Aplied Methodology for Teachers II: Qualitative Approach

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**Background Information on the Subject**

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**Introduction to the Subject (Summary)**

Practical Methodology for Teachers 2 is a subject providing information on the qualitative approach to research, its theoretical starting points, and its application in practice. The knowledge acquired is expected to help students in their work on their graduation theses.

**Subject Objectives**

The subject objective is that students should be able to plan a research project, carry out a qualitative survey and analyse the data collected, and interpret the data subject to analysis within the context of a selected theory.

**Requirements for Completion**

The requirements for completing this subject include a seminar paper consisting of three parts. The first part contains a transcription of an interview carried out by the student. The second part should contain a working procedure describing the method of how the student worked when doing a qualitative analysis of the interview. The third part consists of a 3- to 5-page final interpretation of the interview; it can also contain a model of the theory which has emerged.
Meaning of the Icons in the Text

- **Objectives**
  A list of objectives is provided at the beginning of each chapter.

- **Time Requirements**
  An estimate of how much time you will need to study the chapter.

- **Terms to Remember (Key Words)**
  A list of important terms and main points that the student should not omit when studying the topic.

- **Exercises**
  Miscellaneous less important or clarifying information in a note.

- **Review Questions**
  Verifying to what extent the student has understood the text and the issue and remembers fundamental and important information.

- **Summary**
  A summary of the topic.

- **Literature**
  Used in the text and to complement and further one’s knowledge.
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1 Foreword

This study text has been produced based on the author’s many years of experience with field research. The primary inspiration comes from her activities in the Prague School Ethnography Group (Pražská skupina školní etnografie, PSŠE) (see the Pražská skupina školní etnografie website). Her fundamental experience was gained during longitudinal research carried out by the Prague School Ethnography Group at basic schools in the years 1994–2003 and presented in the publication entitled ‘Vývoj dítěte od první do páté třídy’ (Child Development from the First to the Fifth Grade) (Pražská skupina školní etnografie, 2005) which was awarded with a medal of the minister of education in 2005.1

Further research experience is related to research projects2 addressing the issue of why Roma children in the Czech Republic largely participate in primary education at basic practical schools, previously special schools [schools intended for children with special educational needs who cannot be successfully educated at conventional basic schools] (Levínská, 2009a; Levínská, 2008).

In addition to the aforementioned long-term projects, the researcher conducted a ten-month research project in an anthroposophical village, Botton Village (Rybová, 1998), took part in the comparative research project EUROPEPEP3 (Greger, Levínská, Smetáčková, 2008) and participated in the monitoring of the SIM (‘Střediska Integrace Menšin/ Centres for the Integration of Minorities) project (Levínská, 2009b).

The author’s research approaches have been influenced by her teachers, primarily by Miloš Kůčera, Josef Kandert and Zdeněk Uherek, as well as by PSŠE members (Stanislav Štech, Miroslav Klusák, Miroslav Rendl, Alena Škaloudová, Ida Viktorová, Lenka Hříbková), with Dana Bittnerová and David Doubek recently being the most influential persons with whom the author addresses the issues centred on Roma education. Together they published the monograph ‘Funkce kulturních modelů ve vzdělávání’ (Cultural Model Functions in

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1 1994–2003 ‘Žák v měnících se podmínkách současné školy’ (The Learner in the Changing Conditions of Current Schooling), GA ČR 406/94/1417, 406/97/0870, 406/00/0470 –laureates PhDr. Věra Semerádová and PhDr. Miroslav Rendl, CSCE.

2 2005–2007 ‘Vzdělání a jeho hodnota z hlediska Romů (Pohled na vzdělání očima Romských matek)’ (Education and its Value from the Romas Perspective (Viewed through the Eyes for of Roma Mothers)), (reg. no. GACR 406/05/P560); 2008–2010 ‘Funkce kulturních modelů ve vzdělávání’ (Cultural Model Functions in Education) (reg. no. GACR 406/08/805); 2012–2015 ‘Rozhodovací procesy pomáhajících profesí v oblasti interkulturních vztahů’ (Decision-making Processes of the Helping Professions in Intercultural Relations) (GACR, reg. no. P407/12/0547).

3 2007–2008 a two-year international research project organised by Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique (INRP) in Lyon, France.
Education); this publication was awarded by the rector of Charles University in 2011 (Bittnerová, Doubek, Levínská, 2011).

The aim of this study text is to provide a comprehensible guide on the qualitative research approach, to enable students to carry out research and write their final projects on the one hand and to produce a summary of sources to gain deeper and more comprehensive knowledge about the qualitative approach on the other hand.

As for the disciplines applied, the author has been influenced by cultural anthropology, psychology and the philosophy of education and instruction.

This study text is divided into ten chapters (plus the foreword and the conclusion), each of which is followed by a list of recommended references (literature) to be studied or by assignments to be contemplated upon or performed during the study term. The exercises are expected to help students successfully carry out their research projects, i.e. to collect and analyse the respective data and apply it in the text.

It is not this study text's objective to provide an exhaustive summary (since there are many of this type which are much more complex than this thin text) but rather to pass on personal experience with the qualitative approach and school ethnography.

# 2 Initial Terms

## Objectives

- To introduce the fundamental terms used in research methodology.
- To describe the relation between qualitative and quantitative research.
- To clarify the multi-paradigm characteristics of the social sciences.
- To define the term ‘school ethnography’.

## Time Requirements

1 hour
2.1 What Is Science? Why Do We Speak about Research Methodology at all?

If we move within the scientific domain, it means that we deal with some kind of research. But how can we recognise science? According to Disman, 'it was only Thomas S. Kuhn (1962) who analysed the institution of science in truly sociological terms'. His approach makes it possible to 'create an operational definition of science, i.e. to describe the operations we must apply to recognise that something is science' (Disman, 2005, p. 12). 'Kuhn introduced two important concepts into the theory of science: the concept of the paradigm and the concept of 'normal' science. 'Normal science is a discipline where a community of scientists accepts the same paradigm' (Disman, 2005, p. 12). The natural sciences could be regarded as 'normal sciences', but even such a science as physics is not today united when it comes to an interpretation of the world and its laws. It shares a variety of paradigms related to the interpretation of physical phenomena (Smolin, 2009).

According to Kuhn, paradigms are accepted examples of actual scientific practice – examples which include law, theory, application and instrumentation together. They provide models from which particular coherent traditions of scientific research spring’(Kuhn in Disman, 2005, p. 12).

This definition of science has a social character: ‘science is what scientists in the given field regard as science’ (Disman, 2005, p. 13). According to Disman, a more serious problem is expressed by Kuhn as follows: 'A question remains open whether the social sciences have a paradigm at all' (Disman, 2005, p. 14). Is it possible at all that social scientists within one field of science agree on a common theory, law, application, and instrumentation? We know from psychology that the subject matter of research differs in many individual directions with regard to these sciences. If we look at examples from the past, the founder of behaviourism,
Watson, perceived consciousness as a parallel to the soul (*psyche*) that does not exist and hence, it is not an appropriate subject of research (Hoskovec, Nakonečný, Sedláková, 1999). Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, focused on the arrangement of the human psyche (e.g. Freud, 1971). Clearly, the subject matter of research is absolutely different in these two schools, also resulting in the different application and selection of research tools depending on the theory accepted by the scientist for the subject matter of research. There are numerous examples of this in much subtler nuances in psychology and other social sciences. Therefore, we can say that the social sciences are multi-paradigm sciences.

If we discuss research methodology, students often ask about the purpose and use of each specific method (such as open coding). What they are actually asking about is why there is any difference between a layman and a scientist. Why is science done at all?

Each individual can have different motives as to why to ‘do’ science. If we look back at the roots of European culture, we encounter Plato’s theory addressing the relation between ‘opinion’ and ‘knowledge’. ‘Opinion as such cannot recognise whether or not it is true. That is why an opinion is worthless with regard to cognition’ (Kratochvíl, 1993, p. 60).

In modern history a few centuries later, science holds the position of philosophy and decides whether a certain opinion is erroneous or will be commissioned in the ‘ranks of scientifically proven truth’ (Kratochvíl, 1993, p. 60). In normal life, we use our own and generally shared opinions for our orientation, including various stereotypes. Scientific research can help us reveal the truthfulness or untruthfulness of our opinions. Unlike Plato we cannot in our postmodern times recognise ‘true being’. Nonetheless, we can at least hold the ‘BIOS THEORETIKOS’ position (‘theoretical life’) where we take a detached view and become unbiased witnesses to the events that we retrieve in our narration at home (cf. Kratochvíl, 1993, pp. 60–61).

Plato introduced his philosophy primarily through dialogues because encountering different views and opinions can provide a glimmer of cognition (cf. Kratochvíl, 1993, pp. 60–61). Plato’s view can also be inspiring for the researcher-theoretician. A theoretician ‘does not try to impose’ his/her opinions but is interested in the opinions of others. The form of a dialogue or an interview points to the dual approach of the researcher as both an interested person and one seeking to establish a theoretical distance.

The theoretical and scientific approach to life constitutes a community of scientists as an institution regarding a certain thought process as scientific. Here science is institutionally and socially embedded. A scientist is a part of an
‘academic crowd’. This is related to an individual’s identification and identity (cf. Kučera, 2010).

Sublimation of instinct can be another motive for ‘doing’ science from the perspective of psychoanalysis; this is when scientific research is a result of ‘successful sublimation’ and is an internal motive and incentive. Here it depends on the degree of the scientist’s identification with the shared theory and on the ability to des-identify oneself from the said shared and newly acquired theory in order to identify oneself with one’s instinct and be able to produce creative scientific work (cf. Kučera, 2010).

2.2 Relation Between Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

The scientific literature defines the qualitative and quantitative approaches through the differences between them (see Disman, 2005, Miovský, 2006). The reader will thus realise the options offered by either approach.

They take a different approach to the sample subject of research and to the application of the information gained and its interpretation. However, the most significant difference is in the application of opposite thought operations. The quantitative approach uses deduction, ‘i.e. it can solve only a certain category of problems: quantitative research can only find solutions for such problems that can be described in terms of the relations between the variables observed’ (Disman, 2005, p. 77).

The qualitative approach uses induction. ‘The qualitative approach involves a non-numerical survey and interpretation of social reality. The aim is to unveil the meaning underlying the information communicated’ (Disman, 2005, p. 285).

Disman also discusses the basic differences between the two approaches with regard to the creation of a new theory. ‘Quantitative research aims at hypothesis testing. Qualitative research aims at creating a new hypothesis, new understanding, a new theory’ (Disman, 2005, p. 286).

Each approach must necessarily result in the reduction of some kind of information. This reduction is associated with different objectives and aims. We can either reduce the number of individuals or the scope of the information observed. Figuratively speaking, there is a relation of inverse proportionality between the amount of information gleaned and the number of individuals. ‘In quantitative research, the researcher has a limited range of information about many individuals. There is a ‘strong reduction in the number of variables observed and a strong reduction in the number of relations observed between
these variables. It is mostly easy to make generalisations about the population and the validity of this generalisation is measurable’ (Disman, 2005, p. 286).

In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to gain ‘a large amount of information about a small number of individuals.’ There is a ‘strong reduction in the number of individuals and any generalisation about the population is problematic, even impossible’ (Disman, 2005, p. 286).

Since qualitative research resists any generalisation of its results, it is in certain scientific circles regarded as insufficiently objective, and its communicative value is considered to be very low. But this study text aims namely at proving the usefulness and uniqueness of qualitative research.

2.2.1 Standardisation, Reliability and Validity

Let us define the terms standardisation, reliability and validity and their relation to the research approaches specified above.

‘Standardised techniques use strictly unified stimuli, and the responses are also often limited to a selection from a pre-defined set of categories. We then refer to ‘closed questions’ (Disman, 2005, p. 126). In practice this means that the interviewer always follows the steps on the record sheet. If the interviewee does not understand the questions, no explanations are allowed. Possible interventions on the part of the interviewer are minimised; in fact, there should not be any.

Standardisation aims at enabling reliable measurements. Figuratively speaking, if we have a standardised measure (e.g. meter), we can make reliable measurements of length. The dimensions of one item will remain the same (unless it is subject to wear). ‘A reliable measurement is a measurement providing identical results during repeated application unless the condition of the object observed is subject to any change’ (Disman, 2005, p. 62). Examples from psychology include memory tests, attention tests and intelligence tests. In pedagogy (education), such tests focus on the verification of student knowledge through test batteries. It is important to realise the variables which affect such measurements.

Quantitative research aimed at flat investigation requires strong standardisation. Strong standardisation ensures a high level of reliability. However, strong standardisation necessarily results in the strong reduction of information. Instead of describing his/her opinion, the respondent is limited to choosing only one category from a very small set of offered categories. This necessarily results in fairly low validity’ (Disman, 2005, pp. 286-287). In quantitative measurements the researcher can never be sure that the respondent has understood the question properly.
The problem with validity is in the difficulty of obtaining data that correspond exactly and truly illustrate the phenomenon subject to the study. The problem with validity comes forth clearly in cross-cultural studies. Examples in the Czech Republic may include the application of IQ tests in Roma children while such tests have been developed for children growing up in the majority culture. The human intelligence structure depends on primary socialisation and acculturation related to the cultural background of each individual. For instance, we cannot use instruments that measure intelligence and are created in a different cultural environment as each social environment has a different structure and different requirements for an individual’s capabilities (Cole, 2000; Lurija, 1976).

Sociologist Disman points out that we do not see the phenomena studied directly but obtain them through a certain indicator (e.g. we can see the temperature by the position of mercury or alcohol, by the number on the scale; we can see the research actor’s age by his/her answers). The relationship between a phenomenon and an indicator can be highly complicated and the researcher does not know this bond; he/she cannot see it, and this is where the issue of the validity and reliability of research comes in. ‘Only such measurement is valid that actually measures what we have intended to measure’ (Disman, 2005, p. 62). If we give a mathematical story problem to a child with dyslexia, it may happen that the child will never solve it or will be much slower than his/her peers. If we do not know that the child has dyslexia, we attribute the failure to mathematical insufficiency. However, we know nothing about the child’s mathematical abilities. In this case, our measurements are not valid.

‘The weak standardisation of qualitative research and its loose form of questions and answers do not require the limitations that exist in quantitative research. That is why qualitative research has the potential to be of high validity’ (Disman, 2005, p. 287). The validity potential that Disman speaks about is high because during an interview, it is possible for the interviewer to get the informant’s feedback on the degree of understanding or lack of understanding. The validity of the survey increases provided that the interviewee and the researcher understand each other, use the same language and share its connotations.

‘Standardisation in qualitative research is weak’ (Disman, 2005, p. 287), which is why qualitative research has fairly ‘low reliability’. The measurement tool is not standardised in terms of the researcher’s assignment to use the same instrument, i.e. a questionnaire set, to measure each individual, but in such terms that the researcher’s questioning method goes to address the individual differences between individuals so that their uniqueness is clear.
The statements regarding measurements apply to quantitative research; qualitative research does not target measurements but various methods of description, interpretation of a certain phenomenon.

Shaffir, Stebbins and Turowetz say, 'The problem of validity in field research concerns the difficulty of gaining an accurate or true impression of the phenomenon under study' (Shaffir, Stebbins and Turowetz, 1980, p. 11). This means that validity in field research is closely related to a true and accurate reproduction of the phenomenon subject to research. This brings us back to Plato’s concept of the theoretician (see Kratochvíl, 1993). In our case, reproduction is the production of a text based on an interpretation of the data collected (see chapters ‘Interpretation’ and ‘Text’).

### 2.3 School Ethnography – Theoretical Basis

The qualitative approach has drawn primary inspiration from ethnographic research on young social groups carried out through participant observation (Burgess, 1984). The questions were related to the meaning that members of specific groups ascribe to the world around them, to the activities they perform, to their interpretation of paradigms, and to the social relations they form.

This study text has been inspired by and is primarily centred on the method of school ethnography. The fundamental information about the theoretical roots of school ethnography was provided by Miloš Kučera in 1992 in his text ‘Školní etnografie: přehled problematiky’ (School Ethnography: A Summary of the Issues) (Kučera, 1992). 'School ethnography is an educational research methodology that started to develop at the end of the 1960s and gained in popularity in the 1970s and 1980s particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries, but not only there’ (Kučera, 1992, p. 1). The basic inspiration comes from the ‘great’ ethnography and cultural anthropology of such researchers as Franc Boas and Bronisław Malinowski who were primarily involved in fieldwork. By staying a long time in their environment, they learned the native language in order to develop adequate interpretations of the natives.

Cooperation with a competent informant with whom the researcher builds a relationship has been and is another important asset in research (Kučera, 1992, pp. 1–2). The ‘person under study’ is now no longer perceived as a passive agent but as an active research agent, as someone participating in it. The research actor is not subjected to any measurements; there is a dialogue which takes place between the researcher and the actor. This means that both the researcher’s attitudes and the discourse change. We do not speak about research objects or subjects, but about research actors or participants. We speak with informants. The term ‘respondent’ is exclusively bound to
questionnaire-based surveys. The method of speech and scientific discourse are closely connected to research ethics (see chapter ‘Research Ethics’).

