FQS FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Volume 26, No. 1, Art. 12
January 2025

Teaching Studios as Spaces of Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Shaping a Transitional Phase in Teaching Qualitative Research Methods

Nicole Weydmann, Andrea Ploder & Jeannine Wintzer

Key words: teaching qualitative methods; interdisciplinarity; collaboration; teaching studios; liminality; professional learning communities

Abstract: Qualitative social research and methodological education are currently undergoing significant transformations. In the context of new research questions, fields, and approaches, in addition to the expansion of qualitative teaching programs, generational shifts among instructors and changes in higher education policy and advancements in technology, new opportunities as well as challenges for higher education (instructors) are being created. In this paper we conceptualize the current state of qualitative methodology education through the lens of liminality (TURNER, 1991 [1969]), framing it as work at the threshold where established routines have been dismantled and new ones are yet to emerge. We interpret the establishment of the *Lehrwerkstätten-Netzwerk* [Network of Teaching Studios] in 2022 as an expression of this liminality and report (from the perspective of participants) on its development. We view the teaching studios as an interdisciplinary format in which educators collectively navigate this transitional phase: They engage (similar to *professionelle Lerngemeinschaften* [professional learning communities], BONSEN & ROLF, 2006) in the professionalization of qualitative methodology instruction while simultaneously fostering a collaborative academic culture that may extend beyond qualitative methods. We discuss current challenges within the network and provide an outlook on potential developments and dynamics of the Teaching Studio format.

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1. Prologue[1]

We have been actively involved in the network of qualitative teaching studios (from here on: TeachNet) since its inception. We speak from the context of universities in three countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), from different disciplines (health sciences, sociology and geography), and as members of different qualitative teaching studios (from here on: Teaching Studios). [1]

Nicole WEYDMANN, a tenured professor of qualitative research methods, benefits from academic freedom. However, as a faculty member at a university of applied sciences, she is embedded in a health sciences program dominated by quantitative methods. With a teaching load of 18 or more semester hours per week, she is compelled to ensure efficiency in her teaching. Her commitment has enabled the building of TeachNet, and she is an active member of multiple Teaching Studios. Andrea PLODER, an assistant professor for qualitative methods, has more time for planning and designing her teaching with a workload of four semester hours per week. However, her tenure decision primarily depends on a strong publication record and successful acquisition of third-party funding. She is a member of the Teaching Studio "Teaching Qualitative Methods in Large Groups." Jeannine WINTZER, a lecturer in qualitative methods, holds a permanent 50% position with a teaching load of four semester hours per week. Due to her lecturer status, she experiences less pressure to publish discipline-based research which enables her, among other things, to contribute to the publication of handbooks about qualitative methods and methodology. She is a member of the Teaching Studio "Teaching Qualitative Methods in Large Groups" as well as another Teaching Studio. Members of TeachNet encompass a broad range of positionalities, of which we represent only a fraction. The backgrounds, working conditions, experiences, and needs of many other participants remain either invisible or are only partially reflected here. With this contribution, we seek to initiate a series within the *FQS* debate on Teaching and Learning Qualitative Methods, in which further perspectives within the TeachNet can be made visible. [2]

1 We generated the English version of this paper with the AI-software DeepL. The translation was proofread by us and edited by Jeannette REAGAN, with the financial support of the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern, followed by a final proofreading by members of the *FQS* team.

2. Introduction: Transformations in Teaching Qualitative Research and Methods

German-speaking qualitative social research is currently undergoing a phase of transformation.[2] Many pioneers of the first and second generation whose academic careers began in the 1970s and 1980s, are retiring from active university service. At the same time, younger scholars are stepping in, bringing new ideas, topics, and methodological orientations into universities and into the decision-making bodies of extramural funding institutions.[3] Over the past decades, the field grew significantly and has now reached an unprecedented historical scale. These developments are accompanied by debates concerning the identity, history, and future of qualitative research. [3]

These generational shifts coincide with broader societal transformations which have recently been framed under the umbrella term of *multiple crises*. Examples include the social distancing measures alongside the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s (AUTOR:INNENGRUPPE AEDIL, 2021; PIERBURG, 2022; REICHERTZ, 2021) and technological advancements in digitalization (SCHREIER & RUPPEL, 2021), particularly in artificial intelligence (CHRISTOU, 2023; GROVE, 2023; JAYACHANDRAN, BIRADAVOLU & COOPER, 2023).[4] As a result, new research fields and questions have emerged, and fundamental methodological debates have been initiated. Following an intense period of discussion on qualitative research under pandemic conditions addressed in conference contributions, mailing lists, blogs, and publications (MEY & REICHERTZ, 2020; REICHERTZ, 2021), current debates prominently focus on the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) for the analysis of qualitative data (FRIESE, 2024; STEINHARDT, 2024).[5] Ever since 2023, working groups, discussion papers, and Teaching Studios have been developed around this topic in which fundamental questions are being reconsidered—similar to those

2 The diagnosis of transformation is based on our observations and interpretations. Our work in three distinct academic disciplines and national systems facilitates a diversity of perspectives on the field of qualitative research. However, it does not guarantee that all qualitative researchers perceive this phase as a period of transformation. The diagnosis is further substantiated by the exchange with colleagues and several points of reference, some of which are cited as sources in the text. However, given the absence of a comprehensive study in this area, our diagnosis and all arguments based on it are open for discussion and further interpretation. In this *FQS* debate, we would welcome further discussion on the question, "Is there a period of transformation in qualitative methodology?"

3 The generational shift is a gradual process that unfolds over the course of several years, exhibiting disparities across diverse academic disciplines. The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the appointment of the first substantial cohort of scholars specialising in qualitative research within German-speaking countries. Many of them reached the age of retirement by now, a substantial number of chairs with an (explicit or implicit) emphasis on qualitative methodologies are currently being filled.

4 The history of qualitative research in German-speaking countries was marked by several periods of methodological transformation, which have invariably coincided with significant social change in other parts of society. Illustrative instances encompass the end of the Nazi regime, the 1968 movement, German reunification, and the turn of the millennium with the disruptive political developments and technological innovations that accompanied it (PLODER, 2018).

