

unspoken

unseen

unheard

of

— **unexplored realities in qualitative research**

6 – 8 September 2018

University of St.Gallen

Conference organized by the Research Network “Qualitative Methods” of the European Sociological Association and the Research Committee “Interpretative Sociologies” of the Swiss Sociological Association



Unspoken, unseen, unheard of. Unexplored realities in qualitative research

6–8 September 2018, St. Gallen, Switzerland

A conference on unexplored realities in qualitative research, organized by the Research Network "Qualitative Methods" of the European Sociological Association and the Research Committee "Interpretative Sociologies" of the Swiss Sociological Association.

Call for papers

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"¹?

This conference invites qualitative researchers to address and discuss questions concerning 'unexplored realities' in three directions. (1) A first focus concerns the other senses than those we usually rely on—the auditory and visual sense—those that are not easily captured in language. Should we even attempt to study realms for which we may not have an adequate language (yet)? (2) The second focus concerns social spaces and domains of contemporary societies which constitute—for some or most of us—unknown subuniverses or backstages, kept marginalized, secret, or out of focus from public attention. (3) And thirdly, it concerns hidden and concealed domains, potentially inconvenient and uncomfortable realms that those involved in our research might not want to have exposed.

1 Neglected senses and sensitivities

The dominant senses that organize qualitative social research methodologies have been and still are the auditory and the visual: We hear participants and ourselves talk, we see action, we transcribe spoken into written language, we read documents, watch video recordings, and look at images. Modes of conserving, evoking, and remembering the social phenomena we aim at understanding rely heavily on the auditory and visual senses. Taste, smell, touch, a sense of body movement, but also

¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1922): *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 7.

feelings and emotions are often conspicuously absent in many presentations of social research findings—be it because they are difficult to turn into data, be it for the difficulty to express them in language, be it for our lack of training and sensitivity in dealing with them. The first conference focus concerns sensory realities that are largely unexplored: How do we methodologically proceed to study them? How can we incorporate these dimensions into an interpretive understanding of social reality? How can qualitative studies based on such an understanding inform and enrich our understanding of contemporary social phenomena? If a strength of qualitative research is to study and represent social reality in its complexity, how can we develop research methodologies that include more than the visual and auditory sense?

2 Unexplored social spaces and practices

For both, the wider public and social scientists, many social domains remain relatively unknown territories for a diversity of reasons. There are groups and organisations that may prefer to operate in relative secrecy. It may concern milieus and subcultures that are marginalized. It may concern social positions and population segments that are silenced. It may concern 'exclusive' social domains which are (kept) inaccessible for the majority. And it may simply concern social spaces which have been largely neglected by academia or the wider public, not deemed 'necessary' or 'worthy' of attention and exploration. In short, it concerns realms of the everyday life-world which remain relatively unexplored, accessed by a few and understood by a few. Simultaneously, as Erving Goffman and others have demonstrated, virtually any social setting—whether unexplored or well explored—is divided into front stages and backstages. It is in the relative secrecy of backstages where actors relax from their front stage performances, where they organize support, and where they devise strategies for acting on the front stage. Generating backstages and keeping them intransparent and concealed for front stage audiences are standard social practices.

Bringing our attention to social realms that have largely remained unknown or unheard of is one of the classic endeavours of qualitative research. Participants are invited to reflect upon the manifold methodological challenges posed by studying such realities. How do we negotiate

access to hidden practices and backstages? What kind of backstages should we aim at getting access to? To what extent should we—and to what extent are we legitimized to—expose backstage practices if they concern contested and sensitive issues? How do we represent these realities? Any qualitative methodology engaged in in-depth explorations of social domains needs to account for these questions.

3 Hidden and concealed domains

Any social practice—qualitative research included—is embedded in belief systems and ideologies. For various reasons, practices and their effects may run counter to such belief systems and may consequently be neglected: concealed due to potentially inconvenient consequences, (un)knowingly ignored, or conceptually nihilated into non-existence. How do we deal with domains to which the actors in the field have turned a blind eye on? How do we deal with domains to which the research participants want us as researchers to turn a blind eye on?

Abstract submission and registration

We will be accepting propositions for contributions from early 2018 on. The conference language is English. Electronic abstracts of about 300 words in length can be submitted through an online tool that will be made available on the conference website.

- Submission deadline: 31 March 2018
- Notification of acceptance: 30 April 2018

Please visit the conference website in early 2018 for more information on the abstract submission process:

<https://qualitative-research.ch/en/unexplored-realities>

Workshops

On Wednesday, 5 September 2018, full day qualitative methods workshops will be presented, amongst others by Patricia and Peter Adler. For further information, please visit the conference website in spring 2018.