2.4 Ethnography, Ethnology and Anthropology

With its name, school ethnography refers to ethnography and the related sciences. That is why we should make clear the relation between ethnography, ethnology and anthropology.

Ethnography is the study of ethnic groups and their social structure, customs, traditions and institutions. Its approach is based on the ‘process of observing human behaviour in a holistic cultural context’ (Shimahara, 1988, p. 78). ‘It is the science of cultural description’ (Wolcot in Shimahara, 1988, p. 78). Classic ethnography has been connected with European colonialism; the ethnographer studied other, exotic cultures.

Ethnography and ethnology are often used and perceived as synonyms. Nonetheless, ‘ethnography literally means writing about nations’ (Erikson, 1984, p. 2).

Erikson says that ethnology and ethnography are ‘interdependent in the researcher’s conduct of inquiry’ (Erikson, 1984, p. 2). ‘Ethnology literally means the study of the meaning, or significance, of a human group’s organization and customs’ (Erikson, 1984, p. 2). It is not interested in individual contexts in specific groups; it is a comparative science using ethnographic analysis. Its aim is ‘to identify the principles of order in the social behaviour of mankind as a whole’ (Erikson, 1984, p. 2). Theoretically speaking, it is ‘above ethnography’. It is based on cross-cultural studies. For instance, it can be centred on the comparison of a variety of relative systems, reviving strategies, etc.

Ethnography and ethnology are primarily concerned with the description, comparison and demonstration of the differences between systems. Social and cultural anthropology focus on the understanding of the meaning of activities and rituals. The application of the term ‘social anthropology’ points to its American roots; ‘cultural anthropology’ is a European term. If we move from ethnography and ethnology to anthropology, we go from the study of the unknown to the study of what is known. According to Kučera, there was a methodological turn in the ‘shift of the principles (and secondarily, also of the questions built by these principles) of great ethnology and cultural anthropology studying so-called primitive nations that are strange and exotic for our society to segments of modern society; for the researcher, these segments constitute nations of a sort, e.g. teachers and students – school nations’ (Kučera, 1992, p. 4).

Current social and cultural anthropology and sociology focus as a rule on the study of one’s own culture. Researchers often apply their minds to the
study of marginal phenomena, youth subcultures or socio-pathological phenomena (Shaffir, Stebbins, Turowetz, 1980). ‘There are ethnographies of urban and rural regions and communities, hospitals, enterprises, and professional and interest groups and organisations, i.e. various social settings in general’ (Kučera, 1992, p. 2).

2.4.1 Ethnocentrism

The origin of ethnography is connected to European colonial times. To put it simply, the ethnographer evaluated a lower, more primitive culture from above, from a higher culture’s perspective. If the researcher makes evaluations, he/she needs to know his/her own culture and its values and standards and to realise that his/her enculturation is not more valuable than the enculturation of the research actor. If the researcher does not reflect upon the difference between him/herself and the research actor as a conflict of different, full-fledged cultures and evaluates the other’s culture without reflecting upon it, we can say that the researcher adopts an ethnocentric attitude (Kužel, 1999).

The adoption of an ethnocentric attitude does not only apply to other ethnic groups; should we apply this attitude to school research, the research can be ‘ethnocentric’ towards teachers, children, school caretakers, counselling psychologists, parents or principals. The process of our \(^4\) enculturation has evolved through the evaluations that we have accepted and adopted as a principle and use again to evaluate others. For us, many of our actions – from eating to going to the toilet, from reading to writing – go without saying. Those who do these actions differently are viewed as different. Let us recall the affair surrounding David Černý’s sculpture ‘Entropa’, which was exhibited in Brussels during the Czech Republic’s presidency in the Council of the European Union in January 2009. Bulgaria was depicted as a squat toilet and the European media broadcast many diverse interpretations. It is interesting to observe the interpretations of the ‘Entropa’ affair according to the social status and citizenship or nationality of individual commentators.

Disman illustrates the certain necessity of ethnocentrism with the example of Schuetz’s ‘The Stranger’. The principle of ethnocentrism is made in our evaluations according to the schemes or cultural patterns we know. If we are on a ‘field trip’ and have not coped with the new cultural patterns yet, we use our old interpretations of the world. If we do not manage to adopt the new patterns even after a long time, we remain on the edge of the society (Disman, 2005, pp. 332–335).

\(^4\) When writing ‘we’, ‘our’, I mean the identity of Europeans who have successfully passed the classic educational system, i.e. who have at least completed basic education.
Summary

This chapter describes the basic differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. It reflects ethnography’s legacy reflected in qualitative research and terms such as ‘research stay’ and ‘knowledge of language’, which are important for developing relations and understanding between the researcher and the actor.

The terms ‘reduction’, ‘reliability’, ‘validity’, ‘ethnography’, ‘ethnology’ and ‘anthropology’ are analysed. This chapter shows that school ethnography is not an independent science, but rather a principle, a method for studying the school and academic environment. It sees the individuals acting within an educational institution as the bearers of a specific culture.

This chapter also points to the risk of ethnocentrism resulting from insufficient reflection upon the researcher’s values. Ethnocentrism is an attitude where another culture is evaluated from the perspective of the researcher’s culture. The question begs to be asked whether it is possible or desirable to cast ethnocentrism off absolutely.

Exercise 1

Do a bibliographic and Internet search or use other sources of information to find Czech and Slovak researchers (and their work locations) active in pedagogy, psychology and sociology who use the qualitative approach to research. Give examples of their work.

Exercise 2

Link: http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropa

Use this link to read about David Černý’s ‘Entropa’ and other related links and discussions. Observe the opinions of individual journalists, politicians and artists. What do they pursue with their statements? Who forms alliances? How can these views be categorised? Understood?

Review Questions

When do we use the following terms: ‘respondent’, ‘informant’, ‘actor’?

**Literature**


**3 Why Apply the Qualitative Approach to Research?**

**Objectives**

- To explain the benefits of the qualitative approach to research.
- To characterise the conditions under which qualitative research methods are chosen.
To explain the relation between the empirical and theoretical framework of research.

**Time Requirements**
1 hour

**Terms to Remember (Key Words)**
- crisis of the social sciences
- empirical experience
- practice
- theory
- importance of methodological support
- tools of thinking
- the stranger
- emic
- etic
- indicator
- practical sociologist
- naïve scientist

### 3.1 Crisis of the Social Sciences

If we take the pragmatic view that has recently come forth in university studies, the qualitative approach does not seem to have almost any justification. For an academic degree, it is much easier and faster to carry out a questionnaire-based survey and enter the data into MS Excel, which will make the basic calculations and create tables and graphs. It is easier for making an attempt at interpreting the data obtained (which, by the way, is often very weak, but a scientific attempt has at least been made), and if the student is good at spelling and style, the degree will definitely be awarded.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, requires focused and long-term data collection (fact-gathering). The fieldwork alone entails the loss of personal comfort and privacy and it is necessary to develop relationships with the actors. Not only does the researcher perform research, he/she also becomes a subject under study for the ‘natives’. If the researcher believes that it is important to keep his/her distance from and a detached view of the ‘objects of research’, he/she will not be able to establish a relationship with the informant(s) based on mutual trust. Without this trust, the data obtained will be more or less ‘superficial’ (see the chapter ‘Participant Observation’).

Unlike qualitative methodology, quantitative methodology gives the researcher methodological support in working with ‘objective data’ using an ‘objective instrument’ that has nothing to do with the researcher and almost nothing with his/her thinking. The tools can be used on a repeated basis and
the research results can also be repeatedly verified regardless of the person carrying out the research.

Pavel Říčan gives a very apt description of this support:

“When I in my early days abandoned the career path of a theologian and chose psychology, where I was looking – as is usually the case – both for professional fulfilment and answers to my own personal questions, the numbers in mathematical statistics offered me a kind of a repose, an impression that there was something that could be safely seized. At the same time, I soon came to like the power provided by numbers. Measuring someone’s intelligence quotient means – sometimes fictitiously and in one’s fantasy and at other times even ‘de facto’ – having a certain power over this person. I was fascinated by the correlation coefficient whose calculation – as I felt it – remarkably brings order to the chaos of life. I fell for factor analysis as a unique game with correlation coefficients at such an abstract level that the individual becomes nothing more than a vector in the n-dimensional space’ (Říčan 2005, p. 14).

A qualitative analysis will never give the researcher such certainty. It is the researcher who must decide what direction must be pursued and what analytical segments will be of any importance. The tools applied in thinking are always connected with the researcher’s personality.

The crisis of the social sciences is one of the causes of qualitative methodology’s origin in these sciences.

For instance, Smékal says that sciences about human beings which ‘study a human from a social, psychological and culturally anthropological perspective’, meaning ‘psychology, psychotherapy, pedagogy, ethics, sociology, social work, cultural and social anthropology, ethnology and psycho-history’, have been ‘in crisis almost since their origin’ (Smékal, 1999, p. 23). The sources of this crisis include a ‘dispute over the nature of the subject-matter of these sciences and over their definition, and last, but not least, epistemological and methodological obscurities related to the activity field of sciences about humans’. To put it simply, studying human beings and their fields of activity equals studying subjectivity through another subjectivity. In psychology, one’s consciousness studies the manifestations of another consciousness; in pedagogy, someone taking school education of course studies the education process and has also been ‘processed’ through the education process. Smékal (Smékal, 1999) believes that qualitative research can be the only way out of the crisis of the human-oriented sciences.

Smékal’s suggestion about the crisis of the social sciences since their very beginning can also be put in the context of Kuhn’s doubts about whether the social sciences have any paradigm at all.
In his contribution entitled ‘Kvalitativní výzkum edukace – mikroskopem nebo teploměrem?’ (Qualitative Research on Education – through a Microscope or with a Thermometer?) (Štech, 2011), Stanislav Štech says that the crisis in psychology emerged after World War I in relation to the multi-paradigm character of psychology. The clash of theoretical and practical knowledge revealed the problematic or low applicability of theoretical knowledge in practice. According to Štech, Vygotsky was the first one concerned with the crisis of psychology and psychological research whose task was to address the crisis (Štech, 2011). The crisis appeared after WWI as a reaction to numerous psychological paradigms and their insufficient support in practical life. Current psychology may seem to possess functional tools, but the crisis between theoreticians (scientists, scholars) and practitioners (teachers, psychologists in practice, parents) remains. It is manifested through the mutual non-transferability and non-applicability of knowledge.

In its most basic form, the crisis is manifested through the following questions: ‘What is this for? Why so many research projects? What is their use?’ For instance, if a researcher is involved in the education of socio-culturally handicapped people, e.g. the Romani or other inhabitants of socially excluded localities where there are many organisations engaged in this area and their engagement has varied motivations, such a researcher is rightfully overloaded with these questions. He/she is asked by teachers, psychologists and special-education teachers from child guidance centres, the Romani themselves, socially weak citizens, or even foreigners. It is fairly complicated to give any answers since the knowledge is not applied in the communication between theoreticians and practitioners but is related to school and state policies. The researcher prepares a report on his/her research results; they can be integrated in instruction and training, but direct application is impossible and is highly arguable (see the chapter ‘Research Ethics’).

But let us get back to the crisis of the social sciences. Štech points to the mutual relation between a certain methodology and the subject matter of research: ‘Methodology contributes to the definition of the subject matter [of research] or must be in conformity therewith’ (Štech, 2011, p. 284). Štech points to the need to find an appropriate analysis/research unit (Štech, 2011, p. 285) and to use indirect tools. He borrows Vygotsky’s thermometer metaphor. ‘Vygotsky connects the scientism that may help psychology get out of the crisis with an epistemological attitude described as the search for a psychological thermometer’ (Štech, 2011, p. 287). The question is whether to use a microscope to focus on the detail of the phenomenon under study or to use a phenomenon indicator – the temperature measured with a thermometer, whether to see the studied phenomenon as a detail without any relation to the
surrounding phenomena or in their context. Štech says that the relations between the data must always be respected. The data will be validated through their conceptualisation, i.e. the survey may then be regarded as scientific. ‘Scientific knowledge always requires empirical data which must be read through the concepts established outside or prior to the studied empirical situation/experience.’

It must also be noted that the empirical and theoretical subject matter of an analysis cannot be confused. We must differentiate the theoretical concept that may (or may not) serve to interpret the experience (empirical data).

If an individual’s education is the subject matter under study, we should realise that ‘education is specific for its ‘artificial’ psychological development through an elaborated system of mediations. It is neither an environment nor the outer packaging or conditions for an individual’s development and functioning; it is the central process of psychological genesis: all psychological functions, structures and instances are generated in a specific (and qualitatively higher) form and under conscious control and can be controlled by the will’ (Štech, 2011, p. 288).

Štech’s statement characterises the entire problem of studying any educational process. The researcher’s mind has undergone education and hence, it is formed by this process. Therefore, its empirical focus is also preformed through the experience of enculturation and socialisation. The question begs to be asked whether it is possible at all to find a tool which provides the researcher with a sufficient distance and concept for interpretation. Here interpretation means the reconstruction of empirical methods (see Štech, 2011, p. 287).

If we do not preoccupy ourselves too much with the scientific crisis, the answer to the question of why do qualitative research or why is the ethnographic approach so irresistible would be a personal meeting with another human being, a personal meeting with the unknown phenomenon, i.e. a meeting with a ‘stranger’. Adopting a stranger’s attitude or becoming a real stranger, i.e. someone who does not know anything about the given situation that is outside one’s usual life schedule, is an irresistible challenge. This attitude can help the researcher understand life stories other than his/her own within his/her home society.

‘Scientific constructions are the construction of the constructions of practical sociologists, i.e. common people; not even the researcher stands outside this experience and knowledge when he/she enters school with the confidence that he/she knows everything about it, has heard a lot about it, and has experienced a lot with regard to it. On the other hand, the actors develop their cognitive approaches much more and in a higher quality in their special
social positions; this is the position of a 'stranger' (Schuetz, 1964) who – when entering a new environment – must replace his/her outer knowledge about this environment with authentic internal knowledge, which results in a much more explicit view structuring the given environment; a view which is natural for normal, non-marginal members and which cannot be differentiated from the results if this view is applied.

**Methodologically,** Schuetz’s stranger is evidence that the issue of the researcher’s participation in the environment brought forward in symbolic interactionism need not absolutely be addressed through as fast and complete communion with the environment as possible; it may be more adequate to try to articulate one’s status as a ‘marginal native’ joining both poles. But Schuetz’s work is also sometimes interpreted in the opposite way’ (Kučera, 1992, p. 4). The researcher entering a new environment is always in the position of a stranger who does not know how to behave in the new environment. What is decent and what is impertinent, table manners, etc.

In his quotation, Kučera (1992) shows that there are two methodological options. In the first one, the researcher remains a marginal member of the community who does not understand all the rules and learns them too slowly to become a full-fledged member. The other attitude emphasises fast adaptation to the environment and understanding of the cultural patterns. Kučera indicates that it may not be advantageous for a researcher to become a group ‘insider’ too quickly. From the methodological perspective, clashes of different cultural patterns can be more beneficial (even though subjectively less pleasant).

Here is an example from the Botton Village research project: *Everyone had real fun at the party held by our household. I asked my guests if they wanted coffee. They said yes. When they drank their coffee everybody left. When I asked my long-term colleague why they were leaving, he told me that by offering coffee, the host indicated that it was time to end the party* (author’s archive).

In this context, let us mention **etic** and **emic** views. An etic view is the researcher's objectivised view. An emic view seeks to make an interpretation from the research actor’s perspective. Švaříček and Šeďová, drawing on Denzin and Lincoln (2005), say that ‘*a qualitative approach in the social sciences is based on the way social reality actors understand various terms and relations. The actors are experts in social situations that they live and experience; they are naïve scientists.* The researcher’s objective is to understand the situation in the way that the actors understand it’ (cf. Švaříček, Šeďová, 2007, p. 18). We will repeatedly encounter these terms in this study text.
3.2 When to Choose Qualitative Research?

The researcher chooses the qualitative approach if he/she wants to get to the structure of the problem and understand the relations and reasons why and the circumstances under which the phenomena occur. This is what Smékal says about psychological research: ‘The question ‘How do we know?’ is scarcely reflected in our sciences. In the light of the diversity of higher psychological functions, we can say that while traditional methodology seeks an answer to the question ‘Why?’ or ‘How?’, qualitative methodology asks ‘What for?’, ‘What does that mean?’’ (Smékal, 2000, p. 24).

We want to know life stories, the meaning that an individual attributes to various events in his/her life, the meaning of diverse activities for such an individual.

Example:

From quantitative research we know that one third of Roma children are educated in accordance with the Framework Educational Programme for children with mild mental handicaps; only 2% of non-Roma children are educated according to this programme (Levínská, 2011).

Qualitative research will help us answer the questions resulting from these findings: Why does this phenomenon occur in the Czech Republic? What are the motives for Roma parents to have their children educated at special basic practical schools? What support does a Roma child get to be able to complete common basic education?

Qualitative research can also be used as a pilot study forming a basis for a broader quantitative survey. The phenomena observed can be included in individual questionnaire items and can be ruminated on within mutual relations. The weight of individual items can be measured as the impact of individual elements on an individual’s decision.