5 In QSF-L, the German mailing list for qualitative researchers the potentials, pitfalls and current developments of AI-supported qualitative data analysis have been intensively discussed for two years. The symposium of the *Berlin Meeting on Qualitative Research* 2024 was also dedicated to the topic of artificial intelligence and qualitative research.

prompted by the COVID-19 crisis—concerning the core of qualitative research itself. [4]

At an institutional level, universities have been influenced for decades by reforms based on *new public management* principles (SCHEDLER & PROELLER, 2011) which are supposed to make administrative structures more efficient, customer-oriented, and economically viable. The transfer of principles such as result-orientation, competition, privatization, customer focus, and resource efficiency from the private sector to academia led to increasingly precarious employment conditions for researchers[6], marked by rising performance expectations and decreasing job security (BEUVING & DE VRIES, 2020; CONESA CARPINTERO, 2017; CONESA CARPINTERO & GONZÁLEZ RAMOS, 2018). These dynamics have also given rise to initiatives such as #IchBinHanna and Better Science, whose members advocate for a transformation in academic culture. A central critique shared by these initiatives is that academic work should not be primarily shaped by competition but by mutual support and appreciation (KONDRATJUK, 2020; THALER & JAUK-AJAMIE, 2022). These self-organized initiatives emerged as part of an effort to create sustainable academic careers and working conditions within the persistent in-between—after earning qualifications but before securing stable employment (BAHR, EICHHORN & KUBON, 2022;[7] in the context of qualitative methods teaching, see RIEGLER, HAMETNER, WRBOUSCHEK, DISTLER & SLUNECKO, 2023). [5]

These transformations influence the teaching of qualitative research and methods in various ways (STAMANN, RUPPEL & MEY, 2023). Firstly, qualitative research has increasingly been integrated into curricula, though often only in introductory classes with limited teaching hours, which thereby restricts the scope for conveying qualitative research competencies. To date, there is no systematic comparative study on the curricular design of qualitative methods instruction in German-speaking academic programs. Even KRESSIN (2022), focusing on sociology, did not fully answer this question in her otherwise very insightful study on methods teaching in sociology.[8] However, based on our own teaching experiences and discussions with colleagues in the TeachNet, we have observed that many instructors have only a few semester hours available to introduce students to the theory and practice of qualitative research. Moreover, in large lecture classes, conveying the practical knowledge essential to qualitative research proves particularly challenging (for a problem analysis, see the Memorandum für eine fundierte Methodenausbildung in den Human- und Sozialwissenschaften [Memorandum for Sound Methodological Training in the

6 Language structures reality. In many contexts, scholars without secure positions are still referred to as "junior researchers"—a term we consider demeaning and infantilizing. In this text, we use the term "scholars in insecure employment" to acknowledge these scholars as decisive contributors to the academic system.

7 See also the petition against the new law on temporary academic contracts in Germany: https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/perspektive-statt-befristung-fuer-mehr-feste-arbeitsplaetze-im-wissenschaftsbereich [Accessed: January 3, 2025].

8 HIRSCHAUER and VÖLKLE (2017) looked at the distribution of professorships at sociology institutes and of methods courses in sociology degree programs in Germany. Here, too, there was no indication of the number of semester hours per week or the curricular structure of qualitative methods teaching at the locations analyzed.

Humanities and Social Sciences] from the *Berlin Meeting on Qualitative Research* 2008 (for possible solutions, see ÜLPENICH, 2023; WINTZER, 2023). [6]

The increasing institutionalization of qualitative social research within curricula has led to a growing demand for instructors.[9] Combined with generational shifts, this means that many instructors are entering the field of teaching qualitative research and methods for the first time, and in some institutions, they are the first to introduce this subject. As such, they bear the responsibility of guiding students into a diverse and evolving field. They must decide which methods and methodological approaches they consider promising and sustainable enough to equip students for their future careers. Through their teaching, they contribute to continuing the established methodological canon or establishing newer research approaches. This responsibility extends beyond merely imparting methodological competencies. [7]

Technological developments also change the way we teach qualitative methods. Online teaching, hybrid learning formats, *flipped classrooms* (WINTZER, 2023), *blended learning* (ÜLPENICH, 2023), the use of digital teaching materials (e.g., instructional videos on YouTube), and AI-based software open up new possibilities. However, these also raise numerous didactic questions. Because integrating new technologies into teaching is closely linked to transmitting qualitative research competencies, a complex pedagogical landscape emerges that significantly influences the design of teaching concepts. [8]

In response to these challenges, over one hundred dedicated German-speaking instructors teaching qualitative research and methods established the TeachNet in the summer of 2022. In this network, they discuss discipline-based and didactic strategies, share experiences and resources, and collectively explore solutions to the challenges encountered in different academic contexts. In the current contribution, we examine the foundation of TeachNet through the theoretical lens of liminality (Section 2) and analyze its development as a collaborative response to a period of transformation in qualitative research and teaching (Section 3). We argue that, through their work in the TeachNet, instructors create an environment in which they position themselves between higher education pedagogy, discipline-based disciplinary logics, and professional learning communities (BONSEN & ROLFF, 2006), thereby contributing to professionalizing teaching of qualitative research and methods (Section 4). We then illustrate how this form of collaboration holds the potential to transform both academic work and teaching culture beyond teaching qualitative research and methods. Here, instructors engage in a creative form of academic self-organization, prioritizing collaborative over competitive working practices (Section 5). Finally, we discuss the challenges and pitfalls of current and future collaborations within the TeachNet (Section 6) and conclude with an outlook on possible future dynamics of the TeachNet (Section 7). [9]

9 KNOBLAUCH (2014) shared this finding over a decade ago and it is also in accordance with our current observations from numerous job advertisements for lecturers and teachers in the field of qualitative methodology.

