Conference Report: 5th Swiss Methods Festival for Qualitative Research Methods
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5th Swiss Methods Festival for Qualitative Research Methods.
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of Basel, the University of St. Gallen, the Swiss Sociological Association,
and the Swiss Anthropological Association

Abstract: In yearly installments since 2011, the Swiss Methods Festival offers, during the course of two days, workshops on a broad and diverse range of qualitative social research methods. Complemented by two keynotes that address contemporary issues within the field of qualitative research, the workshops introduce the participants to the state-of-the-art of the respective approaches and offer the opportunity to discuss ongoing research projects. The festival constitutes the largest event in Switzerland concerned with qualitative methods, addressing the still marginal situation of qualitative methods in the curricula of many Swiss universities. This report provides an account of the 5th Swiss Methods Festival, contextualizes the event historically, presents the different workshops, and offers a short discussion of the issues addressed in the keynotes.

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1. The Swiss Methods Festival

On September 16 and 17, 2016, the fifth installment of the Swiss Methods Festival took place in Basel, Switzerland. In the same tradition and in exchange with the organizers of the annual Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung [Berlin Meeting on Qualitative Research Methods] (see MEY & MRUCK, 2009, 2014) it offers workshops on a wide range of qualitative research approaches, a selection of methods that in its diversity is meant to complement the curricula of Swiss universities that in general are still focused predominantly on quantitative methods. The workshops at the festival are led by renowned experts and provide participants with the opportunity to present their current projects and have them discussed with a particular focus on the method taught in that workshop. [1]

The fifth anniversary of the festival provides the opportunity to take a brief look at its history. The history of the social sciences can be seen as the history of its institutions. Significant events happened in 1990, when the Swiss Academy of

Humanities was renamed the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, the umbrella organization of 55 scientific associations. It was based on LEPENIES' (1985) distinction of "three cultures," and recognized that the social sciences, with their emphasis on empirical research, were different from the humanities. Two years later, in 1992, SIDOS was founded, the Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences, which provides information about current and past research projects but also collects the data that is produced in social scientific research. SIDOS was succeeded by FORS, the Research Center for the Social Sciences [Forschungszentrum für die Sozialwissenschaften]. [2]

In 1993, the Swiss Academy founded the Social Science Policy Council, which is typically composed of the presidents of the social scientific associations. This council launched several initiatives, one of which was the promotion of qualitative methods in Switzerland. In the 1990s, it was predominantly quantitative research that was promoted and institutionalized. Qualitative research was politically marginalized—most universities did not provide an adequate training in qualitative methods, and the experts of the Swiss National Science Foundation as well the reviewers at scientific journals often evaluated research projects and papers along inadequate criteria, namely those of (positivist) quantitative research. The initiative pursued several goals:

- to build a network among qualitative researchers in Switzerland;
- to reach a consensus regarding crucial points like quality criteria of qualitative research;
- to publish a statement (manifesto) (SAGW, 2010) to spread this consensus;
- to promote the archiving of qualitative data (at SIDOS);
- to create a qualitative methods festival that offers workshops with international experts for doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers. [3]

All these goals were eventually reached: In several interdisciplinary meetings of the Swiss Network for Qualitative Social Research—founded in 2004—a minimal consensus concerning the basic characteristics of qualitative research was reached among researchers across different social scientific disciplines. This consensus was published in a manifesto (SAGW, 2010) signed by about 60 researchers, mainly professors, demanding from the Swiss National Foundation as well as journal editors that the quality of qualitative research be assessed using adequate criteria. FORS received the explicit task of collecting quantitative and qualitative data alike. Finally, in 2011, the Qualitative Methods Festival was founded. [4]