3.2.1 Research Plan

Before actual research, we must develop a research plan or design. This plan should have a certain ideological component, i.e. a formulation of the research question, possible theoretical concepts and a description of the theoretical research framework (Miovský, 2006). The researcher should know the scientific findings achieved in the area he/she wants to focus on. The plan must contain a sample proposal to be studied, research methods, data analysis methods and a research schedule. The scientific part should put the research

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5 Smékal goes even further than other texts on qualitative research. The question ‘Why?’ is normally associated with qualitative research. However, Smékal focuses both on the researcher’s and the actor’s internal subjectivity. The way we think and how these thoughts ‘clash’ is related to both parties.
project into a theoretical and empirical framework and use appropriate research instruments. It can also contain proposals of potential collaboration with other colleagues or institutions. The practical or pragmatic part is concerned with actual project implementation, with the field procedure.

A well-prepared research plan provides support for the researcher but should not be too restrictive. The researcher should be able to be flexible in his/her reactions to the changes brought by the fieldwork and re-modify the plan.

The research plan is an important part of research for institutions, scientific agencies or other organisations which patronise or sponsor scientific projects.

Summary

The qualitative approach in research is used as a tool to understand the meaning of the studied phenomenon. Some social scientists see it as a way out of the ‘crisis’ of the social sciences. The crisis has been caused by the definition of the subject matter of research, the instruments used in research and by the inapplicability of individual theories to social reality. It is essential to make adequate interpretations of the phenomena under study and not to confuse the theoretical framework with the empirical data. The appropriateness of the theoretical framework for interpretation must be considered (cf. Štech, 2011). In practice, it happens that the researcher prefers the theoretical concepts under which he/she has been educated and with which he/she identifies himself/herself instead of carrying out critical verifications of research in practice (cf. Kučera, 2010).

In research, the researcher assumes the position of a stranger even though the research project is being carried out in the cultural environment of the researcher’s own socialisation (see the chapter ‘Fieldwork’, ‘Participant Observation’). For the researcher to be successful, he/she needs to have a research plan/ design.

Exercises

Prepare a research plan. Set your research objective and the research means you want to use. Where will the project take place? Who are the informants or actors to be contacted? What do you need to plan and what kind of means do you need? What references will you use as a theoretical
framework for your study? Try to estimate the financial and time requirements of your research. Specify the outputs to present the results.

Goal of the exercises: To realise the theoretical and practical aspects of research. A research project must be implementable. It must take place in individual steps, practical actions that should be logical and sequential in time. The individual steps should be implementable.

### Review Questions
- What type of questions does qualitative research answer?
- Explain what you imagine Vygotsky’s metaphor ‘through a microscope or with a thermometer’ to mean.

### Literature
Study the following chapter:

### 4 The Researcher’s Personality

#### Objectives
- To become familiar with the impact of the researcher’s subjectivity on the research process.

#### Time Requirements
30 minutes

#### Terms to Remember (Key Words)
- subjectivity
- trust
- ethics
- standards
- values
- experience
- research tool
- distance
- self-knowledge

At the beginning of this chapter, let us emphasise that it is not the voice recorder, questionnaire, paper or pencil that is the main research ‘tool’, it is the
research as such (Burgess, 1984; Disman, 2005). It wants to find something out; it seeks to provide a systematic explanation of the problem under study – it is interested in relations, in the context, in the possible causality, sense or meaning.

Qualitative research is naturally closely related to the researcher’s personality. Although the researcher knows the principles of analytical thinking and categorisation methods, induction and other cognitive operations, one cannot say that the tools applied should necessarily serve as supportive instruments. The degree of distance depends on the researcher and is in fact hard to control. In qualitative research, the researcher is fully aware of the subjectivity of his/her findings and the subjectivity of the tools he/she uses. ‘Fully aware’ means that the researcher is able to reflect upon the results of the tools applied in relation to his/her life concept rather than the cognitive tools as such. Thinking is ‘pre-conscious’; it runs outside our consciousness, but flows into speech (see Kučera, 2010)\(^6\) and can be reflected in it (Grondin, 1997).\(^7\) We will reflect more on this issue in the chapters about data analysis, data interpretation and text writing (see chapters ‘Interpretation’ and ‘Text’).

The tools – handling of data – used by the researcher help him/her understand the structure of the research problem and interpret its meaning to the audience: to the research sponsor, colleagues, students, the general public. Considering the essence of qualitative research, the researcher defends not only the results, but must be able to defend the actual method showing the procedure of how the results were obtained. The researcher must know the theoretical concepts providing support for his/her considerations in data handling to be able to contextualise the empirical and theoretical experience. Conformity is not necessarily sought; it is rather about the ability of ‘critical thinking’ (see Štech, 2009).

The researcher should place on him/herself the demand of guardedness in respect of the data; as we have already said, the researcher should be reflective (cf. Říčan, 2005). The researcher should not in principle identify him/herself with the information and people where the research is taking place, although he/she may establish a confidential relationship with them during a long-term stay. If any such identification occurs, the researcher must reflect on it, be aware of it and work with it during interpretation. Although this proposition may sound easy, we will see in the next chapters, in particular in

\(^6\) ‘Students cannot expect these methods to free them from the need to instinctively bury themselves in this issue as an algorithm and think: thinking is pre-conscious (by leading to speech), but solutions are prepared on the unconscious level and through its combinatorial analysis; a procedure according to an algorithm is conscious, but this is not a creative act of thinking’ (Kučera, 2010, p. 50).

\(^7\) ‘The essential linguisticality of understanding expresses itself less in our statements than in our search for the language to say what we have on our minds and hearts’ (Grondin, 1994, p. 120).
the chapter ‘Text’, that the relationship between the researcher and the research actor is fairly complicated.

Practically speaking, field research requires endurance and the ability to improvise and overcome frustrations; the researcher gets to know the limits of his/her own personality, the cultural standard he/she is placed in and beyond which he/she is not willing to go. The researcher in a way comes to know not only other people, but is also subjected to certain self-cognising training which tests the limits of his/her physical needs, flexibility of thinking, stereotypical thinking, and ethical principles.

Example:

The process of self-cognition takes place even during observation in a school classroom. Upon entering a first-grade classroom, the researcher can recall the feelings once felt when he/she attended the first grade. Some pupils are more comprehensible than others; some can be identified with; others feel detestable. The same occurs with the teachers – some are found agreeable while the methods of others feel to be too distant.

But it is not the researcher’s task to bring one’s own school achievements and frustrations into one’s research or to evaluate individual actors from one’s own experience, identifications and projections. The researcher should avoid transference. Field notes should be used to ‘filter’ the personality out of the data. The researcher’s task is to perceive what is going on presently and how it is evaluated by its actors. The researcher is in the position of an ‘interpreter’ of the situation for an academic or other audience.

In research taking place in the same environment from which the researcher comes (such as school ethnography), one also needs to focus on the ‘common and given’ phenomena and view them from a distance as unknown phenomena and understand their ‘mechanism’, structure and dynamics. One should be interested in ‘trifles and be a fool’. One should not be an authority, teacher or scientist, but rather be in the position of a learner or student, i.e. someone wanting to learn something from the research actors (for more on the researcher-actor relationship, see Kučera, 2010).

Miovský says about the researcher carrying out qualitative research that he/she ‘ceases to be a ‘mover’ of the action, a person manipulating variables and studying participants, a person whose impact must be minimised at any cost and who must be an asexual, impersonal research ‘force’ superior to the other research process participants. The researcher’s activities have become an organic part of the research process and an analysis and understanding of their impact on this process have become crucial issues in validity, ethics, etc.’ (Miovský, 2006, pp. 69–77).
The researcher’s personality sets the possibilities of field research. A variety of spheres of action open up for the researcher depending on his/her personality. A simple example can be seen in research projects carried out in Muslim countries where women conduct research with women and men in the male society. Gender identity may be helpful not only in countries with a Muslim culture but also during research at basic schools. Some adolescent boys preferred interviews with male researchers. The interviews had a deeper dimension than the interviews carried out by women.

**Summary**

In qualitative research, it is the researcher who is the main tool used in the ‘investigation’. It is primarily the researcher and his/her ability to think, his/her experience, and his/her ability to reflect and self-reflect. The researcher’s approach cannot be objective but should instead be placed in the theoretical and practical context of research.

During participant observation, conversations and interviews, the researcher is personally engaged in the community’s life and creates a relationship with the informants with whom he/she cooperates. The informants’ reactions to the researcher are influenced by the researcher’s status, sex, age, appearance, reputation, etc.

**Exercise 1**

An easy exercise that can show us how deeply our habits are rooted and how our value system has been formed is described by Soňa Hermochová (Hermochová, 1987). It has three stages. In the first stage, one recalls what his/her parents used to tell him/her and what orders were given to him/her; one should move to as early an age as possible (if possible).

In the second stage, one should think about the orders (commands) that he/she finds meaningful and valid.

In the third stage, one realises which of these propositions are applied in respect of his/her partner or children and why.

So the instruction is:

1. Recall everything that your parents used to tell you or order you to do when you were a child. Use the memories to gradually move to the age of adolescence. Write them down.
2. Try to summarize what you have written and what remains valid for you. What do you agree with and disagree with?
3. Is there anything on your list that you require from your partner, colleague or children?

The meaning behind this exercise is to show the values you have adopted and in what way. We can see the related experience, the bodily feelings evoked. What they mean for us and in what way they determine our evaluation of other people’s behaviour.

When evaluating this exercise, we can see a variety of mutual sharing. And we can seek answers to the following questions:

- Who am I and what do I expect from others? What are my limits, standards and values?
- Why are there any social norms and standards? Will I pass them on?
- What is unacceptable to me? Do I know why? What is it about?

The cultural barrier as highlighted by Freud is easily seen in the manifestations arousing aversion and disgust in us (cf. Freud, 1991, 1997).

For instance, when I see an adult picking his nose in public and then putting the yield in his mouth.

- Can I find any cultures which have different standards? In what way are they different? How do I interpret their distinctions?

If the exercise is used in different generations, we can see inter-generational differences and agreements.

Exercise 2

Conduct a short interview with a colleague during the seminar. Swap your roles. How does it feel to be an interviewer and an interviewee? Which role do you fancy more and which is less comfortable for you? What thoughts do you have? Share your impressions during the seminar (inspired by Kučera, 2010).

Review Questions

- Why is the researcher alone regarded as the research tool in the qualitative approach?

Literature

Study the following chapter:
5 Fieldwork

Objectives

- To provide information on a variety of research fields.
- The impact of the research field on the method of entering the field.
- The meaning of the key informant (gatekeeper) for the researcher.

Time Requirements

4 hours

Terms to Remember (Key Words)

- field research
- rural locality
- urban locality
- actor
- data
- closed community
- excluded localities
- basic school
- key informant
- personal data protection
- trust
- support
- field
- borders/limits
- field of research

5.1 Field, Archive, Text

If we intend to carry out ethnographic research, we need to get into the field in which we want to conduct our research. The researcher needs to get to the ‘natives’, the native speakers, and establish relations with them. This is a requirement for participant observation that is the basic data collection method in qualitative research. The researcher writes the observations down into his/her field notes; he/she encodes and analyses them. The observations are then compiled in research reports.

During the ‘Ethnography’ workshop held at the Qualitative Research Summer School at the Department of Education of Masaryk University in Brno on 27 May 2013, our colleague Doubek specified ‘three elements of ethnographic research’. During his/her research, the researcher must pass through three elements: the field where the data are collected; the archive where the data are stored, arranged, encoded and analysed; and the text in
which the researcher submits his/her translation, interpretation and construction of the social phenomenon observed to the reader.

We will now centre our attention on the field and will use the author’s research experience to demonstrate the diversity of the possible fields.

5.2 Field Types

The first survey was held within a workshop on research methodology. It was a one-month research stay in a village in eastern Slovakia. Another research project was an urban research stay during a summer school for anthropology students from various European countries. A town located in the Sudeten area of the Czech Republic was chosen as a research venue. The third research experience was garnered during a ten-month stay in an anthroposophical village in Yorkshire. It was a Camphill whose mission was the coexistence of common people with people with mental handicaps.

The fourth experience came from longitudinal research at a primary (basic) school (from the first to the ninth grade) carried out by a team of experts called ‘Pražská skupina školní etnografie’ (PSŠE, Prague School Ethnography School) from the department of psychology at the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague (see the PSŠE website). The fifth experience includes research projects related to the issue of Roma education. In aggregate, they might be titled ‘Romani and their Education in the Czech Education System’. Research was carried out both in the urban community and in village communities that can be regarded as excluded.

5.3 Entering the Field

What do we have to focus on before entering the field? First of all, the extent to which the field is open and the level at which the field opens up and closes to us, i.e. its overall availability. The researcher must decide whether to choose a long-term uninterrupted stay and live in the field or just visit it.

The researcher also needs to choose who will act as support and to what degree he/she needs any support. Here we are speaking about the so-called key informant (a gatekeeper) who can give us support when entering the field and help us find suitable informants. We must decide to what extent the research actors should know the objective of our observation and what information we will provide them about us. Mutual information strengthens trust, but certain information may frighten the research actors who may find researcher’s life incomprehensible and may not be willing to communicate openly. (For instance, the local inhabitants of a village near Litmanová in eastern Slovakia where meetings took place in the 1990s due to the apparition of the Virgin Mary could not understand someone declaring him/herself to be
an atheist.) It is appropriate if the researcher’s lifestyle is comprehensible to the research actors.

5.3.1 Example 1 – Eastern Slovakian Village

The aim of this research project was to gather as much information as possible about this village and focus on its social structure. The educational objective involved the initiation of anthropology students. This objective was not realised by the students beforehand; perhaps it is better to say that they were not aware of its impact.

The project had explicit guidance and the assignment was defined by Josef Kandert (now Professor Josef Kandert). First of all, students visited the ethnologist Mikoláš Mušinka (now Professor Mikoláš Mušinka) who assigned one Slovak village to each student where they set off on the very next day. There were diverse ethnic groups living in these villages, including Orthodox Ruthenians, Catholic Slovaks, Romani and Poles. Some students were given the contact details of a person who knew ethnologist Mušinka from his previous research. It proved highly advantageous to have such contacts.

The villages could be accessed by public transport. Finding lodging, preferably in a family, was the first assignment. I was given the contact details of the local teacher who was quite easy to find in the village. When I referred to Mr Mušinka and said that my task was to carry out ethnographic research in the village, he put me up for the night and found me accommodation with the locals the next day. The first stage of entering the field was successful beyond all expectations. The successful entry into the village could be attributed to the local teacher’s positive attitude towards the ethnologist. The recommendation made it clear who I was and what I would be studying and what could be expected from me. As I am a woman, it was clear to the teacher that I would need some guidance. So I had the first key informant who opened the gates for me and gradually introduced me to various important people in the village and enabled my access to the local school, town hall and church. He put the local chronicle at my disposal.

As mentioned above, there were also Ruthenians and Romani living in the village next to the Slovaks. The teacher was a Slovak, i.e. I was identified as someone siding with the Slovaks (author’s archive).

As soon as the researcher is accompanied in the field by a local, he/she shares the identity of this selected local and the expectations of the natives related to the researcher depend on this shared identity. If the guiding person is an outsider and undesirable in the community, he/she will hardly help the researcher enter the field. It can on the contrary happen that other informants will not want to communicate with the researcher.
The Romani were another group I was interested in, as well as their access to education within this village. Considering his opinions and Slovak identity, the teacher was not a suitable key informant for entering the Roma settlement. I used two entries to make contact. The teacher helped with the first one; he introduced me to a Roma teacher teaching Roma children at a primary (basic) school. The other entry was through Roma girls I met when walking on the outskirts of the village. I used the same gender identity and my age to establish a relationship.

The teacher opened up the Slovak part of the village for me, in particular the so-called public sphere. I was able to enter personal, family and female life only through my landlady who took me among the local women and introduced me to her family (author’s archive).

A Slovak village is, so to say, an open community. One can come in at any time and leave it at any time by public means of transport. One can use the telephone there. (There was a fixed line at the local post office at that time.)

**Key informants (gatekeepers):** the teacher, the landlady, the Roma teacher, Roma girls. They provided access to certain social groups and ethnic groups. With key informants perceived as the researcher’s acquaintances, she is safe, i.e. she is not harassed by local men even though she lives there alone, which is uncommon for a woman of her age in a village in eastern Slovakia. This means that the key informant has two essential functions: to mediate information and to provide the researcher with safety as an ‘insider’ in the local group (see the chapter ‘Research Ethics’).

**5.3.2 Example 2 – International Summer School – Urban Research**

Participation in the summer school of urban research was another major experience. The school hosted students from many different countries and was led by Birgit Müller and Dr Zdeněk Uherek (now senior lecturer and director of the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic). The research project targeted the town of Jablonec, located in the Sudeten part of the Czech Republic. Its aim was to map out its ethnic structure and industry.

The main difference between a town and a village is size. In urban research, the researcher is not under permanent observation, unlike in a village, where the researcher is the subject matter of research just like its actors. Mutual research is much more intensive in the country. In towns and cities, mutual research takes only place at those moments when the researcher is participating in the social events of his/her informants.