3. The Potentials of a Transformational Phase

In this contribution, we employ the anthropological concept of *liminality* as a theoretical perspective to examine the current developments in qualitative research and teaching, as well as within the TeachNet. The notion of the liminal serves to describe phases of crisis and transformation, along with the chaotic transitional period between an established order and a newly emerging structure. This concept has a long tradition in (cultural) anthropology (TURNER, 1991 [1969]; VAN GENNEP, 1986 [1909]) and is used in various research perspectives in the social and cultural sciences (BRÄUNLEIN, 2012; NIMFÜHR, 2020; THOMASSEN, 2014).[10] VAN GENNEP (1986 [1909]) analyzed transitions (or passages) in individual biographies as well as in collectives and identified three phases that characterize these transitions: A separation phase, marked by detachment from an existing structure; a threshold phase (also called the liminal phase); and a reincorporation phase, in which individuals integrate into a newly formed structure, often emerging during the liminal phase itself. [10]

TURNER further developed VAN GENNEP's approach, focusing specifically on the threshold phase. According to TURNER, a liminal phase dissolves existing structures, replacing them with a state of disorder—what he described as a "fertile nothingness" (1995, p.12). Such phases, "when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun" (TURNER, 1982, p.44), are characterized by the absence of established orders and a search for orientation. Participants typically experience these periods as exhausting and uncertain, yet they also present heightened creative potential for exploring new directions in thoughts and practices. Liminal phases create social spaces where individuals can (more or less free from hierarchy) collaboratively shape an uncertain future (TURNER, 2012; TURNER, 1991 [1969]). [11]

In our view, transitional phases in academia—in this case: In teaching qualitative research and methods—can also be understood as *liminal*. From an anthropological perspective, liminal phases present opportunities for established authorities to solidify their interpretative power. In TURNER's (1991 [1969], p.13) terminology, such figures may act as masters of ceremonies, providing guidance and stability in times of crisis. If these authorities are absent or unwilling to assume this role, marginal but charismatic figures often step in. While some evolve into legitimate new authorities, others primarily seek to perpetuate the crisis for their own power interests (SZAKOLCZAI, 2018, p.26). In liminality research, these latter figures have been referred to as tricksters (e.g., TURNER, 1982, p.32). [12]

10 The concept of liminality and—closely associated with it in TURNER's work—performance have also become increasingly relevant for the methodology of qualitative social research. This was, and is particularly evident in performative social research, in which liminal experiences play a key epistemological role (e.g., GUINEY YALLOP, LOPEZ DE VALLEJO & WRIGHT, 2008; MEY, 2020), but also in the debate about textual performance as a quality criterion for qualitative research (STRÜBING, HIRSCHAUER, AYAß, KRÄHNKE & SCHEFFER, 2018; see also the research network *Textuelle Performanz in der qualitativen Sozialforschung* [Textual Performance of Qualitative Social Research], funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft BE 8178/1-1.

An alternative to these authority-centered forms of crisis management is the emergence of spontaneous social spaces, which Victor and Edith TURNER (TURNER, 2012; TURNER, 1991 [1969], p.96) termed *communitas.* A *communitas* reflects its members' desire to collectively experience, understand, and shape a liminal phase. It exists in both physical and imagined in-between spaces (NIMFÜHR, 2020, p.275), and enables participants to endure the uncertainties of transition together, support one another, and develop strategies for integrating into a new order. Members of such spaces often form close relationships that persist beyond the immediate *communitas*. As manifestations of anti-structure, they are initially largely non-hierarchical, affectively charged and creative, as "communitas emerges where social structure is not" (TURNER, 1991 [1969], p.126). A defining feature is therefore its "detachment from structural and external demands" (NIMFÜHR, 2020, p.275).[11] [13]

Over time, a *communitas* may either dissolve or become integrated into (new or existing) structures and hierarchies (TURNER, 1991 [1969], p.132). According to TURNER, spontaneous *communitas* is always short-lived, as its inherent aim is "to return to structure revitalized by the experience of communitas" (p.129; see also NIMFÜHR, 2020, p.285). When members seek to institutionalize the social relationships formed within the *communitas*, they may transition from a *spontaneous* to a *normative communitas* which has the potential to become a lasting social institution (TURNER, 1991 [1969], p.132). However, this transition is often fraught with conflict, as the relative absence of structure is precisely what many members find appealing about the spontaneous *communitas*. Even a normative *communitas* can, however, gain legitimacy and become institutionalized as a recognized social space. [14]

As a self-organized network, the *communitas* differs from top-down organized *think tanks*. It often emerges in the early stages of social movements, such as the feminist movement (ROCES, 2012) or climate justice activism (GAVRILUTĂ & MOCREI-REBREAN, 2023), and may take the form of intellectual and practical studios where members collaboratively develop new ideas, working methods, and networks. [15]

11 All translations from non-English texts are ours.

4. The Development of TeachNet

So far, German-speaking teaching of qualitative research and methods has primarily been supported by textbooks (e.g., RUTH, WUTICH & RUSSEL 2024; SWAMINATHAN & MULVIHILL, 2018) and an increasing range of open educational resources. Existing workshop series[12]—whether in-person or digital—have mainly focused on the application of qualitative methods within research projects. We observe the same emphasis in the various websites, mailing lists, and newsletters that provide information on literature, links, publication channels, and conferences.[13] However, debates and reflections on teaching of qualitative research and methods in German-speaking higher education have been scarce.[14] [16]

During the transitional phase of qualitative research outlined above, many instructors have sought guidance on how to structure their teaching. However, some of the most obvious approaches initially led to dead ends[15]: Their own instructors were often no longer active in teaching or could offer little substantive or didactic guidance due to changing surrounding conditions. Didactic programs in higher education were rarely tailored to specific demands of teaching of qualitative research and methods. Contact with other instructors was limited at many institutions, as responsibility for teaching methods was often concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. Even within research networks, opportunities for discussing teaching-related questions were (and remain) rare, leaving a persistent gap in resources for orientation. [17]

From TURNER's perspective, this situation can be understood as a liminal phase, as instructors of qualitative methods found—and continue to find—themselves navigating multiple structural disruptions: Foundational debates in the field, repositioning within local curricula, technological upheavals and their impact on higher education pedagogy, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and transitions within individual academic careers all contributed to a range of challenges. While the specifics varied greatly, our discussions revealed that many instructors experienced overlapping separation phases, requiring them to find new structures. The task of designing new teaching concepts emerged as a focal point, marking a threshold state (for examples of the interplay between multiple liminal levels within a threshold state, see NIMFÜHR, 2020, p.282). [18]

12 For an English-language example, see the Qualitative Methods Workshop conducted jointly with the Nova School of Business and Economics; for an example in German-speaking countries, see the workshop series, organized by the Institute for Qualitative Research (IQF) at the Internationale Akademie Berlin gGmbH.