All these successes were achieved thanks to the continued institutional and financial support of the Swiss Academy. A first prerequisite of this funding was that several social scientific disciplines participate in the Methods Festival. Secondly, these efforts needed to be multilingual, situated within the long-standing tradition in Switzerland that participants speak in their respective languages—predominantly German and French—and are expected to

understand the counterpart. In subsequent years, English was added as a third option. The requirement for multilingual editions of the Methods Festival proved to be difficult to implement, as many experts and participants from Germany and Austria are not faced with this demand and do not understand French. After the first installment in Basel in 2011, the Swiss Academy—initially critical of the idea —agreed to separate the festival into a German/English and a French/English version, alternating each year between a German/English edition that takes place in the German part of Switzerland (Basel 2011, 2014, 2016) and a French/English edition that is organized in the French part by FORS in cooperation with French Swiss universities (Fribourg 2013; Lausanne 2015, 2017). [5]

The 2016 Methods Festival offered 18 three-hour workshops that were held during the course of two days (see Section 2). Each morning and afternoon, about a third of the workshops were held in parallel, providing the participants with the opportunity to visit three workshops throughout the Methods Festival. Each of the two days started with a keynote that addressed current issues in the field of qualitative research (held by David SILVERMAN and Jo REICHERTZ; see Section 3). The workshops were conceived to introduce the participants to the state-of-the-art research procedure of a specific qualitative research approach. Similar to past editions of the festival, the corresponding research designs as well as methods of data collection and analysis were not only presented in theory, but were demonstrated and illustrated with the experts' own research, as well as applied to current research projects that the participants presented. The experts who led the workshops were invited from a diverse range of social science disciplines (although many are situated within the field of German-language sociology), coming from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. [6]

2. The Workshops

The festival presented a good opportunity to familiarize oneself with qualitative methods that developed within the German traditions of interpretive sociology. Many of the well-established approaches were covered, representing the broad range of methods within the field. The selection of approaches that are situated predominantly in the German-language social science disciplines demonstrated two things: There is, firstly, a demand for and an ever-diversifying field of qualitative methods within the German-speaking realm; events like this festival or the "Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung" draw a large audience from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Yet, secondly, it highlighted that many of these approaches remain within their language boundaries, although their paradigmatic origins had informed the development of qualitative methods elsewhere; a dialog with similar traditions in the Anglo-Saxon and French traditions of qualitative research is only slowly developing. Much of the work of collaboration and translation across language boundaries is yet to be done. [7]

The program did not sort the workshops in any form of specific tracks. There were, however, some identifiable foci and shared concerns discernible: Three workshops presented *ethnographic research strategies* (long-term studies in the field, ethnographic research designs, life-world analytic ethnography) and another

three workshops focused on *visual methodologies and data* (image hermeneutics, videography, video and film analysis). Other workshops were concerned with *hermeneutics* (sequential analysis, image hermeneutics) or based on a *phenomenological tradition* (phenomenology, life-world analytic ethnography). While most workshops were in one way or another concerned with analyzing data, a few workshops focused explicitly on *data analysis* (analyzing qualitative data, computer-based analysis of qualitative data). In addition to these, workshops were presented on grounded theory methodology, qualitative interviews, methods plurality, biographical case reconstructions, and discourse analysis in the tradition of FOUCAULT. [8]

The workshop "Ethnographic Research: Long-term Studies in the Field" (Peter FINKE and Johannes QUACK) focused on the process of participating in social settings with the aim of engaging closely with the actors and their emic perspectives, calling attention to the strengths of long-term participation in the field and the diverse range of methods that long-term stays make it possible to apply. In "Ethnographic Research Designs," Ronald HITZLER and Paul EISEWICHT presented ethnography as a multi-method investigation of a particular field, focusing on how these diverse methods and strategies may be combined in social scientific plausible research designs. Michaela PFADENHAUER and Heiko KIRSCHNER presented the specific epistemological underpinnings and methodological strategies of "life-world analytic ethnography," an approach situated within the phenomenological tradition of interpretive research, emphasizing the importance of using the researcher's own experience in the field as a methodological tool. [9]

