciplinary, but also on a national level with Anglo-Saxon qualitative research on the one hand (often described as rather homogenous), and non-Anglo-Saxon qualitative research on the other hand (characterized by national diversity and heterogeneity): "if Europeans meet on any topic, the situation looks quite different from meetings of American researchers. Whereas the latter share a common language and a tight network of communication so that everyone present knows what is happening, in Europe the situation is much more similar to what the Italians would call a "minestrone" (KNOBLAUCH, FLICK & MAEDER 2005, p.2). [5]

If one takes a closer look at the non-Anglo-Saxon "peripheries," for sure the ingredients of the European qualitative minestrone are not just national ones: While organizing the "1<sup>st</sup> Berlin Meeting on Qualitative Research Methods" (<http://www.berliner-methodentreffen.de/>) for German language researchers in June 2005 at Freie Universitaet Berlin, the disciplinary differences (theoretical, methodological, methodical preferences, etc.) were obvious. Insofar the "hegemonic position" of (national) sociology is partly a (self) construction of sociologists (and others), and the editors of this issue were aware of a possible "sociological bias" (see KNOBLAUCH et al. 2005, p.7). In addition, talking about sociology (on a national level), it may be more appropriate to talk about

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3 *FQS* 6(3) was edited by Hubert KNOBLAUCH, former President of the Research Network Qualitative Methods in the European Sociological Association, Uwe FLICK, Chair of the Division Methods of Qualitative Research in the German Sociological Association, and Christoph MAEDER, Chair of the Swiss Sociological Association's Research Committee on Interpretive Methods.

sociologies in the plural. If one takes into account the Latin American situation, there already exists a kind of "sociological minestrone" because of the large number of work groups (27) forming the Latin American Sociology Association. There was no specific group on qualitative methods in the past, but during the XXV Conference held in August 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the Work Group 17 "Methodology and Epistemology of Social Sciences" was divided into "quantitative" and "qualitative" sections, even though qualitative researchers are dispersed in other work groups, such as "Social Theory and Latin-American Thinking," "Civil Society: Protest and Social Movements," among others; similar processes occurred in the German Sociological Association (see FLICK 2005 and HITZLER 2005 for the polyphony of German sociology). [6]

On the other hand, for the Anglo-Saxon qualitative research homogeneity works (and is constructed) mainly if one's attention is limited to the (surely impressive) output of a few North American researchers or to the (surely extensive) catalog of Sage Publications as a kind of common frame of reference for researchers from diverse national backgrounds. If one looks at the contributors to the "Handbook of Qualitative Research" (DENZIN & LINCOLN 2000) it seems as if qualitative research must be to a large degree a male, white, Anglo-Saxon, and more concretely North American domain with focuses especially on sociology, nursing, anthropology and communication; additionally "an image of contemporary qualitative research [is promoted] that is relentlessly innovative, allied to postmodernist views of social inquiry" (ATKINSON 2005, p.6). Even though DENZIN and LINCOLN (2005) tried to include different styles of thinking (e.g. racial, ethnic, gender, cultural and national) in the 2005 edition of the *Handbook*, this tendency remains. [7]

Relying mainly on such handbooks and similar publications may not only reproduce the Anglo-Saxon myth<sup>4</sup>, but may be accompanied by another possible bias: while working on this issue we recognized that in some cases an additional center-periphery structure—beside the disciplinary and national ones—worked: a kind off-line/on-line gap. (Although following the impact of the Internet on science it is increasingly difficult to identify where and what the center and what periphery are in one's perspective; this in some regards may be true also for other center-periphery distinctions.) For example KUSENBACH (2005) in her article about "Current Issues and Debates in US Ethnography" provides profound knowledge about the Northern American "off-line world," but the important work of Australian, Canadian, and Northern American colleagues, providing on-line resources for the international community, is not even mentioned (similarly FLICK 2005): we like to remind our readers of The *Qualitative Report*, the first on-line journal dedicated to qualitative research and launched in 1990 at Nova Southeastern University (<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/>); the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*

4 See for example GOBO (2005), whose description of the "The Renaissance of Qualitative Methods" is a (his)story, more or less implicitly written from a sociological and Anglo-Saxon perspective and widely relying on what Sage has published, although GOBO comes from Italy and is well informed about the Italian situation (see BRUNI & GOBO 2005). Presenting an overview over qualitative research beyond disciplinary and national borders often ends in the (re) production of the Anglo-Saxon myth, the ascribed dominance and leadership of Anglo-Saxon and especially North American qualitative research.

(<http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>), launched in 2002 by the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, University of Alberta; the mailing list *Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences*, launched in 1991 at University of Georgia (<http://listserv.uga.edu/archives/qualrs-l.html>); a mailing list on auto-ethnography (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/autoethnography/>) has begun this year; action research resources have been provided for some time at Southern Cross University (<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html>), to mention just a few pioneers. (See the interviews with Ron CHENAIL, Bob DICK, Carolyn ELLIS, Jan MORSE, and Jude PREISSLE in the "Special Issue: FQS Interviews," containing additionally interviews with Aaron CICOUREL, Julie CORBIN, and Anselm STRAUSS and with many other non-American researchers [<http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/inhalt3-04-e.htm>].) [8]

The papers presented in this issue demonstrate—"despite the concentration on the (self-) selected countries we cover here—there is a diversity that is much broader and richer than virtually all textbooks on qualitative methods can cover" (KNOBLAUCH et al. 2005, p.5). Indeed, the contributions on the state of the art of qualitative research in different nations published in *FQS 6(3)* require completion and comments if we are truly interested in avoiding "national catechisms." It will be a future task to provide additional disciplinary and national insights and to systematically link the efforts published today, in former *FQS* issues, and elsewhere, to receive a more comprehensive picture of the landscape of international qualitative research. There is no need, as VALLES and BAER (2005) stressed in discussing the situation in Spain, to write new histories of qualitative research or to produce new canons. But there seems to be a need to be as critical of the outcomes of decontextualized writing as many researchers are already against the outcomes of decontextualized research practices. We need to know more about what is happening in the different (national, disciplinary, medial) "peripheries" to learn about the conceptual roots of our current practices and to act in a future globalized academia, opening our minds to the fascinating diversity (and unity?) of our memories, images, styles, focus, strategies and life-worlds as qualitative researchers. [9]

It is our hope that the *FQS* issue published today will be an important step in this direction. The role of *FQS* in this process can be "to provide a helpful forum to develop, receive and publish these discussions that follow as the result of the papers presented in this special issue," as KNOBLAUCH et al. (2005, p.10) write in their introduction. Others will contribute their part, online and offline<sup>5</sup>, and especially other open access journals like the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, the *International Journal for Ideographic Science* (launched in the United States 2005), the *Qualitative Sociology Review* (launched in Poland 2005) and *The Qualitative Report* may serve as additional sites for discussions, as researchers from all other the world are able to access them as they access *FQS* without barriers<sup>6</sup>. But even in the case of open access journals other barriers besides paying for access appear to continue: Currently, the monthly *FQS*

5 There is, for example, an early effort to create an International Association of Qualitative Inquiry (<http://www.c4qi.org/iaqi/in.html>).

6 See <http://www.doaj.org/> for refereed open access journals.

newsletter is distributed to colleagues in 110 countries and from numerous disciplines. Many of them still have no voice in the international qualitative research endeavor, and they, as all others, are warmly invited to share their knowledge and their ideas about the past, present and future of qualitative research! [10]

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