13 Examples include the *FQS* newsletter, which is published in German and Englisch, the QSF-L mailing list and the online resources for qualitative research at Duke University.

14 For a positive example, see the IQF workshop Qualitative Forschung Lehren[Teaching Qualitative Methods]. This gap can possibly be explained by the fact that teaching is given a less relevant position than research at many German-speaking universities. This could also indicate less awareness of the fact that qualitative research paradigms have implications in terms of research theory and practice as well as learning theory and practice. TeachQ does not get very far with the mere presentation of facts, processes, and phenomena. On the contrary, qualitative research often calls academic knowledge systems and established processes of knowledge production into question.

15 We have repeatedly made this observation in our dialogue with colleagues (in the teaching studios and beyond).

We interpret the founding of TeachNet as an expression of this threshold state. The initiative was sparked by an e-mail from Nicole WEYDMANN on June 12, 2022, sent via the QSF-L mailing list, inviting colleagues to participate in a regular online studio on teaching of qualitative research and methods.[16] Her initial hope was to connect with a few colleagues for joint reflection on teaching experiences and discussions on established concepts and materials. However, she was taken by surprise by the overwhelming response: 130 instructors from all academic ranks—ranging from newcomers to highly experienced university lecturers—expressed interest. They came from diverse disciplines, representing a wide spectrum of institutional settings and curricular structures. Across the board, they voiced a strong desire for a shared space to reflect on teaching practices and exchange teaching materials. During this phase, Nicole WEYDMANN repeatedly rejected the role of an expert, thereby resisting the position of master of ceremonies in TURNER's (1991 [1969]) sense. However, she took on the task of coordinating a network composed of thematically diverse groups of instructors, thereby contributing to the formation of a spontaneous *communitas* in TURNER's terms. The open invitation for participants to share their interests and needs laid the groundwork for a collaborative and egalitarian organizational structure from the outset. The first step in developing the TeachNet involved a transparent survey of participants' priorities alongside the establishment of a digital infrastructure. [19]

Over the following months, regular e-mails kept participants informed about developments and invited their input on next steps. Among the most frequently expressed wishes was the establishment of a centralized, cross-network repository for teaching materials and meeting protocols, as well as the organization of a TeachNet conference. Given these interests—and in an effort to reflect the principles of polyvocality and heterogeneity in terms of experience and discipline-based backgrounds—Nicole WEYDMANN structured the network into ten studios, each consisting of ten to eighteen participants. However, one studio was not heterogeneous as several members explicitly requested a separate space for newcomers to teaching of qualitative research and methods. This studio provided a protected environment where they could reflect on their first teaching experiences and explore their emerging roles as instructors. The initial meetings of all ten Teaching Studios took place between September and October 2022, with the primary goals of defining thematic directions and developing collaborative self-organization. A key principle was to refrain from prescribing theoretical frameworks or specific modes of interaction, instead allowing participants to negotiate their own working methods and content. [20]

From the beginning, the Teaching Studios specifically, and the TeachNet more broadly, exhibited characteristics described by TURNER (1991 [1969], pp.94-130) as characteristics of *communitas*: The shared experience of a threshold state, meetings in (in this case, virtual) liminal spaces, and a relative detachment from structural constraints imposed by individual disciplines and home institutions. Since most participants had not previously met in person, introductions often

16 The regional focus has so far been on German-speaking countries, and the working language in most of the teaching studios is German.

revealed their disciplinary backgrounds, institutional affiliations, employment conditions, and methodological orientations. As a result, many Teaching Studios initially fostered a largely hierarchy-free "community of equals" (NIMFÜHR, 2020, p.274). [21]

During the first meetings, participants introduced themselves, clarified their roles and disciplinary positions within the field of teaching qualitative research and methods, and outlined key questions and challenges. Even at this early stage, common concerns emerged across different discipline-based and structural contexts. Teaching Studios served not only to establish the groups and define shared thematic priorities but also to initiate substantive discussions—for instance, through short presentations of seminar plans. Many groups began with flashlights, in which members shared their current mood, recent developments in their work, and pressing concerns. This process led to the creation of topic repositories where key issues were documented, enabling groups to revisit recurring themes over time. [22]

Another Teaching Studio format that quickly became established involved sessions where members presented inputs on specific topics—ranging from concrete challenges in their own teaching to reflections on potential solutions. Occasionally, guests from other Teaching Studios were invited to discuss their approaches to particular issues. Participants then provided feedback, shared teaching materials, and engaged in reflective discussions. The degree of structure and moderation varied, depending on the members of each Teaching Studio agreeing upon a working style. [23]

After several months of collaboration, early signs of further structuring within the TeachNet began to emerge—developments that can be interpreted, in TURNER's (1991 [1969]) terms, as steps toward a normative *communitas*. Together with others, Nicole WEYDMANN formed a coordination team which has worked to guide and sustain TeachNet's future since January 2023. This team operates as an open, flexible board, with members able to join or leave depending on specific tasks or themes. As of January 2025, the coordination team includes Laura BEHRMANN, Alena BLEICHER, Anna C. NOWAK, Petra PANENKA, Paul Sebastian RUPPEL, Christoph STAMANN, and Nicole WEYDMANN. [24]

In spring and summer 2023, TeachNet members gained access to an online repository hosted on the technical infrastructure of Furtwangen University, where protocols, semester plans, and teaching materials were archived both within and across Teaching Studios. However, following a cyberattack on the university in September 2023, this resource was lost. Currently, some members are working on developing a website with similar functionalities. Alongside these efforts, additional meta-structures have been established, such as assigning responsibilities for meeting protocols, organizing sessions, and moderating discussions. The initial hierarchy-free "community of equals" (NIMFÜHR, 2020,

p.274) has also evolved, with some members recognized as experts in specific areas while some newcomers are positioned as early-career scholars.[17] [25]

We observe an ongoing tendency toward forming new working groups and fostering collaborative writing and presentation initiatives—one of which resulted in this contribution. For instance, the members of one Teaching Studio have compiled a collection of didactic impulses for teaching qualitative research and methods and are preparing a publication. Members of another Teaching Studio are exploring ethical dimensions and plan to release their first joint publication in spring 2025. [26]