Drawing on a similar tradition as the life-world analytic approach, Thomas S. EBERLE presented "Phenomenology" not only as a proto-sociological, philosophical framework for sociology (a view dominant in German interpretive sociology, following Thomas LUCKMANN; cf. e.g., LUCKMANN, 1973), but advocated and demonstrated the use of phenomenology as an empirical sociological research method. While a phenomenological approach understood as an empirical research method focuses on the narrative-dialogic reconstruction and analysis of experience, "Sequential Analysis" (presented by Jo REICHERTZ) is focused on reconstructing the largely implicit structure and order embedded in language, proceeding in a detailed, step-by-step analysis of interview data or naturally occurring data, developing and testing hypotheses with regard to the implied structuring principles of the text that is analyzed. In their workshop on "Qualitative Interviews," Ulrike FROSCHAUER and Manfred LUEGER demonstrated how interviews may be adapted to different research designs and how open-ended interviews are conducted, and presented strategies for analyzing interviews that aim not only at reconstructing implicit meaning structures (as the aforementioned hermeneutic traditions predominantly do), but relate this implicit dimension to the manifest contents of the data. [10]

Originating from the same traditions of interpretive research, the workshop on a "Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Image Hermeneutics" (Jürgen RAAB) discussed the challenges and potentials of an interpretive approach to *visual*

representations in general and to symbolic orders within single images in particular, spelling out the ways in which an analysis could proceed in a methodologically guided manner. Also focusing on the visual, René TUMA presented a workshop on "Videography," an approach that originates from interpretive German sociology, but took on a more conversation analytic character, focusing on an in-depth step-by-step analysis of video-recorded everyday situations. Such video-recorded analyses are supported by ever-more sophisticated technologies; Christine MORITZ' workshop dealt with the "Analysis and Transcription of Video and Film in Qualitative Research." [11]

Günter MEY's workshop presented the basic features of "Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM)," discussing the new developments within this broad research tradition (sometimes called the "second generation," MORSE et al., 2009; cf. RUPPEL & MEY, 2017) with a focus on the crafting of research designs and on the various coding procedures suggested by GTM approaches. In her workshop on "Biographical Case Reconstructions," Gabriele ROSENTHAL focused on a research approach that analyzes social phenomena by reconstructing the life-story context of individuals and by relating these life-courses to the broader societal developments to which they are reciprocally linked. Methodologically based on an "interpretive analytics," Rainer DIAZ-BONE introduced the workshop participants to the basic epistemological underpinnings of a "Foucauldian Discourse Analysis," calling attention to the differences between German interpretive approaches in the tradition of HUSSERL (1996 [1936]) as opposed to French approaches that draw on BACHELARD (1988 [1934]), spelling out the methodological implications and demonstrating this by discussing empirical discourse analyses. [12]

With "Analyzing Qualitative Data," David SILVERMAN's workshop was titled with what is often neglected in teaching qualitative methods in favor of data collection. SILVERMAN stressed the importance of engaging with data analysis as early as possible in research projects and of studying deviant cases, demonstrating corresponding analytic procedures. Stefan RÄDIKER's workshop consisted of an "Introduction to Computer-Based Analysis of Qualitative Data Using MAXQDA," demonstrating how qualitative data analysis software can be used to organize data and support the analysis, highlighting among other things how to practically use the diverse coding features usually built into this type of software. In her workshop "Methods Plurality," Nicole BURZAN presented and discussed the challenges of what is conventionally referred to as mixed methods research designs, i.e., of applying multiple, diverse methods within the same research design. [13]

3. The Keynotes: Developments in the Field of Qualitative Methods

Both keynotes dealt in different ways with developments in the field of qualitative research: addressing credibility, focus, and audience orientation of qualitative research, David SILVERMAN's reflections critically appraised some of the recent trends within the field—such as a dominant concern with "experience" as matter for investigation and with "interviews" as method—and suggested focusing more on observable behavior again. Jo REICHERTZ demonstrated how the range of different qualitative methodologies has expanded during the last 30 years and highlighted the major shifts within the field and the challenges qualitative methodologies are likely to face in the near future. [14]

In his opening keynote address on "The Audiences for Qualitative Research: Making our Work Credible," David SILVERMAN spoke on the subject of qualitative research, the ways in which qualitative research gains credibility, and how we as qualitative researchers address our audiences. This report focuses particularly on the first point concerning what qualitative methods should be concerned with and what methods should be employed correspondingly, as this is a particularly widely debated issue within the field. [15]