As far as lodging is concerned, the researcher stays in a hotel or dormitory and seeks informants through institutions. For instance, if the
researcher wants to contact a Roma community, he/she must contact the Roma coordinator at the local municipal authority, the local social field worker, etc. Contact persons are basically found via the organisations the researcher is interested in. The researcher also monitors the local print media (or the municipal website) to become familiar with the situation in the town and with its structure. It is necessary to get to know the key informant/gatekeeper who will become enthusiastic about the research topic and be interested in introducing the researcher to the group of interest.

Our research group contacted the social worker who was a member of the Roma community and who informed us about the activities of the community and gave us contacts to individual families. Thanks to this acquaintance, we were invited to families and took part in a football match or in a meeting of the Roma association (Müller, Uherek, 1996; Rybová 1996). The key informant makes the researcher familiar with the usual places and activities of the group under study; the researcher will learn about their usual occupations, about the schools they attend, where they go for entertainment and when, where they live, and how the community is stratified. It also depends on the researcher’s shrewdness (chance and luck) whether and how he/she succeeds in making such contacts and gaining such information.

In a way it is easier for the researcher to get into a town; he/she can choose any accommodation and is independent of the informants, but the actual entry into the field of research where the importance of situations for the research actors must be found may be far more complicated than in the country.

5.3.3 Example 3 – Camphill Village

The third experience was garnered during a ten-month stay in a Camphill, a village community in England where non-handicapped people live and work together with people with mental handicaps. The Camphill is based on community life and property sharing; Camphill members have no personal possessions; everything is shared together and if someone needs something beyond the usual pocket money or expenditure, a debate takes place within the entire community.

As it is a religious community, it was necessary to get an invitation. I was lucky to have an ‘old’ Czech friend, an anthroposophist, who knew many foreign anthroposophists active in Camphills since the 1960s. His friendship with one of the oldest and most respected Camphill members paved my way to the Camphill community. I was not accepted as a ‘researcher’ but as a normal colleague who would participate in community life. When I arrived, I said that my stay was motivated by my intention to write about the life of a community
that was unknown in the Czech Republic. In the beginning, the 'housemother' who kept the household where I lived was very disillusioned by the motivation of my stay, saying that it interfered with her privacy and that I should not have concealed my motives before arriving in the community (author’s archive). Using this example, we must realise that any community will have its own ideas about why volunteers arrive. First and foremost it is a working community which chooses suitable potential members from the newcomers.

When carrying out research in closed communities, it is fairly common for the researcher to conceal his/her intentions and identity as a researcher. However, this concealed identity has its pros and cons as we will see in the chapter about participant observation. One can even come into conflict with the ethical rules of research. Nonetheless, the researcher always comes up against ethical boundaries during his/her research. The question is: 'Will the researcher get into the community if he/she unveils his/her intentions? Does the researcher have the right to carry out research? Will the researcher cause any harm to the research actors or not? Do these questions make any sense if the researcher does not penetrate into the field because his/her ethical approach frightens potential informants?'

To cope with the certain unethical nature of my approach, I used simple rationalisation with regard to the ethics of my research: When my Czech anthroposophist secured me access to the community despite knowing that I wanted to write my thesis about the Camphill, it was no transgression. When I completed my thesis, I gave it to my friend to read it. My guilty conscience was cleared as he found it very interesting (Rybová, 1997).

In this case, it was necessary to overcome three crucial barriers to get into the field of research:

The first one was the seclusion of the actual community. I managed to overcome this based on the recommendation of my friend who shares the same world view as its members. The second one was the actual barrier of a foreign country, the barrier of getting a work visa and overcoming the distance. The second barrier could be overcome by the type of work – volunteer activities in a Camphill community. The third barrier was in the choice of the strategy – whether to conduct open or hidden research, whether to be a full participant (hidden observer) or a participant-observer (a researcher who is known to observe). Each of these positions offers different possibilities (see the chapter ‘Participant Observation’).

The community provides the researcher with security, accommodation, food, and social contacts. During this research, the researcher tries out in full what it is like to be in a certain position, i.e. in the position of a co-worker in a certain community. This results in the loss of a detached view, but the
researcher lives absolutely embedded in social life and relations with others. The researcher is fully engaged in the community’s activities and must also count on the plans the community has for him/her. The researcher undergoes a variety of training courses focused both on the community’s ideological background, anthroposophy and communal ideals, and on practical issues such as sheep husbandry, birthing lambs, special fertilising methods, etc. The community has an educational effect on the researcher (or any new member) and the aim of this education for the researcher is to identify with the community as much as possible. As the researcher fully participates in the community life, he/she no longer stays above it all. There is a real risk that someone losing his/her background will remain in the community forever. Remaining in contact with the outer world is one of the ways to face the absorption by the community. Writing and receiving letters. (Please note that this field research was carried out at a time when it was not normal to have a mobile phone and a community household did not have a TV set or computer with Internet access. Only people who really needed (from the community’s perspective) a computer had access to one. I wrote my field notes mostly by hand, but sometimes on a typewriter.)

The researcher’s family and friends serve as great support, as does the tutor (Doc. Miloš Kučera in my case who requested written contact for methodology reasons). Incomplete studies that would have expired had I not passed my exams on time served as an excuse to leave the community.

5.3.4 Example 4 – Longitudinal Research with PSŠE

Primary (basic) schools are mostly public institutions (if not private) with a variety of specialisations and advocating for diverse programmes. The researcher mostly has a certain intention behind the research project and this intention affects the selection of the given school type. It is now fairly easy to get an overview of schools as each has its own website with its respective profile. On the one hand they are public institutions, and on the other hand they are also governed by the Data Protection Act (No. 101/2000 Sb. (Coll.)).

The nine-year survey among 1st- to 9th-graders carried out by a team of experts was in a way a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience. It only rarely happens that one has the opportunity to work in such a varied team for such a long time. In 1994 – when the research project was launched – the school as an institution started to open up to changes and the overall situation contributed to the performance of qualitative research as a joint interview with research actors. The school was opening up for communication and cooperation with parents, with the public (cf. Viktorová, 2011).
The school I asked for cooperation together with my colleague Doubek did not feel offended that we were looking for a school located close to the Roma community where a larger percentage of Roma students might be expected. It normally happens these days that schools conceal the presence of Roma pupils or refer to the Data Protection Act, saying that they cannot provide sensitive information such as the ethnicity of their students.

When contacting a school, the researcher must respect its hierarchical organisation. The principal’s permission must always be requested before actually entering the school. It may sound trivial to you now, but it may happen that you will speak with the deputy principal, the school counsellor, etc. who will not find your entry as a researcher problematic, who will promise cooperation in your research topic. However, if the principal learns about your agreement without having been notified in advance, he/she may feel offended that the deal was made without him/her knowing it and may prohibit your access without getting additional information about your intentions.

It is good to find out before the first personal interview with the principal whether he/she requires any certificate of research or its annotation. Principals are school managers needing clear, brief and logical information. If they are satisfied with the information they get, they normally pass the researcher on to another school employee (deputy principal, school counsellor, form teacher, teacher with the necessary teaching qualifications, etc.); this is mostly related to the research intentions and size of the school.

When contacting the principal, please always keep in mind that you should be comprehensible and clear in your communication and have a trustworthy appearance. One of the essential qualities of a school is to pass on cultural standards and researchers who are too eccentric may awaken distrust. The aspects of what is eccentric may be so diametrically different that you should rely on your own feelings. The researcher does not have to appear in a suit. But it is necessary to remember that clothing communicates our social status and individual thinking and we should consider what we actually want to communicate in the given situation.

Example:

*With my colleague Doubek I regularly visited a first grade class at a Prague school once a week. Both of us had red hair, so the children often asked us whether we were married. They probably attributed significance to our relationship based on the laws of perception, in particular of similarity and proximity. After nine months, we were accepted in the class and at the school as researchers. Surprisingly enough, our position remained solid even when on a whim, we had our hair completely cut. Nonetheless, we confirmed to the audience our joint identity although we attributed a different meaning to it.*
It is also good to realise that now in the first decade of the 21st century, the school is not primarily interested in people making observations from the outside. For a teacher, this means extra work and he/she may also simply have stage fright; the teacher may not feel comfortable when being observed. Basically, the teacher wants to ‘call his/her time his/her own’. When there is someone else in the classroom, the lesson becomes about control, the teacher’s self-control, and the following norm comes forth: what the entire situation should look like and the teacher forces him/herself to give as ideal an impression as possible.

If you get the teacher’s permission, then you arrive at the school, in the field of your research. Then you must win the teacher’s trust. You need the teacher to accept you in the classroom and cooperate with you. An impartial researcher should respect the teacher, show him/her respect, and should not criticise his/her failures; the researcher should listen and ask. The teaching profession is among the most criticised professions in the Czech Republic and one needs to realise that teachers are highly sensitive to any criticism.9

The other actors include the pupils and students. After regular visits to the school, the researcher is no longer a disturbance; the children get used to him/her. As soon as they realise that the researcher is not watching them or checking on them and is not reporting their improprieties to the teacher, their playing activities in the teacher’s absence are no longer inhibited and the researcher can observe their spontaneity. Children get used to the researcher fairly quickly and like explaining their activities and speaking with him/her about their affairs. Simply observing certain activities without them being explained is not enough as the researcher may not understand the meaning that the actors attribute to their actions.

Parents are hidden actors in research projects related to the school environment and the researcher should consider the benefits of contacting the parents. If observation should be carried out in a classroom today, it is very likely that the researcher will need the parents’ informed consent. Cooperation with the form teacher is also important; the teacher must be willing to help and support the researcher in this respect. It is appropriate to count on the parents having a negative attitude and formulate the request accordingly.

We encounter many barriers in the school environment which can thwart research as the researcher can always be rejected with reference to the

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8 I noted the first change in the years 2004–2005 when I was looking for schools suitable for cooperation. I noted watchfulness on the part of teachers and school managers which I did not observe or notice in the 1990s.

9 This is not a statistically verified opinion, but a judgment drawn from communication with the non-teaching public.
existence of a certain legislative barrier or disagreement with one of the actors under observation. The researcher’s task is to persuade them that his/her intentions are meaningful and that research as such can be beneficial even for its actors though not directly.

5.3.5 Example 5 – Romani in the Czech Education System

The fifth research experience involves research projects carried out since 2005 regarding the issue of Roma education in the Czech Republic. Research has been conducted in the urban community, in villages and in excluded localities. We apply both the classical ethnographic approach addressing specific local communities and the school ethnography method centred on the school and the education process.

Considering the complexity of this issue, we had to find some locality where we would have a cooperating municipal authority, primary (basic) and practical (previously special) schools, and access to the Roma community. Practically speaking, we needed to visit several localities and schools before we found the appropriate field for our research. It took several months to find a suitable locality and the researcher kept encountering fear among the representatives of individual institutions that was cloaked in Act No. 1001/2000 Coll. Ethnicity and religious affiliation are sensitive data that cannot be disclosed to a third party. The ‘native’s’ answer that ‘we do not have any Romani here; here are only Czechs, maybe Slovaks’ clearly shows that they are not interested in cooperation. The causes of this fear among school employees can include, for instance, the fear of parents or school publicity making it visible in a negative sense.

One of the localities was contacted in the place where our friends live; one of them was by coincidence on the municipality council and another taught at the local primary school. Both contacts proved to be highly valuable sources of information about what was going on in the respective institutions. In addition to the ‘official’ presentation of the institution to the researcher, we were given reports on the attitudes and alliances of individual actors. It is highly important to know the attitude of local politicians towards the issues under study, to the pressures they have to cope with, in order to understand the entire context.

As far as entry into the field is concerned, we combined all of the methods specified above. We had quite a problem winning the trust of the local Roma communities. After repeated attempts, we were successful with the

cooperation of the local field social workers who have built functioning relations with their clients. They helped us get gradual access to the community. The position that the researcher attains in a community is never definite; it must be maintained and mutual trust must be further strengthened.

The basic methods of maintaining trust include:

1. Not causing harm to the actors or informants, i.e. not ‘passing along’ the information provided; keeping their anonymity;
2. Just like the ‘classic’ ethnographers who gave out strings of glass beads, it is good to give small presents to the informants.
3. Never make a promise you cannot keep, meaning that you should be realistic in estimating your possibilities.
4. Give thorough consideration to whether you should give your informants the text about them to read (see the chapter 'Text').

Key informants are crucial again, opening the gates for us into individual institutions and mediating our meetings or providing us with contact details about the persons related to our research issue. Their name can but need not open the gates to other actors, which depends on their own relations. We must also be aware of the fact that for other people, the researcher partly shares the identity of the key informants with whom he/she can be seen in the locality. The researcher learns the results of this shared identity only little by little as he/she penetrates into the social structure of the field subject to research.

Summary

Should we sum up the issue of entering the research field, we must basically consider the following elements:

1. To what extent the research field is open or closed; where barriers are localised;
2. How much time the researcher has to carry out research; where he/she will stay or how he/she will approximate the place of research;
3. Whether any recommendation is necessary to enter the given society or institution;
4. What the hierarchy of the society is; how important this arrangement is for entering this locality;
5. How the society under study is open to actual research, i.e. should the researcher remain concealed or can the research project be carried out openly?
6. Is the key informant (gatekeeper) necessary? What does the researcher need from him/her? What can the researcher mean for the key informant (gatekeeper)?

7. Whether any recommendation is necessary to enter the given society or institution;

8. What the hierarchy of the society is; how important this arrangement is for entering this locality.

Exercises

Having just read the chapter ‘Fieldwork’, think about the design of your research and adjust it where necessary.

Review Questions

- What does ‘research field’ mean? How can it be defined?
- Where does the researcher carry out his/her research? In a locality, a group of people, in a network of relations? Does the researcher seek to get the opinion of someone concrete?
- ‘Where’ do we need to get into, enter? What strategies should be chosen?

Literature


6 Research Strategies – Sampling

Objectives

- To inform students about non-probability methods in sampling.
- To show what factors are decisive when choosing a sample.
- To define the meaning of the position of a ‘stranger’.
6.1 The Stranger

Field research takes place in social situations in which the researcher participates in a way. Basically, this means that the researcher is physically present in the locality, at school, in the classroom, in the household, as a volunteer in an excluded locality, with women at the weaving loom; there is an infinite amount of movements, gestures, statements and yelling around him/her. The researcher entering the field of research feels success or even silent happiness that he/she is there, but he/she slowly starts to sink into confusion from the surrounding chaos.

This is the position of a stranger who does not know the meaning of situations (Disman, 2000; Kučera 1992; Schuetz, 1994). He/she does not know the names and relations of the actors. Despite being with only one person who ‘rings the bell’, the researcher in fact does not know what it is all about. A focus on specific actions from their very beginning until they subside is a way out of this chaos. The researcher must reasonably narrow the focus of research (Burgess, 1984) and decide who, what, where and when to observe and with whom and about what and about whom to conduct an interview. This is the process of creating a sample.

The researcher in the field is permanently engaged in research; he/she is constantly present in the research process where he/she continues to make decisions about what will become central and what will be in the background and what elements must be observed although they are currently not the focus of the researcher’s attention. This means that the researcher is continuously choosing some things and removing other things from his/her interest (see the ‘The Personality of the Researcher’). The sample is absolutely connected with
the researcher’s decisions and the question begs to be asked to what extent this decision is rational and to what extent it is subject to intuition.

We can naively believe that social reality is predictable and that the way in which a sample is chosen can be determined in advance. This may only be possible with a total sample where the research focuses on all of the actors in a certain situation. But not even here can the researcher avoid the decision-making process, since all actors are constantly developing a certain activity. It will never happen that one individual acts while the others wait until he/she is finished. Even if social reality had this character, the researcher might be interested in what is going on in the heads of those who are waiting.

It may happen that the researcher chooses a sample of actors where it is impossible to observe the phenomenon he/she is interested in (e.g. superstition) as it does not exist there. In this case, the researcher can either change the intention or the sample.

Another question that begs to be asked is why not just directly ask the research actors who know their lives best about the structure of their reality and the meanings of the individual thoughts and actions in their lives. Some scientists are convinced that people do not reflect upon their everyday lives from a sufficient distance and that they do not analyse their behaviour based on theories. People even believe that they act in accordance with their convictions and words.

Holy and Stuchlik (1981) showed that people tend to have certain ‘folk models’ that are the constructions of social reality; however, this does not mean that these constructions absolutely determine their conduct.

We can say that the relation between social reality, the behaviour of actors, and their utterances about their convictions and behaviour is loose to a certain extent; or to be more specific, no simple causality like When I say that I will do A, I will do A’, ‘When I say that I mean A, I really mean A’, ‘When I do A, I also mean A’ can be traced here. Such statements need not be true at all. For instance, many people believe they are not racists, but say that ‘the Vietnamese are assiduous; the Romani want to go to practical schools. This is just their mentality’. As soon as someone starts attributing qualities to another based on their anthropological type, no one can say that he/she is not a racist.