After nearly two and a half years, the TeachNet has undergone a process of consolidation, albeit with a reduced number of members. Currently, approximately 50 people meet regularly in five Teaching Studios while a group of newcomers is in a phase of evaluating and redesigning its working approach. All members collaboratively coordinate the organization and content of the meetings and continuously develop them further. Members frequently leave the Teaching Studios due to family or career changes. Additionally, some members temporarily suspend their participation in the groups due to health-related or career-related challenges but continue to use the TeachNet mailing list. At the same time, new members regularly join and are integrated into the existing groups. In July 2024, a virtual information session was held for the first time, providing interested colleagues with an overview of the working methods and thematic focuses of the Teaching Studios. Furthermore, participants had the opportunity to engage in discussions with individual members in virtual breakout rooms. [27]

Most groups meet monthly, while one convenes every two months in virtual spaces. To strengthen the overarching TeachNet, the first conference on *Praktiken der qualitativen Methodenlehre* [Practices of Qualitative Methods Teaching] was held at the University of Applied Science in Furtwangen in November 2023. In addition to network members, external guests were also invited. During the conference, cross-group topics were addressed in workshops, working groups, and a poster session. This was followed by the first internal network meeting at the University of Wuppertal in February 2024, and another meeting at The University of Applied Sciences in Fulda in September 2024. The second conference is scheduled for March 2025 at the University of Applied Sciences in Wernigerode. [28]

Members of the TeachNet are increasingly expressing a desire for greater visibility and a means to make their engagement within their institutions, in their academic careers, and in public discourse more transparent. During the meeting in February 2024, a dedicated working group was established to address this issue. Additionally, the TeachNet board is exploring ways to enhance visibility of the TeachNet and its members through external funding acquisition and institutional affiliations. From the perspective of TURNER's concept of liminality, we expect that institutional third-party funding and its associated logics may

17 See NIMFÜHR (2020, p.287) for the emergence of structures and hierarchies on the way to normative *communitas*.

dissolve the existing organizational and thematic flexibility of the current *communitas*, replacing it with standardized structural affiliations and leadership structures centered on individuals. The advantages and disadvantages of such a development are currently under discussion. [29]

The increased visibility of the needs of teaching of qualitative research and methods instructors has led to interest not only from individuals seeking exchange but also from representatives of didactic service providers who have approached Nicole WEYDMANN to offer training sessions within the framework of the TeachNet—tailored to their respective fields of expertise. Established colleagues have also offered their support: Franz BREUER and Margrit SCHREIER, who have long been engaged with the concerns of instructors in qualitative methods through their editorial work on the *FQS* Debate on "Teaching and Learning Qualitative Methods" (BREUER & SCHREIER, 2007; SCHREIER & BREUER, 2020), as well as Rudolf SCHMITT, who has addressed the challenges of teaching qualitative methods in the context of social work (SCHMITT, 2007) and who served as an ad hoc advisory board for the network's early development. They provided counsel in the first few months. Additionally, Günter MEY, co-organizer of the *Berliner Methodentreffen qualitative Forschung* (BMT) [*Berlin Meeting on Qualitative Research]* and involved in the q_d2-Lab project, in which the conditions of a digital teaching-learning lab for qualitative methods education are examined (KALKSTEIN & MEY, 2021), also offered his support. For example, in 2023, he organized a BMT symposium on *Lehren und Lernen qualitativer Methoden* [*Teaching and Learning Qualitative Methods*], where the developments surrounding the TeachNet played a central role (MEY, NIERMANN, PANENKA & WEYDMANN, 2024). [30]

5. Interdisciplinary Professionalization of Methods Teaching in Alignment with Professional Learning Communities

At the institutional and organizational level, we interpret the Teaching Studios as a response to recent developments in German-speaking higher education. Since the turn of the millennium, higher education has undergone a transformation, most notably visible in the extensive expansion of didactic training for instructors in higher education which was framed as a professionalization process (SCHMIDT, BESCH & SCHULZE, 2020). Within these training contexts, there is broad consensus that teaching must be didactically structured, conveyed, and prepared without reducing the complex learning processes of students to rigid schemas (HERICKS & RIECKMANN, 2018). However, this form of professionalization is also tied to neoliberal developments which intersect with the challenges outlined earlier (RIEGLER et al., 2023). [31]

The idea of learning (SENGE, 2006 [1990]) and reflecting (SCHÖN, 1991) groups to enhance the professionalism of teaching is one that members of the Teaching Studios share with members of professional learning communities (PLCs) (STOLL, BOLAM, McMAHON, WALLACE & THOMAS, 2006). The concept of PLCs among instructors has received particular attention in educational theory discourses on instructors training over the past decades (BONSEN & ROLFF,

2006). It is also associated in the literature with related concepts such as *communities of practice* (LAVE & WENGER, 1991), *professional learning networks* (TRUST, KRUTKA & CARPENTER, 2016), and *teacher professional communities* (McLAUGHLIN & TALBERT, 2006). Two key objectives of these working styles align with the interests of Teaching Studios members: The pursuit of professional development and the exchange of knowledge among colleagues (ENTHOVEN & DE BRUJN, 2010). Other core elements of the Teaching Studios are sharing semester plans, didactic approaches to specific methods or research designs as well as teaching and assessment materials. [32]

In the professionalization of Teaching Studios, we identify two key factors that we will explore further: Teaching of qualitative research and methods is practiced across various disciplines but does not belong to any single discipline. Consequently, collaboration within the Teaching Studios is inherently interdisciplinary. Furthermore, the Teaching Studios are not institutionally embedded, meaning that members are connected through informal agreements rather than formalized structures. Both the interdisciplinarity and the lack of institutionalization present unique opportunities and challenges. [33]

The questions of what constitutes good teaching of qualitative research and methods and what characterizes effective instructors have long remained unanswered. They were increasingly shifted to discipline-based discourses, along with their associated epistemological and methodological reflections (for sociology, see BOLL, RÖHL & SCHIEK, 2024 who also wrote about "professionalization," p.50). In some cases, discipline specific approaches have been developed that, when situated within educational theory and higher education pedagogy, have directly influenced discipline-based teaching practices. To this day, this means that instructors must navigate between discipline-based positioning and openness to interdisciplinary discourse, between educational-theoretical reflection and the facilitation of exploratory learning spaces (SCHMOHL, 2019). [34]