SILVERMAN is well known for his textbooks on qualitative research (cf. 2014 [1993], 2016 [1997]), and as editor he has increasingly included non-Anglo-Saxon researchers from other European countries. In laying out his perspective of the territory of qualitative research, he first focused on the relationship between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Reflecting on a widely shared notion among much of the qualitative research field, he suggested not seeing qualitative and quantitative research methods as competing—but rather, complementary—methodologies. Drawing on an another widely shared notion, he suggested seeing the ability of qualitative research to investigate the phenomena of interest in a differentiated and detailed manner—providing the corresponding theory work with a grounded and relevant character—as one of its main strengths. What the major strength of qualitative methods beyond this notion is, however, remains a contested issue within the field. Taking issue with what he sees as the "majority" view in the field, SILVERMAN not only criticized the predominant concern of the "majority" view—"lived experience"—but also the persisting focus on mainly one data collection method to investigate this lived experience, i.e., interviews. Partially based on a perspective situated within the tradition of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (see e.g. SILVERMAN, 1998), he suggested—on the contrary—seeing "behavior" as the unique topic of qualitative methods: "what people do" should be the main focus of qualitative research. Correspondingly, data collection methods should focus on naturalistic data, produced with only minimal (or no) intervention by the researcher, and data analysis methods should not focus on "themes" but rather analyze how people accomplish everyday settings *in situ*. Interviews and thematic analyses have indeed become some of the most widely applied qualitative methods and figure prominently in the ever-growing market of handbooks and introductory methododology guides for qualitative methods. And as SILVERMAN reminds us, we currently live in an "interview society" in which the interview is used by a wide

range of professionals and non-professionals, creating a particular need for reflection on why and how the usage of particular interview strategies in the social sciences set themselves apart from the usage in other fields. [16]

Behavior and experience, however, are categories that other qualitative approaches would not see as mutually exclusive. Many ethnographic approaches and particularly the life-world analytical approaches to ethnography— epistemologically based on HUSSERL (1996 [1936]), and SCHÜTZ and LUCKMANN (1974, 1989), among others—are sensitized towards an integral experience of internal sensations, the processes of meaning constitution, and behavior that is externally observable by others. They differ with regard to the epistemological status they grant inner experiences: While some remain sensitized towards such experiences but focus on their externalized form, others aim at grappling with the "inner dimension" in a more in-depth way, either by narratively exploring these dimensions with the research participants or by analyzing the researcher's own experiences. [17]

Another important question raised by SILVERMAN is whether and how it is possible to infer the social reality of a "field" when data are gathered from interview situations removed from that field. While some everyday life phenomena may indeed be rendered invisible in the interview (i.e., only "appear" in narratives), other phenomena may often remain "invisible" in everyday life too; they constitute important dimensions that may be primarily lodged in subjective memories. If we assume individuals' past experiences to be relevant to action in the present, we need to critically engage in a discussion of how we deal with dimensions that are relevant but hardly tangible—a question that many of the workshops at the festival dealt with. Thus, while qualitative research methods should not be reduced to interviewing, neither should they be reduced to only focusing on observable behavior. [18]

The second and third part of the keynote addressed issues of credibility and audience orientation, both of which constitute long-standing threads of discussion in the field of qualitative research. In terms of credibility, SILVERMAN argued that qualitative methods should not try to compete with quantitative methods but focus on their respective strengths, i.e., focus on the in-depth analysis of any given phenomena of interest. To this end, he cautioned against dismissing the notion of credibility too easily; instead, whenever engaged in writing up results, qualitative researchers should try to reflect and work on the credibility of their research. This should, however, not imply following what he termed the two common orthodoxies, namely the "divine orthodoxy"—the researcher is endowed with superior knowledge—and the "explanatory orthodoxy"—the researcher knows *why* certain phenomena are socially constructed and organized in specific ways. Instead, researchers should focus on demonstrating "how things actually work," on the "what" and "how" questions. Again, the latter point, as outlined above, is particularly plausible within approaches that share the epistemological premises of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, but the latter remain contested within the wider field of qualitative research, which has undergone a remarkable process of differentiation in the time since its revival in the 1980s. [19]