Presuming that the world is chaotic, it is a bit needless to require objectivity from oneself. We can only hope that people living in chaos have their intentions and act accordingly, but we cannot rely on them to communicate their intentions because they in fact do not know them, just as the researcher does not know his/her intentions either (see the chapter ‘Text’).
The first students of general anthropology had various theories as to why they were doing research in the social sciences. Those who originally studied at a faculty of science believed that they were forced to study by latent toxoplasmosis that wanted to be transmitted to other people or a selfish gene that wanted to reproduce itself this way. Students with philosophical and literary roots believed that they wanted to live a life other than their own. Students with a psychological background believed that they were forced by an overpowering yet sublimated libido.

Can any of these theories be true?

The researcher can have access to the place of research, which does not automatically mean (as we could see above) access to each person living in the given area or him/her being of certain interest. Nor does the researcher have access to every event which takes place. Hence, the researcher needs to choose a sample of persons, places, time sequences and events to be observed.

The sampling method depends on the theory and the researcher’s scientific interest. Basically, it is possible to choose a probability sampling method, a non-probability sampling method, or theoretical sampling (Burgess, 1984; Disman, 2005; Miovský, 2009, p. 130).

Probability sampling is rather characteristic for quantitative research methods; nonetheless, it can also be used in a qualitative survey if the researcher wants to have a representative sample of members of the group under study. The qualitative researcher should instead know the actual position of the currently studied actor within the society. This is established through comparisons of speech.

This is an example from the longitudinal PSŠE research project. It is an extract from a dissertation thesis.

‘Jitka gives us a detailed description of the girl group’s stratification in the fourth grade: ‘For example, I make some kind of groups; I always divide them into groups. One group of girls are the cream. Karlička or Veronika, for example, they show off a bit, like Aneta and the like; but don’t tell them ...

The second group is rather ... well, the first group is the cream showing off and the second one is the ladies.

I would skip the third group, they do not show off, they are not ladies, they are not very good at school, like Rozárka, Emilie, Ála, you see.

And so there is this middle group, being neither the cream nor the weak ones, you see, so I don’t know.’

She further specifies her categorisation with the following words:

‘Well, although I call them the cream, they are also sour cream, they are simply like that, showing off all the time. They came in the morning – Veronika
and Aneta – like big friends; and when they quarrelled at the end of the lesson, they split and then were friends again in the after-school club; and after lunch they had a row again and made up in the evening and it was all the same the next day.

And the weaker group, they are nice; they do not show off, you see, there’s more fun with them. And this Veronika – you know – though she says things we laugh at, I don’t laugh with her very much, you see’ (14 April 1998, Rybová, 1999) (Levínská, 2002, p. 30).

Jitka’s categorisation elaborated on the stratification in the classroom. We knew how the class was divided based on our observations, but Jitka made it clear what it meant to belong to one group or another.

Individual groups have their own qualities.

1. **Ladies, the cream, showing off – sour cream, showing off all the time.**
   
   Showing off: They were big friends, then had a row, then made up, and it was the same the next day.

   The boaster Veronika says things we laugh at; but I don’t laugh with her very much (the one from the ‘middle’ group).

2. **The middle group – neither the cream nor the weak ones.** (Not part of any of these groups – does that mean that they do not have their own qualities? The interview showed that the middle group definitely disliked showing off, but this does not mean that they identify themselves with the weaker ones. Humour: They do not laugh at the same things as the boasters. There’s more fun with them.

3. **The weaker group is nice; they do not show off, there’s more fun with them.**

We can see that viewed by the girl considering herself to be part of the middle group, the girls are divided into three groups. The first group is typical for its showing off. With the second group, they have more fun, but the middle group is not identical with it. Interestingly enough, the girl did not speak about any of the positive qualities of her own group. Her speech concerns mutual relations, certain inter-group dynamics. With her statements we could verify and observe the individual qualities of these groups in our subsequent interviews and observations, as well as the way they define each other (and whether and how they exist.). She also enabled us to ask more precise questions of the other girls regarding their views of their own or others’ positions in the classroom.
Non-probability methods do not use any stable rule that could be expressed with probability; they instead use the opportunity the researcher has during his/her research. Theoretical sampling is one of the basic approaches in qualitative research. (It is mentioned by Glaser and Strauss in relation to the grounded theory.) ‘Sampling methods and strategies during research directly depend on the results of the data analysis process’ (Miovský, p. 129). We agree with Miovský who proposes that the theoretical sample is the principle of qualitative research and remains behind the particular sampling strategies.

6.2 Sampling Strategies

6.2.1 Total Sample

For instance, if it is a team’s functioning that is subject to research, the researcher focuses on all of the actors. All the same, the researcher must decide during such research where to conduct it, under what circumstances, in what area, and at what time intervals.

Miovský (2006) says that one-case studies can be performed with an individual, a patient with an extraordinary mental disorder, a certain communication pattern of a certain family. Here the researcher works with interviews and observations. Document analysis can be used to analyse the life of a certain personality (Miovský, 2006, p. 131).

6.2.2 Sample Selection by Criteria

The researcher pre-defines certain criteria that a selected individual must meet (e.g. sex, age, group membership, occupation, expertise, experience). The sample is then defined by qualities known in advance. The sample selection is sometimes absolutely clear (e.g. ninth-graders at primary schools in localities with more than 50,000 inhabitants). The researcher may at other times find out that the qualities of his/her sample remain unclear, as well as the criteria to know whether a certain member falls within this category or not. The researcher may allude to the problem of using different categories than the research actors, i.e. it can happen that there will be no agreement between the researcher and the research actors.

Example:

In our research about the education of people in excluded localities we constantly allude to the problem of whom we are actually studying. The majority society more or less denotes the inhabitants of certain localities as ‘gypsies’ but when the researcher enters this locality, it becomes obvious that not only Romani live there. Or, that some Romani do not look like Romani from our view but regard themselves as such. In other places, we encounter
individuals who look like Romani but are not; they are not even regarded as Romani; and there are also people who resemble them, and are therefore Romani, but do not want to be spoken about as 'gipsies'.

To cope with the difficulties of defining who a Romani is, we applied the theory of cultural models based on cognitive anthropology and psychology for our interpretation. Cultural models are idiosyncratic and shared stereotypes which affect the thinking, behaviour and lived experience of individuals. They are not closed thought categories, but they change and are shared within the mutual interactions of various people. The 'gipsy' stereotype is shared in a similar way; it cannot be definitely grasped as a category that should have specific qualities and to which an individual would belong based on these attributes (cf. Doubek, 2011).

6.2.3 Snowball

If the researcher is interested in a network of relations, in the sharing of certain interests, the ‘snowball’ is an appropriate and preferred strategy. Based on an acquaintance with one person, the researcher can get access to other individuals having similar interests. This strategy mostly concerns participation in a certain sub-culture, club membership, or in research related to addictions. This procedure is appropriate if the researcher is concerned with a certain organisation. The way in which the people and members of a certain network recommend each other may be convenient for observing the quality of their ties and the significance they mutually feel towards one another. This sampling method is not a ‘mere’ search for informants; it also involves the quality of the relation and its meaning and significance. The sampling alone becomes research.

6.2.4 Theoretical Sampling

In their grounded theory, Glasser and Strauss (see Corbin, Strauss, 1999) speak about sampling based on a theory generated by research. In order to be able to create the theory, the researcher needs to target the sample theoretically. The data must be saturated, i.e. the statements by informants will start to be repeated and the researcher will no longer find new statements.

If the data differ from the theory, such data will expand or modify it. With repeated data collection, the researcher verifies the validity of the theory.

If no new information emerges and if such information keeps being repeated, we speak about data saturation. Different information, i.e. even such information which invalidates the other, can represent angles of individual samples of the same phenomenon. For instance, if we ask: ‘What is a primary school?’, we can find different information at the level of legislation, political
statements, teachers, parents, children, the majority, the minority, architects, and school caretakers.

An example of the statements of teenage girls about the primary school they completed:

'I was bullied at primary school 'cause I am a Roma; they bullied me from the first to the third grade even though my parents came to school’ (Gina, 2010).

'It was also because they made fun of me when I was little 'cause everybody from school told me I was disembowelled, so I wore a swimsuit 'cause I was really ashamed of the scar’ (Blanka, 2010).

ML: ‘This primary school seemed to be a harder school.’

‘And the worst thing about it is that you must go there ..., I am glad it is behind me ..., you will never see me there again’ (Gina, 2010).

‘The school I went to was really tough stuff’ (Blanka 2010).

A girl growing up in a children’s home and having good results and not having any problems with school as such says: 'When I did not take notice of the problem people, it was okay, 'cause they otherwise were crude and stupid’ (Eva’s sister, 2009) (Levinská, 2011, p. 225).

During research, the researcher constantly faces the dilemma of whether the data sample is sufficiently representative. ‘Are the place I am at and the interactions taking place here sufficiently representative?’

Erving Goffman (1999) who carried out research among hotel keepers on the Shetland Islands described the differences in the behaviour of the guests and the hosts when they were together and apart. He speaks about the so-called ‘backstage’ and the ‘front stage’. It sometimes happens that the audience can see backstage but the actor does not realise it in full: ‘When a neighbour dropped in to have a cup of tea, he would ordinarily wear at least a hint of an expectant, warm smile as he passed through the door into the cottage. Since the lack of physical obstructions outside the cottage and the lack of light within it usually made it possible to observe the visitor unobserved as he approached the house, the islanders sometimes took pleasure in watching the visitor drop whatever expression he was manifesting and replace it with a sociable one just before reaching the door. However, some visitors, in appreciating that this examination was occurring, would blindly adopt a social face a long distance from the house, thus ensuring the projection of a constant image’ (Goffman, 1999, p. 8). Likewise, the researcher can be an audience for the research actors for whom a certain story is performed and told. Nonetheless, even this performance has a certain meaning and sense.

Example:

When carrying out research in excluded localities, we encountered a
phenomenon that we called ‘pink-painting’ (Doubek, 2011, p. 102). It often happened in the households we visited that something was not working; there was no electricity; they had contaminated water; a small old stove was used to heat the flat and cook meals; the children had problems at school; a family member was in prison or had just been released. Simply speaking, the life of the actors is on the verge of tolerability from our perspective. But when we talked to the families, these were only marginal issues. Everything works as it should; something might be improved, e.g. public transport – they counted on their children continuing in their studies. Does this pink-painting work to preserve RESPECT? Is it an accommodating reaction to the nonsensical questions of the researchers who could have noticed without asking that this is really and completely about something other than school? (author’s archive).

With these questions, we in a way reflect back on the previous chapter. Have we really entered the field of research despite being inside the households in the excluded locality? What kind of data do we collect here? Can we ask what it actually is like?

According to Glasser and Strauss (Burgess, 1984; Miovský, 2005), the population is not defined in advance in research where sampling is based on a theory, and we do not know the scope of the data necessary for the saturation of the ‘sought, construed’ theory either. Sampling is reiterated during research and takes place in relation to data analysis.

During his/her research, the researcher must know why he/she is making a certain choice at the given moment and how the sample is connected with the research question. Does the selected sample have a conceptual force and does it provide a good presentation of the phenomenon selected from the chaotic whole? Is this selection feasible at all? Does the researcher face any ethical problems in his/her choice of the situations, informants, etc.? What minimum must be gained to generate a theory?

**Summary**

The way the researcher puts together a research sample is closely related to the research question and the choice of the group or the network to be studied. Basically, a few questions must be kept in mind during sampling:

- Why have I chosen this person/situation/place/time?
- What is the link between the research question and the subject matter of my interest?
- Does this sample have any conceptual force? Have I made a good choice?
- Is this selection feasible?
Are there any ethical problems?
Have I met the required minimum?

To broaden your understanding of the individual methods, we recommend methodological texts describing various sampling strategies in detail.

**Exercise 1**

Conduct a short survey among student-teachers on the following theme: ‘What did primary school mean for you?’

When you ask your parents and grandparents, are their answers different from the original sample? What are the differences? What are the differences based on?

**Exercise 2**

You have designed your research. Characterise your designed sample. In what way could your research sample be changed? Consider the people, place and time.

**Review Questions**

- When does the researcher use the probability sampling method and when is non-probability sampling preferred?
- What is the difference between theoretical sampling and criteria-based sampling?
- When is it appropriate to use the snowball method?

**Literature**


7 Field Research Methods

Objectives
- To inform students about the basic field research methods, including participant observation, interviews and document analysis.
- To explain the meaning of participant observation.
- To outline the risks of participant observation.
- To explain the meaning of conducting an interview as a conversation.
- To draw attention to the facts that the researcher must bear in mind during document analysis.

Time Requirements
4 hours

Terms to Remember (Key Words)
- participant observation
- social reality
- research actor
- participant-observer
- observer-as-participant
- complete participant
- migrating member
- interview
- semi-structured interview
- listening
- language

7.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is one of the most suitable methods of qualitative research. Burgess (1984, p. 78) refers to Schuetz who in 1951 described a distinction between the reality described by the natural scientist and the social reality described by the social scientist. Natural scientists define the subject matter of their research on their own and choose the procedural rules accordingly; they determine the facts and figures relevant to the problem under study. This means that the facts and events to be studied are determined in advance and the observational field is pre-interpreted. According to the natural
scientist, the world of nature does not mean anything to electrons and atoms. A field as observed by social scientists [observational field], which represents social reality, has, however, a specific meaning and structural relevance for living, acting and thinking human beings. Social scientists pre-select and pre-interpret their world through a series of common-sense constructs and experience this world as everyday reality. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist have to be founded upon the practical thought constructions of those living their everyday lives within their own worlds (cf. Schuetz in Burgess, 1984, p. 78). Essentially, the above statements imply that the social scientist cannot know the field of his/her research in advance because it is hidden in the thought constructions of the research actors.

The social world is not objective; it involves subjective meanings and experiences attributed by its participants to certain social situations. It is the task of the social scientist to interpret the meanings and experiences of social actors, and this task can only be achieved if they share the lived reality together with the individuals involved (Burgess, 1984). ‘The participant-observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization he studies’ (Becker in Burgess, 1984, p. 79). Researchers use participant observation in order to get access to the meanings which the actors assign to social situations. Participant observation aims at facilitating the understanding of the meaning contained in a social situation. In participant observation-based research, it is the researcher who is the main instrument of social investigation (Burgess, 1984, p. 79).

Participant observation seeks to obtain a wealth of detailed data based on observation under natural circumstances. We cannot speak about participant observation if observation takes place under experimental or artificial conditions where the researcher has variables under control and can and wants to influence them. Standardised collection is another option. This is where I gather pre-determined data in a natural environment and such collection involves vast amounts of data gathered in a team. Again, this is not participant observation, but a statistical survey.

Participant observation wants to understand and see the concepts used by the research actors in their everyday life and language. Language is another obstacle for the researcher. Although the researcher conducts his/her research in a society where he/she has been socialised and whose mother tongue he/she shares, the researcher need not necessarily share the same vocabulary as the social group of interest; the researcher does not share the same meaning of the words they use. Everyone knows that there is professional jargon, criminal slang, etc., and that even people from the same social rank may not agree on the meaning of one specific word. This virtually means that the researcher’s
task is to know the language and become familiar with it – to ask for explanations of terms.

During participant observation, the researcher enters situations face to face and becomes a part of the context that is being observed (Schwartz and Schwartz in Burgess, 1984). The researcher should ask in what way he/she impacts on the behaviour of the actors and informants, and what influence he/she has on the relations within the group under study. When speaking of the quality of this approach, the researcher’s role can oscillate between active and passive.

For instance, when observing actions in a classroom, the researcher can sit in one part of the classroom (preferably with his/her back to the window to avoid looking into the light) to get a good view of the class from the side and to see the class’s interaction with the teacher. The researcher can also observe what the children do at their desks, whether and with what they are playing and whether they are writing love letters or holding mobile phones. The researcher can also sit at a school desk and perceive the classroom from the perspective of a student. The researcher can look into a child’s hands and see how he/she does assignments or try what it feels like to do a specific assignment.

‘Though it may seem incongruous to think of a middle-aged, 200-pound male anthropologist being a participant-observer in third- and fourth-grade classes, this was actually the case. I sat at a desk in the back of the room and did the same things the children did insofar as my ethnographic recording activities permitted. The children accepted me and my role much more quickly than did the teachers, but both seemed to adapt to the incongruities after a period of several weeks. I can think of no other way that I would have come to an understanding of what the third and fourth grades in the Schönhausen Grundschule were like’ (Spindler 1974 in Burgess, 1984, p. 83).

The researcher can be asked by the teacher to take the children to another classroom or to watch them when the teacher needs to suddenly leave the classroom. The researcher can stand in for another teacher. The researcher can assume a variety of roles within one community; nonetheless, it can happen that some of these roles will close the door to any relationship with other members of the community. In all cases, this role brings expectations and in a way also prepares attitudes of participants in advance. The researcher’s role can change during observation depending on the relations and expectations imposed.

According to Burgess (1984, p. 80), ‘Major distinctions have been made between active and passive roles (Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955), open and
closed roles and known and unknown participant-observers (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979) (Burgess, 1984, p. 80).

