



# — 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 “Interpretive 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 "Interpretive Sociologies" of the Swiss Sociological Association.

## Call for papers

*"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"<sup>1</sup>?*

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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**

Proposals for contribution can be submitted through an online tool available on the website. Please visit the conference website and consult the section "Abstract Submission":

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

- Submission deadline: 10 May 2018
- Notification of acceptance: End of May 2018

*Submission requirements:*

- Paper title
- Abstract (300 words or less)
- Keywords (1–5)
- A separate, brief statement of what methods and methodological issue(s) the paper will discuss
- Indicate where you wish your paper will be considered: one of the three

thematic streams or one of the predefined sessions (see list below).

- Institutional affiliations and email addresses for all co-authors

Contributions can either broadly deal with the conference theme in one of the three suggested thematic directions (neglected senses and sensitivities; unexplored social spaces and practices; hidden and concealed domains) or be submitted to one of the specific sessions listed below (please consult the website for short descriptions of these sessions):

- Researching the Problem that is Not There
- Hidden Realities of the State: Ethnographic Approaches to Public Administration and Governance
- Narrating the Unexplored and the Concealed
- Exploring New Arenas of Social and Civic Engagement
- Feeling the Field: Emotions in Qualitative Research
- Negotiating official vs actual realities: Observations when bureaucratic facts and truth conflict
- Qualitative 'Failures' and Beyond
- Comparative, Collaborative and Continuing Ethnography to Study the Unspoken, Unseen, Unheard
- Bureaucracy in Everyday Worklife

## 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.

### **David Howes, Concordia University, Canada**

David Howes is Professor of Anthropology, Co-Direstor of the Centre for Sensory Studies, and Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. He holds three degrees in anthropology and two degrees in law. His main fields of research include sensory anthropology, multisensory aesthetics, culture and consumption, constitutional studies, and the anthropology of law. He has conducted field research on the cultural life of the senses in the Middle Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, Northwestern Argentina, and the Southwestern United States. He is currently directing a research project on "Law and the Regulation of the Senses" and collaborating with new media artist Christopher Salter on a project called "Mediations of Sensation." His latest publications include *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (co-authored with Constance Classen) from Routledge, and the four-volume *Senses and Sensation: Critical and Primary Sources* compendium from Bloomsbury.

## Workshops

On Wednesday, 5 September 2018, three full day qualitative methods workshops will be presented: by Patricia and Peter Adler, Ross Koppel, and David Howes. For further information, please visit the conference website.

### **Workshop 1**

#### **Participant Observation and Membership Roles**

*Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler*

Participant observation is an in-depth method of data collection that requires significant amounts of time, commitment, and/or self-involvement. What it may sacrifice in the breadth of its empirical range and statistical analysis it makes up for in both the greater understanding of how and why people perceive the world and act within it and a more meaningful examination of the theoretical analysis underlying people's selves, interactions, cultures, and the effects of social structures.

In this workshop we will begin by reflecting on a few of our major ethnographies that have employed different research roles along a spectrum of membership, from those based on complete membership (Peer Power), to active membership (Backboards and Blackboards), to peripheral membership (Wheeling and Dealing) to non-membership (The Tender Cut). The type of role researchers take may depend on their biographies, opportunities, connections, and theoretical interests, among other things. Each stance evokes different opportunities and challenges for gaining entrée, forming trust, gathering data, and critically analyzing findings.

We will then open up the discussion to the research projects of workshop participants and let the group join us in engaging in brainstorming for helpful suggestions to deal with participants' roles, problems, and conceptualizations from their settings.

## **Workshop 2**

### **Multiple Methods in Social-Scientific Medical Research: On Using Qualitative Methods to Start and End Research—and Quantitative Methods In-Between**

*Ross Koppel*

Prof. Ross Koppel presents some of his major research projects from 50 years of research that employed multiple methods. He will focus on studies that incorporate qualitative and quantitative research methods and will discuss how the methodological challenges of combining multiple and diverse methods can be addressed. The presentation will particularly focus on Koppel's work in medical informatics, which is the use of computer systems in healthcare, often called Healthcare Information Technology (HIT).

The course will cover the use of:

- Informal and formal observations; focus groups; shadowing; and intensive interviews
- Surveys (paper and pencil, digital and face-to-face)
- Analysis of computer logs, including logs of software clicks and keystrokes; analysis of help desk logs; analysis of requests for software changes or fixes to hospital it departments and to vendors
- Attendance at FMEA conferences (failure mode and effects analysis) meetings involving clinicians and technology use; attendance at M&M conferences (mortality and morbidity conferences in hospitals following a known error)
- Interviews with healthcare technology vendors at sales meetings conferences, and in hospitals; interviews with medical and nursing informatics directors, hospital it leaders, programmers
- Analysis of legal contracts between vendors and clinicians

Koppel will also discuss the reactions to research findings when they were published in medical journals. The second part of the course will be opened to discussions of the research projects of the workshop participants.

## Workshop 3

*David Howes*

This workshop will involve going on a ramble and encountering a collection. The objective is to experiment with a variety of different concepts and techniques of the senses that have been evolved in recent years by sensory studies scholars interested in the investigation of "atmospheres" and the "sensory life of things."

Attempts have been made to measure atmospheres by using gas liquid chromatography, for example, but they invariably fail. This is because an atmosphere is "something in-between subject and object," as the philosopher Gernot Böhme has taught us. An atmosphere is not just air, and it is not just space. It is relational and therefore cannot be objectified, only sensed. The multisensory ramble is one means for doing this. It is a composite of sightseeing, the soundwalk, the smellwalk and the touch tour all of which methodologies have been elaborated independently in the past, but are finally brought together here in St. Gallen.

The idea that objects might have a social life has been circulating for some time, and the "biography of things" approach has been developed to render an account of this. The recognition that objects also have a sensory life is more recent (though there are important historical and cross-cultural precedents). Various techniques will be demonstrated in the course of encountering a collection that will help activate the sensory life of the objects under consideration.

The route the ramble will take and the nature of the collection we shall be exploring have yet to be determined.

## Further information

### Conference website

Please visit the conference website for updates concerning the conference programme and the workshops:

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

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

- [University of St.Gallen \(HSG\), Switzerland](#)
- [Swiss National Science Foundation](#)
- [University of Applied Sciences FHS St.Gallen, Switzerland](#)
- [Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences](#)
- [Swiss Sociological Association](#)
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