The second day began with a keynote address by Jo REICHERTZ on the current developments in qualitative social research. In the past 30 years, the field has become very complex. The development is not just going into one direction; it is not just getting "more and better." Instead, topics come and go, and there are ups and downs with regard to methods of data collection and data analysis, as well as regarding theoretical approaches. In the early 1970s there was, as it seems, a vague consensus on what qualitative or interpretive research was: Opposite to quantitative or positivist approaches, it dealt with the subjective sense of social action. And objects were not considered to be determined by objective properties, but became socially relevant by the meaning that actors attributed to them. However, the interpretive paradigm remained loose, and there was no institutionalized view defining how qualitative research had to be done. The debates from the 1970s onwards essentially zoomed in on two basic positions: Should qualitative or interpretive research attempt to understand social action from the subjective perspective of the actor, or should it rather understand it from the social situation in which the actor acts? There were several charismatic personalities in German-speaking sociology and psychology, such as Fritz SCHÜTZE, Ulrich OEVERMANN, Thomas LUCKMANN, Hans-Georg SOEFFNER, and Thomas LEITHÄUSER, who took a succinct position in these debates and who acted as "referees." [20]

In the past 10 to 15 years, this basic consensus has vanished, as REICHERTZ observed, and there are no respected referees left who are accepted in this function. An abundance and variety of new methodical procedures have emerged, due to new theoretical approaches and new media of data registration and analysis. More and more types of data are used, new procedures of interpretation developed, and a diversity of goals aimed at. Qualitative research is not only pursued at universities, but also by corporations, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Qualitative and quantitative methods are combined with mixed methods, and the border between different paradigms is increasingly crossed—collaborations of all kinds have emerged, and increasingly the observed are considered as co-active participants in the research process (as insiders, or in order to involve or empower them). More and more approaches are fighting for recognition in the field, and the former established approaches are increasingly getting dissolved—their label, which was tied to a charismatic leader, is still used, but it does not imply a common practice or theory. Notable examples are, among others, the "grounded theory methodology" approach or "content analysis": Which is the "right" way to pursue this kind of research? Hermeneutic approaches have tried to achieve some canonization, but unavoidably, more qualitative research approaches are fighting for recognition. How should this situation be dealt with? Uwe FLICK (2014), for instance, advocates a "methodical multiculturalism," which considers each approach that is called "qualitative" as equally worthy to be included under the big umbrella "QSR." Accordingly, Günter MEY (2017, p.194) recommends a "tolerance for ambiguity." REICHERTZ argued that in terms of the sociology of religion, one could diagnose that the predominant "polytheisms" in qualitative research have been replaced by "pantheism." [21]

REICHERTZ did not pretend that he could deliver a "neutral" description of these developments; rather, he made sense of it as an actor in the field of qualitative research. He observed a number of recent movements: The subject is shifting from the symbolic interaction of situated subjects to the collective order of practices that also includes artifacts. Video data has become a favored type of data, allowing for "nano-analyses." Methods of data analysis are no longer considered as an "art," but rather as a tool kit to choose from. Qualitative research has become a social field where the participants compete for economic and symbolic capital, and there is also a trend from slow and expensive to quick and cheap research. Maybe the most obvious development is that qualitative researchers increasingly reflect on their own research process (how they practice reading, writing, interpreting, etc.), and how their subjectivity as researchers affects their findings. A new consensus has been emerging that social research is always a communicative process—with the researched, the scientific community, and the society that is funding science. [22]