Qualitative research and teaching have always been interdisciplinary. Editors of many international journals on qualitative research explicitly position their journals in this way, as seen in the descriptions of Qualitative Inquiry, Qualitative Research, The Qualitative Report, The International Journal of Qualitative Methods, and the American Journal of Qualitative Research. The same applies to *FQS* and the German-language Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung. Historically, many of today's common research approaches and methods were developed within interdisciplinary research teams or through close exchanges between colleagues from different disciplines before being applied across multiple fields (for the German speaking countries: e.g., PLODER, 2018; WEISCHER, 2004). Nearly all established qualitative research approaches today are grounded in methodological reasoning that integrates insights from various disciplines. This diversity is also reflected in the research landscape: Despite the discipline-bound career structures of the German-speaking academic system, methodological discussions frequently take place in interdisciplinary settings. The BMT is one such example where workshops and research labs demonstrate that developing

methodological competencies need not be confined to a single discipline but can also flourish in interdisciplinary environments. [35]

At the same time, many disciplines have developed their own interpretations of teaching concepts and didactic approaches (e.g., for social work, see SCHMITT, 2007; for geography, see WINTZER, 2023). In this process, qualitative methods are often linked to discipline-specific research interests and objects of study, shaping how they are taught.[18] Many disciplines have established their own didactic canons, which textbook authors reinforce by discussing certain research approaches while omitting others (e.g., MAIER, KEßLER, DEPPE, LEUTHOLD-WERGIN & SANDRING, 2018; MEY & MRUCK, 2020; MEYEN, LÖBLICH, PFAFF-RÜDIGER & RIESMEYER, 2019). However, overarching approaches that encompass the full spectrum of discipline-based research interests are still lacking (GARNER, WAGNER & KAWULICH, 2016; SCHREIER & RUPPEL, 2021). [36]

Due to the open invitation via the QSF-L mailing list, the TeachNet has been interdisciplinary from the outset, encompassing diverse discipline-based backgrounds and levels of experience. Instructors use this interdisciplinary space to exchange ideas on higher education pedagogy and qualitative methods, developing a polyvocal, cross-disciplinary framework for teaching of qualitative research and methods. However, discussions in the Teaching Studios also reveal that discipline-based positioning—whether of instructors, students, or study programs—can at times influence *t*he approaches of teaching of qualitative research and methods. As is often the case in interdisciplinary settings, the distinctive perspectives of different disciplines become visible, perspectives that might remain implicit in monodisciplinary settings. [37]

TeachNet, unlike many PLCs, is not embedded within an institutionalized training program. BLANKENSHIP and RUONA (2007) described how PLCs are often established as an institutional attempt to address the perceived shortcomings in instructors' and pedagogical expertise. Typically, school administrators initiate these programs and integrate them into teachers' schedules to support professional development and the sharing of teaching materials. In contrast, the Teaching Studios function as an independent network of instructors, completely detached from any institutional or systematic structural integration.[19] This independence allows members to set their own priorities and orientations based on their individual needs rather than institutional logics. It also enables them to discuss their teaching and learning conditions in a protected space. [38]

However, this independent organizational model also means that participation is generally not recognized as part of formal working hours and is therefore not

18 In sociology, disciplinary identity is so closely linked to methodological training that KRESSIN (2022, p.14) spoke of an "integration of cultural diversity via the boundary object of method and thus [of] disciplining through method."

19 The infrastructural support provided by University of Applied Science in Furtwangen is based on the commitment of WEYDMANN, but should not be confused with an institutional link between the TeachNet and the university.

financially compensated. School-based PLCs are typically integrated into educators' regular work schedules (STOLL et al., 2006, p.240). By contrast, engagement in Teaching Studios often occurs in addition to an already demanding workload at universities—particularly for adjunct faculty, doctoral researchers, and scholars in precarious academic positions. While active participants frequently describe their involvement as valuable (NOWAK, 2024), the reasons cited by those who leave TeachNet indicate that participation represents an additional time burden. Within university organizations and the broader context of career progression, engagement in the Teaching Studios is often overshadowed by institutional demands for research output, publications, and accredited professional training. [39]

6. Teaching Studios and Collaborative Academic Culture

Beyond shaping a liminal phase and professionalizing the teaching of qualitative research and methods, our experience suggests that the Teaching Studios specifically and the TeachNet more broadly also serve as a space for fostering and practicing a collaborative academic culture (HAWKINS & KERN, 2024). This can lead to a form of academic collaboration that is both productive and beneficial, as in the following situations: When the sharing of didactic knowledge, teaching materials, semester plans and exam questions becomes routine; when acute teaching crises (RIEGLER et al., 2023) faced by individual members are addressed with appreciation and constructive discussion; and when uncertainties and knowledge gaps are met not with criticism but with substantive suggestions and reports of comparable experiences. [40]

In our academic environment, we have observed a growing trend in which scholars create social spaces that foster collaborative rather than competitive forms of interaction across hierarchical boundaries—often in explicit contrast to established academic work structures. The need for such appreciative and supportive collaboration is becoming increasingly pronounced in response to the escalating pressures of competition and performance within the neoliberal academic system (DE WELDE, 2022; KONDRATJUK, 2020; RAYNE et al., 2023; THALER & JAUK-AJAMIE, 2022). This development was recently discussed under the term *academic kindness* (THALER & JAUK-AJAMIE, 2022), which refers to a caring attitude towards colleagues, staff, and students, but also toward oneself as a researcher. This approach carries the potential to reshape the conditions of academic knowledge production on multiple levels—ranging from funding applications to the presentation and discussion of research results. Ideally, this can lead to improvements both in the daily work experiences of researchers, instructors and students, and in the academic quality of their outcomes (PLODER, 2022). [41]

The working practices within the Teaching Studios exhibit many characteristics of collaboration (ROSCHELLE & TEASLEY, 1995). Unlike cooperation, which primarily focuses on the (division of) contributions of individuals toward a pre-defined common outcome, collaboration is shaped by joint work, process

orientation, and creative participation. ROSCHELLE and TEASLEY defined collaboration as:

> "a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem [...] Cooperative work is accomplished by the division of labour among participants, as an activity where each person is responsible for a portion of the problem solving" (p.70). [42]