Based on these differences, Gold (Gold 1958 in Burgess, 1984, p. 80) categorises observers into four ideal groups: the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer (Gold 1958 in Burgess, 1984, p. 80)

The complete participant conceals the dimension of observation; the group need not know at all that there is a researcher. This role serves its purpose if, for instance, the target group is a sect or a deviant group such as a group of drug addicts. However, it can also happen in this case that the researcher who is a complete participant may completely change the behaviour of the group that he/she has entered and whose member he/she has become. If the researcher is regarded as a group ‘insider’, he/she may encounter situations where his/her role will be to lead the group. The role-playing can be so effective that the researcher ‘goes native’ and ceases to gather data. If the researcher is a complete participant, it is recommended to leave the group, taking breaks for writing field notes and coding data (Burgess, 1984).

Writing letters to someone from the outside, to a group ‘outsider’, is another option for keeping distance from a group if the researcher cannot leave it and if the research is being conducted in a locality outside his/her ‘home’. This means that the researcher must keep in touch with the people having ties to the researcher’s identity before the entry into the field of study, i.e. with one’s family, colleagues and/or tutors.

Example:

I carried out research in an anthroposophical village in Yorkshire. I assumed the role of a co-worker who was to participate in the everyday tasks as well as the festive rhythm of the community. An individual gradually gets used to the community rhythm and if he/she takes part in various activities, he/she can substitute for a housemother if she is ill or on vacation; this improves his/her reputation. It can easily happen that an individual identifies him/herself with life of the community because of being positively accepted. The researcher can use several footings, e.g. not to interrupt contact with friends, family and teachers. I personally had a good experience with regular letters to the tutor who was overseeing my studies, visits from friends, and unfinished matters. I knew that I wanted to finish my anthropological studies and that I needed to pass my exams and write a thesis. During this type of research, the researcher will realise how fickle and fragile his/her identity is.

It may happen that the researcher identifies with the objectives of a certain group in the field during long-term research and may become a co-worker.

Example:
I regularly visited a community centre (‘nízkoprahový klub’) in a town where there is a Roma community. I carried out my research and also helped children in the club. Local Roma activists asked me to cooperate with them in the development of a community centre in line with the new standards laid down by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and become the club’s manager. Although I knew the location fairly well, this experience enabled me to go deeper into its political and economic relations and their consequences. I understood that the political and economic relations that influenced life in the community were not safe for me. I changed from the position of a researcher to the position of an actor, which is why I interrupted my active research in this locality for a fairly long time.

When being a participant-as-observer, the researcher admits his/her role as a researcher and does not conceal the subject matter of the study and even makes no secret about his/her intentions. The researcher is in the field and actively uses his/her potential. For the actors involved, the researcher remains someone outside the group who may, nonetheless, be accepted based on trust (Burgess, 1984, pp. 80–85).

Example:
Children at primary and secondary schools know quite well that the researcher is not their classmate. The researcher can hardly be a full participant in their group. Nevertheless, it is understandable and adequate that the researcher wants to have the rules of their games explained and understand the relations between friends or the way they solve an assigned problem. The researcher has the power to establish a relationship of trust where the children appreciate that someone cares about their opinions and ideas. The stiffness gradually fades away in their relations and interactions.

The complete participant and participant-as-observer are research attitudes that are absolutely in line with the targets of participant observation.

Observer-as-participant. This is about formal contact between the researcher and the research actors. The actors know that they are being watched by the observer who can thus never ‘go native’. The researcher does not take part in their social life. This role may not be satisfactory when seeking the meaning attributed by participants to their experiencing of social situations. Cursory contact does not allow the researcher to unveil the meaning of an activity. The researcher is not in the picture with regard to the essence of the actors’ conduct (Burgess, 1984, pp. 80–85).

The researcher can also be a mere observer if he/she has absolutely no contact with the informants or actors. The absence of the option to go native can also produce another problem known as ‘ethnocentrism’. This phenomenon has been described as ‘great ethnography’ and denotes the researcher’s
inability to adopt the position of a native, a native speaker or a research actor; such a researcher evaluates the activities observed only through his/her own experience (Gold 1958 in Burgess, 1984, pp. 80–85; Disman, 2000).

If research is carried out in the school environment, the participant-as-observer attitude is an appropriate approach. It is his/her physical size that creates the social distance between the researcher and the children. ‘From the children’s perspective, every adult has some kind of relation to the teaching staff’ or other members of the school staff or parents. If the researcher does not fit into any of these groups, they ask questions like ‘Who are you?’; ‘Who is the person?’

The researcher’s acceptance by teachers or the school management can be a problem as well. Burgess (1984) describes that different teachers and representatives of individual school departments have taken different approaches towards him. A deputy headmaster, XY, accepted him as a rightful member of the teaching team participating in the school’s activities and introduced him as a new teacher. On the other hand, a representative of the mathematics department allowed him to participate in various activities, but absolutely ignored him when introducing the teaching staff to visitors.

If we look at the time spent in the field, the observer’s role can change over time with regard to the researcher’s acceptance by the research actors. The researcher’s role is created on the basis of the social exchange between the person subject to research and the researcher. Janes (in Burgess, 1984, p. 84) differentiates five stages: newcomer; provisional acceptance; categorical acceptance; personal acceptance; and imminent migrant. We must emphasise that it depends on the researcher’s activities whether he/she makes it through to the fifth stage of acceptance – to be regarded as an imminent migrant (marginal member, cf. Kučera, 1992) of the society; as someone close who has friends and who can be trusted. The researcher constantly hovers on the edge of acceptance. There is always a risk that the researcher will make a mistake, commit an impropriety or carry out an inappropriate evaluation and will fail to continue the relations already developed. Some members can display categorical acceptance and others will accept him/her only because he/she is accepted by another member of the community. We believe that we encounter this situation in our research in excluded localities quite often. We experience different degrees of acceptance depending on the length of our acquaintance with the research actors, on the character of the relations between the research actors and the key informant, and on the actor’s personal prudence and degree of trust.
Olesen and Whittaker take a similar approach to Janes with regard to the development of researcher-actor relations. According to Olesen and Whittaker (in Burgess, 1984, p. 85), the relation between the researcher and the research actors goes through four stages: At first, there is a *surface encounter* where other life roles are mixed with one’s role as a researcher; then there is *proffering and inviting* where the definition of the self is mutually exchanged, including group membership; the *selecting and modifying* phase comes third and includes meaningful and viable research and the life roles of the researcher, research participant and observer; and finally, there is the *stabilizing and sustaining* stage where balance is achieved between one’s life and research roles.

Burgess uses examples to demonstrate the development of the researcher’s role and the development of the research field’s roles where the research field changes its relation to the researcher.

Example:

*I temporarily stopped my research at the ‘Fortress’ as I myself identified too much with the research field and if I can put it so, the research field wanted to appropriate me and employ me in accordance with its prevailing rules. Nonetheless, I kept in touch with some of the actors. It was interesting for me to hear that another researcher had appeared in the field and I was given references about him. It was at that time when I realised what others assess about the researcher. I was astonished by the style of their questions: ‘Why does the researcher act as if he is stupid? Is he stupid or not? You also kept asking about things, but you did not make an impression of being completely …’* (author’s archive).

Anthropology students are encouraged to not be those who ‘give out opinions’ but rather those who listen and position themselves as ‘learners or students’. My fellow researcher adhered to this instruction but made the actors uncertain with this attitude; they were afraid his intelligence was lower than it was. They did not understand ‘how on Earth’ he could be doing research.

This attitude is assumed because it is not a matter of course for the researcher to accept an answer saying, *‘This is normal here; this is how it goes; I agree with this; this is improper behaviour.’* Basically, the researcher is prohibited from surmising and assigning meanings like the ‘native speaker does’; the researcher must keep asking: *‘How do things work here? What is normal? And what is not? What do you agree with? And why don’t you agree with someone who says things you agree with?’* The researcher wants to know about the ‘root of the meanings’; he/she is walking on thin ice as he/she cannot surmise and must ask more specific questions. The researcher positions himself/herself either as a ‘dunce’ or as an ‘aggressor’ asking annoying
questions. The researcher must balance these positions all the time without compromising his/her ‘search for meaning’.

### 7.1.1 Impact of the Researcher’s Experience

With growing experience with participant observation, the researcher can focus his/her attention on the phenomena corresponding to his/her theoretical focus and research question. A relaxed attitude is another important skill which can come in handy if events take an unforeseeable turn, because research often focuses on events which do not follow any plan prepared in advance. If things go as planned, they may be well-arranged but may not reflect the authentic activities of the society under study. The researcher’s experience is crucial with regard to data collection.

We have already mentioned the research field’s reaction to the researcher’s appearance, age, sex, gender identity and ethnicity. In some situations the researcher’s identity may be counter-productive, and in other situations it may be helpful. It affects the statements made by informants. A man uses different language when speaking to another man of the same age and of the same class than he does when speaking to a young and beautiful girl. The research field also has different interpretations of interviews and encounters.

Example:

In the Camphill, heterosexual encounters between young people were interpreted as ‘dating’. When I was interviewing some male co-workers alone, a ‘certain meaning’ was immediately assigned to the situation. Any male visitor was viewed as a potential partner. (Similar mechanisms can also be found in a Czech village.) (author’s archive).

Theoretical and practical experience with research may (or may not) provide the researcher with a deeper insight into the problem under study and may help him/her fight the stereotypes and models used to interpret the phenomena observed. They offer possible interpretations depending on various theoretical frameworks.

### 7.1.2 How to End Participant Observation

‘Leaving the research field’ could be a chapter on its own. If the research plan has a clear timeframe and the research is conducted in a certain institution (e.g. longitudinal PSŠE research), there is no special tension when the researcher leaves the research field. Problems may, however, emerge if the researcher changes his/her identity, if the researcher assumes a certain social

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11 This is in fact an addition to the chapter ‘The Researcher’s Personality’.
role in the field, or if the researcher identifies him/herself with the group observed. It may happen that the researcher never leaves the research field. The question begs to be asked to what extent such a researcher can write an adequately reflective research report.

Or, there may be a change in the research field and the researcher’s presence may become undesirable as he/she has been a witness to change. The research field may try to get rid of the researcher. It is easy if it is a closed institution such as a school; the school will simply prevent the researcher’s access to the building or to the class.

If one’s research is completed as scheduled and agreed with the research actors, we recommend that the researcher says goodbye and gives a small present to the informant or actor as confirmation of the relationship and its termination.

7.2 Interviews as Conversations

Statistical surveys normally include a structured interview where the researcher prepares the questions in advance and repeatedly asks them in the same manner, in the same wording and in the same order. The questions are formulated prior to the actual research and do not change during the research survey. This method of questioning leaves no space for reflecting on, reformulating or for making them more specific. The interviewee has no opportunity to ask questions. The researcher is in a superior position in respect of the interviewed; their relationship is asymmetric in the context of the given situation.

The qualitative approach mostly uses other interview types, such as semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and narrative interviews. Such interviews can be conducted only on the basis of basic trust and a relationship established between the researcher and the persons interviewed. According to Burgess, much has been written about how to conduct an interview correctly. He points to the risk of a relationship, to the need to be friendly and open yet not too social, and to the risk of being carried away by one’s affections.

To be able to conduct an interview, the researcher needs to realise that a conversation is a social exchange in which the participants are engaged and where the researcher cannot expect the interviewee to be open if the researcher is reserved and closed. The degree of openness depends on the relationship between the researcher and the person being interviewed, and the

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12 The title and content of this chapter have been inspired by Burgess: ‘Methods of Field Research 2: Interviews as Conversations’ (Burgess, pp. 101–122).

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researcher needs to adjust his/her expectations regarding the information he/she receives accordingly (see the development of the research role in the chapter ‘Participant Observation’).

Interviews are regarded as conversations with a target. Mayhew in his report ‘London Labour and the London Poor’ (1851), which was concerned with London’s workers and poor, was one of the first researchers to conduct unstructured or informal interviews (see Burgess, 1984, p. 102).

In this approach, the researcher is more interested in the life of the persons being interviewed than in the interview itself; he/she is a friend and confidant. This kind of interview cannot be conducted without knowledge and preparation beforehand. It is strongly tied to participant observation. Sidney and Beatrice Webb (in Burgess, 1984, p. 102) speak about an interview where the persons being interviewed should feel comfortable and where the interview is a pleasant social experience. Zweig (1948) (in Burgess, p. 102), who was concerned with the issue of blue-collar workers, speaks about an informant’s astonishment that the interviewer talks to him about things which he has never spoken about before in his life. ‘Strangely enough I have never talked about that to anyone else’ (Burges, 1984, p. 103).

We have also encountered similar statements in our research on the helping professions in the area of educating people from excluded localities. When communicating their stories, the informants are surprised about what they have actually told the researchers. Sometimes they express a certain relief and satisfaction that they have realised or arranged their thoughts on their professional life (diary, Levínská, 2013). This type of interview as a conversation can be, to a certain extent, ‘therapeutic or supervisory’. And it is here where we encounter the following ethical question: We know that people long to be listened to, which is basically the reason why they finally consent to being interviewed after initially being apprehensive. And once they overcome their shyness, they offer opinions and thoughts to the researcher which they had never assumed they would communicate, or even re-discover them. What position should the researcher take? In particular if he/she acquires more sensitive information than was originally expected? Such information can be intimate in a way; or can one’s good intentions result in the informant’s ethics being compromised, and by publishing this information the researcher can cast a bad light on the person being interviewed? (see the chapter ‘Research Ethics’).

The personality of the researcher embodies two attitudes – one of a professional and one of a confidant. The ethical problem lies in the clash between the attitude of a confidant, which induces an atmosphere of friendship, and the attitude of a researcher. The professional and friendly mix
together and the informant can be easily misled. At the same time, the researcher can feel affection towards his/her informants and have bad feelings about reporting ‘about them’ (this issue is further developed in the chapter ‘Text’).

Similarly to participant observation, also here the researcher needs to evaluate the influence his/her personality has on the course of his/her interviews. The effects of his/her appearance, gender, age, etc. The possible effects of the researcher’s ethnicity on research focusing on ethnicity.

7.2.1 Interview Implementation

The interview is a procedure which has particular essentials that need to be adhered to. One needs to prepare oneself and have the relevant information for the interview before its actual implementation and before contacting the person to be interviewed. For instance, if the researcher wants to interview a mayor, he/she needs to know about the mayor’s political affiliation, term in office, goals and objectives, and successes and failures. This means gathering as much information that is publicly available as possible. It is appropriate to use information from participant observation or any previous interviews with other research actors.

In this preliminary phase, the question begs to be asked what should be done so that someone is willing to speak with the researcher?

If the interview is being conducted with members of a Roma community or with people living in an excluded locality, no interview can be virtually carried out before a relationship with some of its ‘trustworthy’ members is built. The researcher must rely on the gatekeeper, on the key informant and his/her abilities and position in the community.

If the researcher is conducting research at a school and has become an ‘imminent migrant’, i.e. someone involved in school life on a regular basis, his/her role as a researcher is accepted; the researcher and research actors exchange information and there is no problem to get the teachers’ consent in most of the cases to interview learners during lessons. If learners are given the option of leaving a lesson, all of them will basically be willing to take part in an interview. Being absent from a lesson is perceived as a reward. Burgess (1984) has similar experience and the majority of researchers doing research in a school environment have encountered this situation as well.

Before the actual interview takes place, one needs to have a timeframe with regard to the time to be devoted to certain topics. The researcher must also be ready to adjust this plan flexibly if a new issue arises. The researcher must be able to anticipate the informant’s options, how much time the informant is willing to give to the researcher, and how much time can actually
be given. Other considerations that can make a difference include the social status of the person being interviewed, his/her job, duties, age, etc.

The researcher chooses the form of the interview depending on the type of information to be obtained and the target set by the researcher, i.e. the interview’s form can range from loose to strictly structured. A semi-structured interview contains issues to be discussed, but the depth of the discussion depends on the actor and on the meaning assigned to these issues. The researcher can prepare a certain sequence of questions not to be omitted in order to be able to compare the statements of individual informants and to not get lost in the impressions from the interview in progress.

During the interview, the researcher asks additional questions to clarify or delve more deeply into certain information.

**Unstructured interviews** take place during conversations at various social events. The researcher very often lacks the option to make a recording and must rely on his/her own memory and write notes down after departure or once the event is over.

A narrative includes the narration of stories that occurred to the narrator or someone else from the group under study. It can be a spontaneous narration during field research or it can be initiated by the researcher. The researcher acts as a listener; he/she should not interrupt the story with questions until after it is heard in its entirety.

Establishment of a relationship is the first step during the actual implementation of the interview. The researcher introduces himself/herself briefly, clearly and openly. The informant must clearly know who is in front of him/her and what competencies the researcher has. The informant must be put at ease, reassured about his/her anonymity (his/her identity will be protected), and told that the information he/she gives will not be given to any third party. Next, the researcher introduces the topic and why this specific informant has been contacted. In Step 3, the researcher has no other choice but to hope that the informant is attracted to the idea of the interview and will be willing to speak about specific situations related to the given topic.

On the one hand, the researcher needs to ‘persuade’ and ‘win over’ the informant so that he/she is willing to take part in the research project. On the other hand, the informant must also be persuaded to talk during the interview. Longitudinal research at a basic school has shown that some boys ‘had to be’ addressed by a male researcher because they simply would not talk to a woman. Luckily enough, the pair doing research was a man and a woman. Likewise, some girls were more open when being interviewed by a woman than by a man. This can be a problem when one needs to inspire the informant to make broader statements than just one word, etc.
It is also good to record the interview if the researcher has the informant’s consent. However, there are two primary dangers when making recordings. The first one is technical – the recording device stops working and the interview is not recorded. Or – in the better case – the interview conditions are chaotic, full of noise and it is hard to identify who is speaking and why.