After pondering a number of factors that may have caused or contributed to these developments, REICHERTZ closed with some reflections on the challenges we are currently facing. Firstly, the new methods of recording reveal the visual of social interaction in great detail and allow for nano-analyses; this implies new theoretical, methodical, and methodological challenges that must be thoroughly tackled. Secondly, the rise and dissemination of practice theory and actor–network theory challenges the conventional focus on the subjective experiences and intentions of actors and replaces them with broader units, which include artifacts and embodied practices, but also situations. Again, this has methodical and methodological implications. Third, the new focus on the practices of communication and interaction will shift data collection methods from ego-documents (above all, interviews) to registering documents, such as videos in combination with transcripts, which requires a new assessment of analytical content and interpretive procedures of data analysis. [23]

REICHERTZ displayed an impressive in-depth knowledge of the field of qualitative social research in Germany and presented a plausible diagnosis of its main movements and developments. As he conceded, his view is not a neutral description but a result of his own perspective as a participant in the field (cf. REICHERTZ, 2016). His argumentation made evident that he was socialized in the tradition of symbolic interactionism, reconstructive social research, and hermeneutics. He therefore has a preference for analyzing interaction and communication—and now practices—and does not put the subjective perspective of actors center stage. Phenomenological sociologists, who represent a strong faction within German interpretive research, would agree with many points, but are likely to put a different emphasis in the conclusion: The main challenge will be to correct the widespread but false belief that taking into account the actors' subjective perspectives means explaining their actions by their intentions; in SCHÜTZ's conception of the life-world, the subjective pole is complemented by a pragmatic, intersubjective pole from early on, and it has always included the embodiment of action as well as the relevance of (material) objectivations, as was recently thoroughly explicated by Hubert KNOBLAUCH (2016). Sociology will

always oscillate between subjectivism and objectivism; neither a completely subjectivist nor a completely objectivist position will endure. The most promising approaches span both poles as do, for instance, the sociology of knowledge by BERGER and LUCKMANN (1966), or BOURDIEU's theory of practice (BOURDIEU, 1977). [24]

4. Concluding Remarks

Acknowledging the differences among the various social scientific disciplines, methods of qualitative social research remain marginalized at many Swiss universities, particularly with regard to their mandatory status in the methods' curricula. The Swiss Methods Festival—one of the outcomes of an initiative of the Swiss Social Science Policy Council aimed at promoting qualitative research methods—addresses this situation partially by offering a theoretical and practical introduction to the state-of-the-art of a broad and diverse range of contemporary qualitative social research approaches. [25]

Participation in the 2016 edition of the festival demonstrated that it not only provides an opportunity for the participants to familiarize themselves with specific methods, but to engage in exchange and conversation with other participants and experts with regard to specific research projects, to discuss the current state-of-the-art, and to establish a sense for where and how qualitative social research is done. The latter aspect, however, pertains predominantly to qualitative research in the German-speaking social sciences. The two separate editions of the Methods Festival, French/English in Lausanne and German/English in Basel, reflect the language divide between French- and German-speaking qualitative research. While the decision to organize two separate editions is based on pragmatic considerations with regard to experts and participants, the corresponding differences in research sensibilities remain largely non-thematized. In particular, a methods festival in Switzerland could provide an opportunity to go beyond reading each other's texts to lively discussion and sharing of the research sensibilities of each (language) area, warranting, however, additional and potentially uncomfortable efforts in terms of understanding. Another opportunity still to be further explored is cooperation and exchange across the different social science disciplines: Qualitative approaches and the corresponding methodological sensibilities differ in political science, social/cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology, among others; while the Methods Festival provides the opportunity to get a sense of the current state-of-the-art in these disciplines, qualitative methods could—among other domains—serve as a common ground for cooperation across disciplines. [26]

Finally, as the two keynotes exemplified, the Methods Festival is one of the settings in which central concerns and developments are discussed. Questions with regard to the status of behavior and experience in qualitative social research, to name just one example, are questions that need to be posed and discussed repeatedly. While different approaches each formulate answers to such questions, they need to be re-examined continuously in the light of new developments. Such developments bring about new empirical phenomena that

warrant transformations of existing methodologies and research sensibilities, and lead simultaneously to processes of diversification and consolidation in the field of qualitative social research. The Methods Festival provided the participants with the opportunity to engage in a discourse about the changing contours and central concerns of this field. [27]

Acknowledgments

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