In the process of collaboration, problem definitions, goals, and working methods can continuously be adjusted or redefined.[20] Unlike mere participation, which often operates through practices of acceptance or rejection, collaboration is characterized by practices of surprise, improvisation, trust and hope—which form the foundation for the willingness to engage in collective emancipation and effort, with the aim of developing sustainable forms of working together (TERKESSIDIS, 2015, pp.259ff.). In this sense, participants in the Teaching Studios use and shape the liminal space of transition not only for their professional development but also as a social space where they can experiment with and refine new modes of collaboration. Our experience has shown that the interdisciplinary and translocal composition of the Teaching Studios helps alleviate competitive pressures and the need to appear highly competent. This, in turn, fosters a mode of working that is rooted in empathy and solidarity (YANG, 2000). [43]

Teaching of qualitative research and methods often extends far beyond the transmission of discipline-specific perspectives. Rather, it involves cultivating an attitude of openness, communication, process-oriented thinking, and reflexivity. From this perspective, teaching qualitative research and methods—beyond its direct relevance to research—can contribute to the development of key didactic, empathic, and communicative competencies (KUNZ, MEY, RAAB & ALBRECHT, 2021). The negotiation of appreciative openness, explicit positionality (WEYDMANN & PLODER, forthcoming), and teaching and learning roles that are evolving occurs within the situational context of everyday teaching. As a result, reflecting on these negotiations of positions and attitudes constitutes a core element of the Teaching Studios and the TeachNet. [44]

20 Collaborative forms of work have been and continue to be successfully used by higher-ed instructors in other contexts. One example is the 16-member group AEDiL (2021), which was founded in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and launched an autoethnographic project on teaching in higher education under pandemic conditions. This group was also formed in a period of acute transformation, and the members spontaneously developed structures that can be described as collaborative. They not only used the method of collaborative autoethnography (CHANG, NGUNJIRI & HERNANDEZ, 2016), but also organized the entire exchange and working context collaboratively.

7. Navigating Challenges: Stumbling Without Falling

After more than two years, the Teaching Studios find themselves at a crossroads. The phase of spontaneous *communitas* has passed, and both the members of the Teaching Studios and the TeachNet board are now working toward developing more permanent structures. Several meetings have been dedicated to discussing possibilities for institutional integration—an indication that the reincorporation phase (VAN GENNEP, 1986 [1909]) has begun. This transition raises many questions: How can the Teaching Studios be structured in ways that maintain safe spaces while remaining accessible to newcomers? How can members support one another without inadvertently reinforcing precarious institutional conditions? How can status hierarchies within the Teaching Studios be continually challenged and renegotiated in a productive manner? And how can the competing needs for flexibility and stability be balanced within the Teaching Studios? [45]

The first challenge concerns how the Teaching Studios and the TeachNet should be organized and structured to move forward. From the outset, the desire for openness has existed in tension with the need for a certain degree of closure. Many participants expressed a wish to create protected spaces where they could discuss their teaching experiences in a safe environment—analogous to research-focused reflection labs (VON UNGER, HUBER, KÜHNER, ODUKOYA & REITER, 2022). These protected spaces were particularly valued for discussions about both challenging and successful teaching experiences, personal dynamics in the classroom, competition among instructors (e.g., for students' favor), and issues related to teaching evaluations. Creating a space for such discussions requires clear and reliable Teaching Studio structures that foster trust. [46]

Other participants, however, were primarily interested in an open exchange of perspectives on teaching qualitative research and methods across different institutional and disciplinary contexts. To accommodate this, participants proposed additional open discourse spaces—similar to barcamps (EBERHARDT & HELLMANN, 2015)—where members could move freely between discussions. This would allow instructors to form ad-hoc working groups beyond their core Teaching Studios affiliations to engage in broader discussions on discipline-based and didactic issues. Such a format could serve as a bridge between the established small groups and the larger network. It could also provide an entry point for instructors who lack the capacity to participate in a regular working group but still wish to engage in discussions on teaching qualitative research and methods. [47]

A second challenge lies in the paradox that, while collaborative networks enable mutual support, they can also perpetuate precarious structures in academia. The Teaching Studios allow members to continue delivering high-quality teaching despite difficult working conditions. This could reduce pressure on the institutions to improve these conditions. At the same time, networking may also empower instructors to collectively identify, articulate, and advocate for improved working conditions. [48]

As authors of this article, we acknowledge that we are relatively privileged in terms of employment security (see Section 1). However, many members of the TeachNet teach qualitative research and methods under precarious and underpaid conditions, often having to prepare classes on short notice while minimizing grading and feedback efforts due to workload constraints. When we share syllabi, teaching formats, technological tools, and teaching strategies, we can —while being supportive—also create a pressure to conform, especially for scholars without secure employment. To mitigate this, it is essential that participants continually reflect on the structural conditions of their teaching and the tendency toward blurring work-life boundaries in academic labor. [49]

A third challenge is that, despite their collaborative ethos, the Teaching Studios are not free from status hierarchies and power dynamics. In some Teaching Studios, participants expressed a desire to learn from those with perceived greater experience about *how to teach qualitative research correctly.* This attribution of didactic authority—or its denial—creates implicit hierarchies within the Teaching Studios. Similar patterns emerge at the administrative level: Certain roles and tasks are often assigned along established hierarchies without critical reflection. Efforts to counteract this can sometimes lead to tensions and conflicts. Moreover, both members and external actors frequently implicitly expect centralized leadership structures—asking, for instance: Who is responsible for setting up a website? Managing e-mail accounts? Handling potential funding applications? These recurring expectations of formalized leadership illustrate the challenge of maintaining the self-organized nature of the network while developing sustainable structures. [50]

The fourth challenge concerns the continuity and reliability of participation in the Teaching Studios. For some participants, even short-term involvement has been highly beneficial, allowing them to discuss open questions, receive practical teaching tips, and refine their course designs in peer discussions. Although the Teaching Studios are not merely a space for passive knowledge acquisition, their members still provide resources that make short-term participation meaningful. Other participants, however, use the Teaching studios for ongoing pedagogical and methodological development and have begun to integrate insights from the Teaching Studios into academic publications (see Section 4). By translating Teachings Studio discussions into formal academic outputs, they make the network's work more visible within the dominant logic of academic publishing. [51]