Another danger lies in the researcher’s reliance on thinking that everything will be recorded and therefore the researcher does not listen to the informant adequately. Listening is the principle behind the interview as conversation. If the researcher does not listen actively, he/she is exposed to the risk that he/she will fail in making contact and establishing trust with the actors and obtaining the relevant information.

Written notes during an interview are another important technical aid. The researcher puts down the informant’s reactions and asks additional questions which occur during the interview.

What types of questions are asked in an interview? Spradley (1979 in Burgess, 1984, pp. 111–112) speaks about three main types of questions. There are descriptive questions, which provide information about the informants’ activities and positions. Then there are structural questions, which aim to find out how the informants have structured their knowledge. The third type is contrast questions, which allow the informants to discuss the meanings of situations in their world. When questioning, the researcher uses the terms used by the informants and tries to understand them in more detail. This can be done through comparisons of various situational contexts and events.

7.2.2 Group Interviews

Another way of organising an interview is in a group. The aim of the group interview is to spur a discussion among the research actors. The discussion enables mutual comparisons of a variety of views of the same phenomenon. The research actors can react spontaneously and the meanings within their social worlds arise more seamlessly than if the researcher made the same attempt as an outsider.

However, the situation may sometimes become chaotic and hard to grasp, but at other times the group interview can bring unexpected information when the research actors try to ‘outdo’ each other with their experience, for instance. It may also happen that the researcher changes into a catalyst for the expression of group frustration.

A focus group is a special technique within the group interview. In this case, the researcher identifies the focus of the discussion for it to be comprehensible to all participants. Through the developing discussion, the researcher can observe to what extent group dynamics and social pressures
affect individual meanings (cf. Miovský, 2005). This research technique has been elaborated upon in greater detail and is worth further study in other references.

### 7.3 Document Analysis

The analysis of all kinds of documents is also a part of qualitative research. The information contained within a document does not seem to change, as the text is completed, but supporters of Gadamerian hermeneutics say that the meaning of the text emerges when it is read by a specific reader. Texts read by different persons in different socio-cultural and historic times always have different meanings (Fay, 2002). The first-grade report card is an important event for its holder and the parents. When an ex-first grader finishes basic school or passes his/her upper-secondary school-leaving examination, this report arouses a faint smile, in particular if there is a big ‘A’.  

When working with documentation, one needs to consider the time when it was produced, its author and its purpose. Personal documentation is governed by Act No. 101/2000 Sb. (Coll.), on Personal Data Protection. The daily press and agency news can also be used in research. Other sources in modern research also include the Internet, social networks, etc.

When conducting research in a school, we can work with the products of the children, with their work, notes, letters, etc. Essentially, we have two options: We either know the context of the situation and have the respective commentary from the children or we get finished products such as examination papers from a Czech-language school-leaving examination.

Example: An expert opinion from a pedagogical-psychological counselling centre can have different meanings for the child, for the parents, and for the teacher. The teacher receives a report about the child saying that increased tiredness and mistakes on assignments are caused by a reading disorder but that the child’s intellect is slightly above average. The teacher can (which also happened in the case observed) see this report as another problem in his class as the parents will want concessions and special evaluation, etc. The parents are satisfied as they know the cause of the child’s failure at school. However, considering the teacher’s reaction to the report, the tension between the teacher and the child and the child’s parents increases compared to the ‘pre-report’ period. Although the teacher can no longer give ‘Ds’ to the child, which

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13 Considering the context of research in excluded localities, we can see how evaluation can define clear borders between ‘normal children’ and children transferred to a practical school.

14 We are not sure whether children wrote each other written messages before the mobile-phone era. When PSŠE started its basic-school research, mobiles were not commonplace. They emerged during the second stage of basic school, around 1998, and then were only used in spoken conversations.
the child deserves in his opinion, his approach to the child (which cannot be measured and that should be expressed through empathy and understanding) does not improve. The reason why this is so can be found if we look at the teacher’s life from a broader perspective and in a deeper context.

Summary

In this chapter we discussed three data collection methods – participant observation, interview and document analysis. Both in participant observation and interviews we must realise the manner in which our personality affects observation. The manner in which the situations entered by the researcher are shaped. Depending on the type of research, the researcher decides to what extent the observation will be open, active and known. This decision is absolutely tied to the research objectives and design. The degree to which the researcher structures his/her interviews is related to the research objectives and stage. The researcher primarily wants to understand the meanings which the actors assign to their actions. If the researcher wants to study and compare more actors, questions of the same type must be asked. Clearly, the researcher also receives answers to his/her questions and the questions as such shape the answers. It is therefore appropriate that the researcher is sensitive in his/her decision-making when it comes to whether to listen or to ask questions.

Exercises

The main seminar assignment is to conduct and analyse a semi-structured narrative interview or observation in a class.

1. Choose an interview topic and your informant and propose the type of interview suitable for this topic. Propose the issues or areas you want to discuss.

2. Conduct your interview and observe its circumstances: When and where is the interview being conducted? What is the informant’s mood? How does he/she react to your questions? When is the reaction prompt and when does the informant become more contemplative or refuses to answer? Observe the informant’s emotional reactions and gestures. Write these things down. Write down other questions which you think of or which you do not understand.

3. Make a verbatim transcription of the interview and add your comments and remarks. Now the interview is ready to be analysed.

Literature
Review Questions

- What types of observation can we conduct? What are the differences between them?
- What attitudes can the field researcher adopt? Which attitudes are best suited to participant observation?
- What do you imagine the term ‘marginal member’ of society to mean?
- Characterise a semi-structured interview.
- What is a ‘standardised interview’?

8 Archive

Objectives

- To inform students about the importance of an archive in field research.
- What are an archive’s components and why?
- To provide information about the basic procedures in data categorisation.

Time Requirements

2 hours

Terms to Remember (Key Words)

- field diary
- archive
- primary data
- description
- cluster creation
- contrast method
- metaphor method
- Gestalt method
- embedded theory method
- open coding
- axial coding
- selective coding
- category
8.1 Archive Content

An archive containing the data collected is a necessary part of ethnographic research. The archive has a structure containing diaries, interview recordings, images, video recordings and copies of documents. Contrary to the chaotic field, the archive is a well-arranged item with meaningfully organised content. What does this mean?

The archive contains records of multiple layers. The primary data contain direct transcriptions of the researcher’s ‘experience’ in field diaries as we know from ethnography.

The field diary is a must in participant observation. It contains the methodological research procedure and actual observation records. It contains the ordinary activities performed by the researcher in order to implement his/her research, as well as the researcher’s experience and evaluations. It normally happens that the researcher takes the participant observation situation ‘hard’ and the diary helps him/her to ‘bear’ the given experience. Field notes also reflect the researcher’s attitudes, which helps differentiate his/her attitude in analysis and interpretation. Reflection of one’s attitudes helps in preventing the researcher from imposing own projections on actors during data interpretation.

Field notes also enable one to make a distinction between theory and the field. Notes are subsequently supplied to the primary records and commented upon, and meanings are assigned to them. It is only through analysis that the researcher comes to understand (or not) the meaning for the research participants. If the researcher chooses to leave the primary and rough notes uncommented upon, he/she is exposed to the risk of the data ‘growing old’; after some time, it will remain unclear why such data were recorded. The archive should also contain the primary notes and coded materials. Miovský sees archive work as an analytical method having several procedures. Archiving of the coded data contributes to the creation of an organised database. To put it simply, the archive grows and flourishes depending on the data-management intensity. Miovský (2006, p. 219) says that there is no high standardisation of partial methods in qualitative research. He mentions several methods which can be used in data analysis. First, there is a description, a simple arrangement of data and their description. Each record must contain the basic characteristic, the date and place of acquisition, the persons present and the type of the recorded event.

Actual analysis is carried out through coding, which can be defined as a process of identification and systematisation of characteristics of units of
meaning depending on the criteria created’ (Miovský, 2006, p. 219). The data are connected during coding; the researcher seeks relations in the data. Individual parts are linked into higher units through identifications and clusters. When working on the archive, the researcher comments upon and adds data through written commentaries which broaden/deepen the analysis. Then the researcher draws conclusions and verifies them. He/she interprets the data and seeks support for his/her interpretations. Their validity is verified. Support is sought in the archive or may be supplemented with additional data. The researcher creates and seeks interpretation frameworks so theories with which the researcher is concerned can also become a part of the archive.

8.2 Particular Data Analysis Procedures

The actual analysis is not carried out unbiasedly or mechanically regardless of the character of the data collected. A different approach is taken if the data are analysed based on a grounded theory, on a phenomenological approach, on a narrative approach, etc.

First, let us mention a few data-sorting possibilities. Miovský (2006) describes several analytical approaches: the method of creating clusters, the Gestalt method, the method of simple enumeration, the method of contrast, of metaphor use, factoring, seeking relations, and grounded theory.

‘The method of creating clusters is normally used to group and conceptualise certain statements in groups, e.g. by differentiating certain phenomena, places, cases, etc.’ (Miovský, 2006, p. 221). The researcher groups and conceptualises statements in groups or clusters which are organised on the basis of thematic and spatial overlapping between the identified units. This is an inductive procedure.

‘The Gestalt method lies in finding certain repeating patterns and topics in the data which are recorded. This is basically about seeking certain more general principles, patterns or structures corresponding to the specific phenomena observed and tied to a certain context, person, etc. When obtaining or analysing the data, the researcher creates certain coherent ‘stories’ about the course of the given phenomenon” (Miovský, 2006, p. 222). Miovský also says that the researcher puts the data into these ‘stories’ and constructs his/her own idea about the phenomenon under study (Miovský, 2006, p. 222).

The method of simple enumeration is on the border between a qualitative and quantitative approach and identifies the frequency and intensity of a certain phenomenon.

The method of contrasts and comparisons serves to differentiate two identified categories. ‘Contrasting is important for the contextual
differentiation of a certain phenomenon which may have a different character depending on the context’ (Miovský, 2006, p. 223).

The method of metaphor use ‘transfers the source data to a metaphorical level, reducing and generalising the data through a parallel in meanings having its established interpretation framework both culturally and socially’ (Miovský, 2006, p. 234). A metaphor has an interpretative power but may also be misleading if used ‘too early’.

When using the method of seeking and identifying relations, we first of all search for the relations to which participants draw our attention in their formulations. Seeking internal and external relations is another procedure. External relations include the style of dress and affiliation or sympathies to a certain sub-culture. Internal relations can include changed attitudes to the socially weak based on one’s own experience.

The factoring method assumes that there are variables affecting other phenomena. It focuses on these variables, verifying and constructing them (Miovský, 2006, pp. 221–225).

Glasser and Strauss’s method of grounded theory (Corbin, Strauss, 1999) is based on an inductive procedure for creating a theory and has detailed data analysis. Working with data results in the production of a theory. This working with data is highly systematised. Nonetheless, everyone working through this systematisation understands that it is a ‘mere aid’ to thinking and that simple induction cannot produce a theory. One needs to use the creativity of the thought process and not simple mechanics. To understand the principles of grounded theory, we recommend Qualitative Research Fundamentals by Strauss and Corbin (1999). We have given only a brief outline of this principle.

Data are coded in three stages. First, there is open coding, and then there is axial coding and selective coding. In open coding, key words are used to identify the meaning of individual paragraphs, sentences and words. The researcher reads his/her records and interview transcriptions and adds key words to individual meaning sections. It is not mechanical work, but is instead a reflection. The researcher knows why individual sections are identified. There might even be an intention in the identification method.

Finally, the segments identified with the same key words are combined in a single unit linked to a specific common meaning. This unit is known as a pre-category. The researcher uses this method to create several pre-categories and now he/she needs to find the characteristics of these units and the dimensions (scope) of specific qualities.

Axial coding is a process which monitors the bonds between individual pre-categories. It determines the hierarchy of relations, mutual relations and their crucial influence. Axial coding aims at finding a core or central category.
Selective coding is the production of the final 'story' or theory related to the central category and its links, impacts, dependences, etc. The researcher seeks data which support the final theory, or variations if the context changes.

These coding methods have been described one by one, but they in fact take place all at once. In open coding where we identify semantic units, we need to realise that the meaning is not created by being removed, but through the forming of a relationship. This means that axial coding is latent during open coding. The researcher knows about the relations and writes them down in certain codes or his/her own citations. And this is a very important part of this work - to write down 'ideas' related to the coded data. The vast majority of thoughts are overlapped by other ideas which arise during one's work and if noted in a timely manner, they ensure reflection with regard to interpretation.

The grounded theory is concerned with the development of categories, but the social world and the world of social meanings are not so easy to transfer to the world of formal logic and the categories which form it. If we strictly adhere to formal logic, we can reduce or lose these shared meanings.

In coding, we also need to realise the status of coding techniques (as Kučera puts it): 'No procedure in accordance with these techniques can replace normal reasoning within and during the use of such techniques. It does not mean anything if someone says that he or she has followed the 'grounded theory'. The quality of the procedure depends on the quality of coding and the first, open coding, is the crucial one: If someone says that it is impossible to code openly (because he/she is a pedagogue and not a psychologist, a sociologist and not a psychotherapist, etc., and feels that he/she must analyse the topic in accordance with his/her discipline) or if he/she unconsciously forbids the concepts of openness, normality and common sense, his/her research can miss the real 'core' category around which the entire phenomenon is centred. (From my experience I can say that qualitative research only seldom pulls down interdisciplinary barriers and their defensive delineation.) Students cannot expect these methods to free them from the need to instinctively bury themselves in this issue as an algorithm and think: thinking is pre-conscious (by leading to speech), but solutions are prepared at the unconscious level and through its combinatorial analysis; a procedure according to an algorithm is conscious, but this is not a creative act of thinking' (Kučera, 2010, p. 50).

Summary
The archive is a ‘physical’ or electronic place where all the data collected by the researcher and created during analysis are arranged. The archive is in a way a mediator between experience, i.e. research practice, its theoretical grounding and the writing of the actual text. The text is produced while working on the archive and gradually becomes independent of it.

**Exercises**

You have an interview transcription. Start coding it in line with the grounded theory.

**Literature**


### 9 Interpretation

**Objectives**

- To inform students about interpretation approaches.
- To know the difference between intentionalism and Gadamerian hermeneutics.
- To realise the difference between understanding and interpretation.

**Time Requirements**

2 hours

**Terms to Remember (Key Words)**

- reconstruction
- interpretation
- understanding
- intentionalism
- Gadamerian hermeneutics
- explanation
- explication
- meaning
- writing
- reading
As soon as we have collected and sorted the data, we need to interpret them and write a text. Why do we interpret the data? Why don’t we simply say what is going on in the field (in the area of our study)?

9.1 Searching for Meanings

We have already said that the social sciences want to find meanings. 'Questions of meaning are thus at the heart of multicultural experience. They are also at the heart of social science’ (Fay, 2000, p. 137). A mere description of the research actors’ behaviour does not suffice to understand the meaning. '… when confronted by the behaviour of others, don’t presuppose that it means what it would if you did it; always ask, what is the meaning of that?, with the pre-supposition that this meaning is likely to be different from what it might at first appear’ (Fay, 2000, p. 137).

However, it remains unclear from the theoretical perspective where the meaning lies and what the meaning is. Fay has two theories on meaning: Intentionalism and Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Intentionalism deduces the meaning of a certain act or its product from its originator’s intentions. The meaning behind the behaviour of others is defined by what they mean by this behaviour (Fay, 2000, p. 138). According to Collingwood (in Fay, 2002, pp. 167–168), 'actions have an "inside" or a "thought-side" as well as an observable outside, an inside which distinguishes them from purely physical events which can be described and explained from the outside in purely physical, non-intentional terms. This, to identify actions we must ascertain the inner thoughts which they incarnate’ (Fay, 2000, p. 138). "Re-thinking” thus means grasping the agent’s conception of the facts of his or her situation; his or her beliefs and desires regarding it; his or her sense of the possible courses of action in light of these ; and the process of practical deliberation by which the agent put all these together’ (Fay, 2000, p. 139).

Quentin Skinner says that Fay further differentiates between the intention to do something and the intention in doing something. A writer has a plan or intention to create a certain type of work (X) or one can refer to an actual work embodying intention X (Skinner in Fay, 2002). The conduct need not actually embody the actor’s intentions. An actor can have several motives; some may be clearer while others need not be fully realised; he/she may make errors and mistakes and believe that certain conduct leads to a certain goal, but this need not be true. Intentions and actions are not equal. [acts must be placed] into the wider context of the agent’s life and the social setting in which they are performed, and [interpreted]... it in light of this wider context’ (Fay, 2000, p. 140).
Intentionalism need not be focused on the fact that an individual is the best interpreter of his/her actions. This change in thinking is possible as meaning is not grasped by ‘a psychological process of re-living the thoughts of the agent (as Collingwood would have it) but by an interpretive process which places the act into and appropriate context (as Skinner would have it)’ (Fay, 2000, pp. 140-141).