Keynote speakers

Patricia Adler, University of Colorado and Peter Adler, University of Denver, USA

Patricia Adler will hold a keynote address; together, Patricia and Peter Adler will conduct a methods' workshop on 5 September. Peter and Patricia Adler have written and worked together for almost 40 years. Patricia is Professor Emerita of Sociology at the University of Colorado. Peter is Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Denver. Their interests include qualitative methods, deviant behavior, drugs and society, sociology of sport, social psychology, sociology of children, social theory, and work, occupations, and leisure. Together, they have published over 100 articles and books, including *Momentum* (Sage, 1981), *Wheeling and Dealing* (Columbia University Press, 1985, Second Edition 1993), *Membership Roles in Field Research* (Sage, 1987), *Backboards and Blackboards* (Columbia University Press, 1991), *Peer Power* (Rutgers University Press, 1998), *Paradise Laborers* (Cornell University Press, 2004), and *The Tender Cut* (NYU Press, 2011). The Adlers have served as Co-Presidents of the Midwest Sociological Society, as editors of *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (1986-1994) and as the founding editors of *Sociological Studies of Child Development* (1985-1992). Their co-edited anthologies include *Constructions of Deviance* (Wadsworth), now in its eighth edition, and *Sociological Odyssey* (Wadsworth), now in its fourth edition. In 2010, they were honored with the George Herbert Mead Award for Lifetime Achievement by the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction (SSSI).

Ross Koppel, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Ross Koppel, Ph.D., FACMI has been on the faculty of the Sociology Department and an affiliate professor at the Medical School at the University of Pennsylvania since 1991. Koppel is also a Senior Fellow of the Leonard Davis Institute at Penn's Wharton School and a Senior Fellow at the Center for Public Health Initiatives of Penn's Perelman School of Medicine. Prof. Koppel is a PI on several studies of cybersecurity, including the Intel/NSF study of cybersecurity of the Internet of Things and cyber-physical systems, the NSF Project on Safe Cyber

Communication (both with Penn's Engineering School) and the NSA study on circumvention of cybersecurity. He is also a leading scholar of healthcare IT (HIT) and of the interactions of people, computers and workplaces. His articles in JAMA, JAMIA, NEJM, Annals of Internal Medicine, and Chest, et cetera are considered seminal works. His focus on cybersecurity circumvention dovetails with his work on HIT because workarounds in medical settings are both pandemic and often required for medical necessities. Both research foci employ his 48 years of work in statistical analysis, research methods, surveys, ethnography, computer usability studies, data visualization interpretations, the role of HIT in facilitating errors, evaluation methods, and the sociology of work and organizations.

Vaike Fors, Halmstad University, Sweden

Vaike Fors, Ph.D., is associate professor in pedagogy at the School of Information Technology at Halmstad University in Sweden. Fors has also been director of the Swedish centre for Applied Cultural Analysis, and is affiliated researcher with the Digital Ethnography Research Centre at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, and the international Digital Data & Society Consortium. She is also part of the program office for the Swedish governmentally funded special innovation program for future smart mobilities; "DriveSweden". Her area of expertise lies in visual, sensory and design ethnography. In her pursuit to contribute to further understandings of contemporary conditions for learning with emerging technologies in everyday life, she has studied multisensory, embodied and emplaced aspects of user experiences of technologies in various research projects, such as self-tracking devices and self-driving cars. She has focused on understanding how ethnography can be tailored to be used in multi-disciplinary applied settings in research projects and publications.

Additional keynote speakers

Other keynote speakers will be announced on the conference website.

Further information

Conference website

Please visit the conference website for updates concerning the keynotes and the workshops as well as to submit your contribution proposition. The deadline for abstract submission is 31 March 2018. The registration tool will be online in early 2018.

<https://qualitative-research.ch/en/unexplored-realities>

For further inquiries, please contact the congress office:
unexplored-realities@unisg.ch

St. Gallen, Switzerland

The conference will take place in [St.Gallen, Switzerland](#). More information on accommodation in and travel to St.Gallen will be announced on the conference website.

Organization and sponsors

The organizing team in St.Gallen consists of: Dr. Florian Elliker and Niklaus Reichle (M.A.) (both University of St.Gallen), with the support of Prof. Dr. Peter Schallberger (University of Applied Sciences St.Gallen), Prof. Dr. Christoph Maeder (Zurich University of Teacher Education), and Prof. em. Thomas S. Eberle (University of St.Gallen).

The conference is supported by the following institutions:

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