Our experiences over the past two years indicate that the Teaching Studios are unlikely to produce universal *best-practice* models for teaching of qualitative research and methods. A recurring misconception is that the Teaching Studios will collectively determine the *correct* didactic approach to teaching qualitative research and methods. [52]

One major obstacle to the long-term sustainability of Teaching Studios is the lack of institutional support. The initial advantage of spontaneous *communitas*—existing in liminal spaces and maintaining relative independence from formal structures—now presents a challenge. Participants must dedicate time to monthly

meetings to develop their teaching practices, despite the fact that teaching—especially in the German-speaking academic context—remains undervalued in comparison to research and publishing. For many academics, teaching qualitative research and methods is only *one* part of their broader academic portfolio, limiting their capacity and motivation for consistent participation. At the same time, some members rely on structured engagement to build trust and establish professional relationships. The tension between these needs remains unresolved. [53]

From the perspective of liminality research, we see the Teaching Studios as currently standing at the threshold of normative *communitas*. This transition is inevitable, as "[s]pontaneous communitas is a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition" (TURNER, 1991 [1969], p.140). Over time, members develop a need for clearer and more stable structures to continue pursuing their goals effectively. As this section has highlighted, however, this transition is also fraught with challenges, as it necessitates rethinking the self-organized, extra-institutional nature of the network. Striking a balance between formalization and preserving the creative and collaborative character of the Teaching Studios was one of the key objectives of the internal network meetings held in February and September 2024. [54]

8. Conclusion and Outlook

In this contribution, we have examined the emergence of the TeachNet as an expression of a transitional phase in qualitative social research and teaching. Drawing on liminality theory, we have interpreted its founding as an instance of spontaneous *communitas*—a space in which members collectively faced uncertainty, developed orientation, and experimented with new teaching strategies and working methods. Against this backdrop, we understand the Teaching Studios as spaces where the future of teaching qualitative research and methods is collaboratively imagined and shaped. Recognizing the liminal nature of the present moment in teaching qualitative research and methods provides a framework for making sense of uncertainty, effort, and the pressures of being in-between, while also offering a constructive direction forward. [55]

First, we argued that collaboration is a promising strategy for shaping knowledge production and pedagogical practices in teaching qualitative research and methods during periods of transition. Through collaborative exchanges, members of the Teaching Studios have developed interdisciplinary spaces for reflection that allow them to situate their teaching practices within the tensions among institutional constraints, discipline-based frameworks, and local teaching contexts. This process has gradually revealed a shared experiential space, forming the foundation for the development of new teaching strategies and visions of good teaching. [56]

Second, we have highlighted that Teaching Studios can initiate change not only in teaching practices but also in broader academic cultures. Participants have the potential to transform these spaces into environments of solidarity, mutual support, and political organization, countering the structurally competitive

tendencies of the academic field. In this way, the collaborative practice in Teaching Studios can contribute to an atmosphere of *academic kindness* as a response to the neoliberal university (THALER & JAUK-AJAMIE, 2022, p.9). [57]

Despite ongoing challenges—including questions of collaboration, precarity, hierarchies, and commitment—we see Teaching Studios as established spaces for critical reflection on qualitative teaching practices. Their history demonstrates that scholars can generate momentum for change during periods of academic transition. In this article, we have used the concepts of liminality and professional learning communities not only as analytical but also as political tools. By applying them, we frame the present and future of teaching qualitative research and methods as an open-ended, negotiable process shaped by complex and shifting factors. This shaping occurs in many different spaces—in individual courses, small networks, and, importantly, within Teaching Studios themselves. [58]

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank all members of the Teaching Studios for their appreciative and concerted engagement over the past two and a half years. Their strong dedication has made this unconventional form of collaborative work possible. Additionally, we thank Laura BEHRMANN, Franz BREUER, and Margrit SCHREIER as editors of the *FQS* debate *Teaching and Learning Qualitative Methods*, as well as Katja MRUCK, Günter MEY, Paul S. RUPPEL, and Christoph STAMANN for their careful review and valuable feedback. Their critical comments and thoughtful inquiries at various stages of the writing process have helped refine this contribution. For language editing of the English version of this paper, we thank Jeannette REGAN.

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Authors

Nicole WEYDMANN is professor of qualitative methods at Furtwangen University, active member of multiple qualitative teaching studios and co-editor of the *FQS* debate "Teaching and Learning Qualitative Methods." She focuses on reflexive and performative research methods, teaching and learning conditions of qualitative research methods, and human-environment relationships in times of multi-dimensional crises.

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Nicole Weydmann

Furtwangen University
Applied Health Sciences
Robert-Gerwig-Platz 1, D-78120 Furtwangen im Schwarzwald, Gemany

E-Mail: nicole.weydmann@hs-furtwangen.de
URL: https://www.hs-furtwangen.de/personen/profil/3123-nicoleweydmann/

Andrea PLODER is assistant professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of Innsbruck. In her research, she focuses on qualitative methodologies, sociological theory, history of sociology, sociology of science, and science and technology studies.

Contact:

Andrea Ploder

University of Innsbruck
Department of Sociology
Universitätsstrasse 15, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria

E-mail: Andrea.Ploder@uibk.ac.at
URL: https://www.uibk.ac.at/de/soziologie/unser-institut/andrea-ploder/

Jeannine WINTZER studied geography at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena and has been working as a lecturer for qualitative methods in geography at the Department of Geography at the University of Bern since 2013. In addition to qualitative methods, she teaches history and epistemology of geography. In her habilitation entitled "Towards social relations of space. Research and higher education in geography," she focuses on the potentials of geography for knowledge societies.

Contact:

PD Dr. Jeannine Wintzer

University of Bern
Institute of Geography
Hallerstrasse 12, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland

Tel.: +41 31 684 88 26

E-Mail: jeannine.wintzer@giub.unibe.ch
URL: https://www.geography.unibe.ch/ueber_uns/personen/pd_dr_wintzer_jeannine/index_ger.html

Citation

Weydmann, Nicole; Ploder, Andrea & Wintzer, Jeannine (2025). Teaching studios as spaces of interdisciplinary collaboration: Shaping a transitional phase in teaching qualitative research methods [58 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *26*(1), Art. 12, https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-26.1.4200.