The crucial thing is to realise the difference between re-enactment and interpretation. ‘Re-enactment is a psychological process of identification in which historians and social scientists re-experience the thought processes which went through the minds of agents as they performed various actions. In contradistinction, interpretation is not a psychological process at all; rather it is an explicatory process in which acts are situated within relevant social and intentional contexts – the agent’s cultural world. In interpretation the point is not to discover the conscious thoughts which went through the mind of the agent but to decipher what the agent was doing in behaving in a particular manner’ (Fay, 2000, p. 141).

Hermeneutics is about the interpretation, explanation and understanding of texts, sciences, events and facts. A certain pre-understanding is always a condition of understanding in hermeneutics. We put our pre-understanding into what we want to understand (Anzenbacher, 1990).

‘According to Gadamerian hermeneutics, the meaning of an act (or a text or a practice) is not something which is in the act itself; rather meaning is always meaning for someone such that it is relative to an interpreter. According to it meaning never involves just one element (agents and their intentions) but two (that to (acts, texts, and the like) and their interpreters). Meaning arises out of the relationship between an act and those trying to understand it – it is the product of an interaction of two subjects ... meaning is only potentially present in any act, and that is this potential meaning becomes actualized only in and through the process of interpretation itself’ (Fay, 2000, p. 142).

Fay says that intentionalism and Gadamerian hermeneutics work with ‘two different senses of “meaning” and ... address two different interpretive

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15 “Hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word hermeneuein meaning “to interpret”; it in turns derives from the Greek name for the god Hermes who carried messages for the other gods. Hermeneutics is the science of the interpretation of written texts’ (Fay, 2000, p. 142). Modern hermeneutics is based on the science of existentials of existentialists, in particular (Anzenbacher, 1990, p. 52). Existentials are structures of existence which always and necessarily determine existence ‘such as earthliness, historical situation, physical existence, co-existence, “it”, realisation of mortality, sexuality, shame, fear, “to have”, etc.’ (Anzenbacher, 1990, p. 52).

16 Fay (2002) mentions the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer is a major German philosopher of the 20th century who was concerned with philosophical hermeneutics. He was follower of Heidegger.
endeavours.’ Intentionalism is concerned with 'what intentions are expressed in act X? Gadamerian hermeneutics spotlights answers to the question “What is the significance of act X for some particular interpretive community?” (Fay, 2000, p. 147). Both of them are essentially deficient, as ‘intentionalism fails to account for the role translation plays in accounts of agents’ intentions; ... Gadamerian hermeneutics is insufficient as a theory of meaning understood as significance because it overlooks the crucial role agents’ intentions play in answers about acts’ significance... Authorial intention and translation both play important roles in any and all attempts to ascertain the meaning of intentional acts and their products’ (Fay, 2000, p. 148). Fay does not understand intentionalism and Gadamerian hermeneutics as full theories on meaning, but as theories focused on various aspects of meaning: ‘intentionalism focuses on meaning understood in terms of past intentions; Gadamerian hermeneutics focuses on meaning understood in terms of present significance’ (Fay, 2000, p. 151). They symbiotically and correctly stress different aspects of meaningfulness.

9.2 How to 'Do' Interpretation

Interpretation virtually starts with actual coding. We have already said that the researcher prepares supporting documents for a certain interpretation method through coding the data collected. Sociologist Zdeněk Konopásek seeks to clarify what interpretation is and how it is ‘done’ in his article entitled 'Co to znamená interpretovat text?’ (What does it mean to interpret a text?) (Konopásek, 2005, pp. 85–95). Konopásek says that 'analysis and interpretation of a text is mostly reminiscent of pure intellectual performance’ and ‘it is also true that it is hard to write about the actual analysis and interpretation’, i.e. the established ‘topic tends to show signs of a Secret’ (Konopásek, 2005, p. 86). His statements are directed at criticism of the inability to explain qualitative analysis and interpretation. A verbatim quote: ‘when it comes to practices through which the ‘new quality of reading’ emerges which we call an understanding (and by which we mean an understanding of reality through the eyes of our discipline), interpretation often becomes vague, thin and foggy. Everyone making efforts to teach qualitative research methods knows this very well. The inability to answer such questions in a satisfactory manner is then sometimes disguised in statements saying that qualitative research is actually art and as such can hardly be transferred (Denzin, 1994 in Konopásek, 2005, p. 87). Konopásek (2005) shows (being in fact inspired by the grounded theory) that coding and associations of the relevant information under a single ‘code’ connects individual sections and provides a new reading. Here we are looking for sub-codes that can be interconnected and mutual links that can be found.
And then we verify the new links. A link is expressed through new (and one’s own) words and notes. ‘But if we only have a ‘feeling’ or an ‘impression’ which we cannot verbalise, guardedness pays off’ (Konopásek, 2005, p. 92). The researcher should review and verify the notes over time and try to see them in a new context. It is a matter of course that the researcher gradually creates a network which becomes denser and from which he/she picks what is important and abandons what is not. What is important with regard to making a selection? Konopásek has this answer: ‘It is not a special, sagacious judgment which we make when quietly meditating over our data; it should be clearly and simply obvious. A code having many neighbours is important and worth studying and elaborating’ (Konopásek, 2005, pp. 92–93). ‘To put it simply, interpretation is not seeing ‘through the data’; it is not sagacious smartness thanks to which we are able to capture meanings not seen by others. It only seems so if it is done right. But to get it right, we need to virtually proceed in a strange manner: We need to take small and very particular steps which are not very ‘prudent’; we should instead sidestep back and forth’ (Konopásek, 2005, p. 93). Konopásek recommends that the researcher should not task his/her mind with ‘more distant objects’ and think too far forward. There are two reasons for this – the researcher prepares fruitful situations for interpretation and ensures an ideal objectivity: ‘the researcher cannot have full and direct control over the research results but instead acts as a spokesperson for someone or something else, for something a bit inscrutable’ (Konopásek, 2005, p. 93). For Konopásek, interpretation is the manipulation of texts and the creation of new texts. Interpretation is based on observable mental practices (writing) rather than on the desired mental processes (reading) (Konopásek, 2005).

Konopásek wanted to show the ‘pragmatism’ of interpretation, how to do interpretation, and that there is an objective option for data management. He describes the road to interpretation as a road through writing, referring to Petřiček who regards the ‘writing in the margin of the text’ (Petřiček in Konopásek, 2005) as crucial for interpretation. We believe that Konopásek neglects the transition between reading and writing, i.e. the activity which takes place during interpretation. It is namely this transition stage which is hard to describe and which we want to elaborate on. We think it is some kind of art although rather in the sense of being able to do something than a metaphor for irrational interpretation.

The ‘essence’ of interpretation for us can be better explained by Vladimír Chrz’s article ‘Co děláme, když interpretujeme’ (What Do We Do When We Interpret?) (2009).

Following upon the hermeneutic tradition, Chrz (2009) distinguishes between interpretation and understanding and narrows the field of his research
to the level of ‘research-creating processes’. If we ask ‘In what way do we examine the processes which create a meaning?’, we can answer: By interpreting’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 15). Interpretation is an ‘explication of creating a meaning or better to say an explication of the implicit component of the processes which create a meaning. When distinguishing between understanding and interpretation, Chrz applies David Bordwell’s (1989) approach which differentiates ars intelligendi and ars explicandi. ‘Understanding (ars intelligendi) is an act of giving or creating a meaning. The meaning is not given explicitly, but we always construct a certain part of the implicit meaning from certain explicit suggestions and this meaning always has an implicit and explicit component’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 15). This means that meaning has an explicit and implicit component (which we are looking for as it is hidden), and explicit suggestions can be used to construct the implicit component. Intelligence (intellegere, i.e. choosing what is relevant) is ‘following the information which is given’ (Bruner in Chrz, 2009, p. 16).

Interpretation as ‘ars explicandi is an explication of what is implicit in the creation of a meaning. It is a kind of ‘unfolding of what has been folded’, ‘expressing what has been unexpressed’, ‘finishing what has been suggested’. Simple understanding cannot do without explication (we can understand without expressing what has been unexpressed, without finishing what has been suggested, etc.). In interpretation, we explicate what is implicit in the creation of a meaning (which we just understand within simple understanding and are happy with it)’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 16).

In interpretation, one needs to understand how a certain meaning is created, the meaning understood by the actors without having to explicate it; this is in contrast to the researchers who must explicate it because the way in which the meaning is created must be presented to an audience – to colleagues, readers, students.

Explication as an unfolding is not the same as explanation within the meaning of a logical reconstruction. Interpretation is an explicated ‘unfolding’ of understanding (Chrz, 2009).

Based on Bordwell’s ‘Making Meaning’, Chrz states four constructions of meaning: reference meaning, explicit meaning, implicit (symbolic) meaning, and symptomatic or displaced meaning. According to Bordwell, the process of understanding constructs a reference or explicit meaning while the process of interpretation constructs an implicit or symptomatic meaning. Chrz emphasises that interpretation always moves across the implicit and explicit border. ‘According to Bordwell, interpretation is always a cognitive activity performed in
a certain socio-institutional framework. And this activity involves inferences based on certain schemas and conventions’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 17).

Logically, the following questions emerge: ‘What kind of inferences do we make? What suggestions do we use? Based on what schemas and conventions? In what social-institutional framework?’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 17). Similarly to historical development where various interpretative hermeneutical practices were related to various institutions and schools, also today we can find a variety of interpretative practices based on the researcher’s identification with the institutional framework of his/her theory. Chrz gives an example of psychoanalytical practice, cognitive psychology and narrative psychology. ‘Explication is in drawing inferences from suggestions based on certain schemas and conventions. Interpretation is also an exemplification (explanation) of concepts and theories. In such an event, it would only involve the search for additional illustrations for certain pre-defined concepts. But, at the same time, we need to know about this interpretive aspect’ (Chrz, 2009, pp. 18–19).

Chrz shows the various interpretation possibilities of the ‘fort-da’ play described by Freud. ‘A 1.5-year-old child tosses objects (chiefly a kind of wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it), screaming ‘fort’ (forth!), and lets it not be seen and hails its reappearance with a gleeful ‘da’ (here). And the child does so in his mother’s absence, which he tolerates quite well’ (Freud 1999 in Chrz, 2009). This play is a great cultural performance, according to Freud. By staging ‘appearance and reappearance’, the child is able to give up the immediate satisfaction of his/her instincts and move to the level of symbolic representation.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan interprets this play as a breakthrough on the road from an imaginary to a symbolic order. ‘This is an acquisition of a characteristic which can be represented even if the object is not present, i.e. it is ‘present in absence’ if structuralist terminology is used’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 19).

From the perspective of cognitive psychology, interpretation seeks to ‘explicate the ‘structure-mapping’ mechanism, i.e. the projection of a certain relation from one area to another. This can be translated into a form of proportional analogy: ‘the object ‘fort’ in respect of the object ‘da’ is the same as ‘Mum fort’ in respect of ‘X’. And ‘X’ (as an interpreted meaning of the play) means: ‘Mum will be back’ (Chrz, p. 19).

Narrative psychology offers another interpretation. ‘In his contribution about the ‘narrative turning point in psychology’, David Hiles (2003) correctly says that this ‘great cultural achievement’ mentioned by Freud also lies in something else. The child performs his experience through a narrative

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17 Inference – logical judgment (Petráčková, Kraus et al., 1998).
construction (a kind of ‘proto-narration’). We would hardly find a more elementary narrative structure than a narration about ‘disappearance and reappearance’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 19). Chrz shows ‘four different interpretations, each of which exemplifies different concepts and theories and explicates different processes of creating meaning’ (Chrz, 2009, p. 19).

If we follow Chrz’s considerations, we must draw a conclusion that interpretation is not merely a mechanical analysis and its ‘thorough and fair’ noting. Interpretation is tied to the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity (see Corbin, Strauss, 1999) and his/her ability to have a dialogue with data.

Interpretation cannot even be ‘objective’ as has been emphasised many times; interpretation (and science as such) is tied to a socio-institutional framework and then social sciences are multi-paradigmatic. We cannot speak about objectivity, but about a focus and concentration on a certain explication of processes of meaning depending on the researcher’s identity and research objective. Here there may emerge a risk that the researcher will handle the data a bit violently at the cost of discovering what has been ‘planned’ and ‘anticipated’. This justifies Konopásek’s concerns about objectivity. Nonetheless, we believe that mechanics do not guarantee objectivity, because the desire for objectivity alone is illusory.

Objectivity as such is closely tied to objectivism. ‘Briefly, objectivism may be defined as the thesis that reality exists ‘in itself’ independently of the mind and that this reality is knowable as such’ (Fay, 2000, p. 200).

Let us quote Gadamer’s follower Grondin: [Gadamer] follows Heidegger’s intuition that understanding always includes self-understanding—indeed, self-counter. Understanding, then, involves something like applying a meaning to our situation, to the questions we want answered. It is not the case that there is first a pure, objective understanding of meaning, to which special significance accrues when it is subsequently applied to our questions. We always take ourselves along whenever we understand, so much so that for Gadamer understanding and application are indivisibly fused. This can best be seen by means of a negative example, non-understanding. Whenever we cannot understand a text, the reason is that it says nothing to us or has nothing to say’ (Grondin, 1994, p. 115).

**Summary**

A qualitative approach in research is highly specific for being concerned with the meaning of the phenomena under study, with the meaning assigned by actors to individual social activities in a shared social world. In this chapter,
we have sought to outline what the search for meaning ‘looks like’ and what the difference is between interpretation and understanding, i.e. understanding which does not require interpretation, and interpretation closely tied to the researcher’s institutional grounding.

Interpretation is not mechanical; it is a dialogue between the researcher and his/her data. The results of this interpretation are presented in a text (see the following chapter, ‘Text’).

Exercises
1. Find and generate a theory in your analysed data from an interview or observation.
2. Try to interpret your analysed data according to the theories you have selected.

Review Questions
• Explain the difference between understanding and interpretation.
• What is the difference between intentionalism and Gadamerian hermeneutics in the search for meanings?

Literature
Objectives

- To inform students about the types of texts the researcher works with.
- To realise what it means to write a research report.

Time Requirements

1 hour

Terms to Remember (Key Words)

- data
- contextualisation
- externalised memory
- projection
- transfer
- identification
- interpretation of the meaning
- pre-understanding
- mental hygiene
- physical experience
- reader
- validity

The final text presented to readers is created on a step-by-step basis. There are three different yet intellectually interconnected levels: The first is produced in the form of gross data put down in field diaries. The second level consists of analysed data with notes (archive). The final text comes third as a research report intended for an audience, for the public. The text is part of the archive but lives independently of it, however paradoxical it may sound. This chapter will briefly reflect on the issue of the field diary and coding because they are part of not only the archive but also of the final text.

10.1 Field Diary

Writing a field diary is a must during field research and there are several reasons for it. First, it is a kind of externalised memory whose task is to minimise distortion of the memory track. The diary contains chronologically ordered records of events that may not be worth anything as such but help with the writing of the final text, especially with data contextualisation. The
memory track is invoked through a diary entry. The researcher can again experience the images and his/her own physical feelings, and discover items with hidden meanings. An entry can reveal the researcher’s own projections in his/her research.

When writing (and not only this text), the researcher is constantly involved in a decision-making process regarding the size of the detail to be chosen, the micro-moments to be reflected, and the nuances and contexts to be recorded. The researcher should not forget that every detail is present in a wider context of events.

**Mental hygiene** and a kind of ‘escape’ is another good reason for writing a field diary. During participant observation or as a participant-as-observer, the researcher becomes fully engaged in the life of the group being observed. There may be many unconscious identifications and projections. When read again, diary records hold a mirror up to the researcher through which he/she can put down these projections or introjections. This helps the researcher defend himself/herself against identification with the community under study and any absorption by it.

During research, the researcher can also become ‘socially tired’, which may distort his/her view, but the field diary can also withstand open, intimate statements not intended for readers. One of the founders of social anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, was strongly demythologised when his field-research diaries were published (Malinowski, 1989).

Technically, field diaries can also be prepared using audio tracks. We have already said that application of this technique is risky as it can fail, often due to dead batteries. However, a field recording is appropriate when the researcher is leaving a certain social activity and an immediate recording can be made. These acoustic recordings are governed by the same rules and gross research data – they lose their value without additional notes and explanations.

### 10.2 Notes and Coding

Text arrangement is another level of writing a text. To be able to ‘search for’ a meaning hidden behind a phenomenon under study, the researcher needs ‘time to tidy up’. This means that the researcher introduces order in the collected data through codes and notes which anchor and find relations between and among individual entries. The gross data will thus be ‘reproduced’ and become the central content of the archive.

The beginning researcher should know that data having no notes or codes will normally get lost because their significance is reduced. The researcher should not get rid of such information by excluding it from any category unless he/she is absolutely certain about its insignificance.
We also want to note that students classifying data from interviews through open coding suddenly feel that the interviews have fallen apart through coding. A kind of chaos is established. If they further work with coding and notes, they gradually become surprised that they have brought a ‘new order’ to the interview and find motives behind their questioning. It is necessary in practice to have the original interview ‘as a whole’ and code and ‘edit’ only a copy of it.

10.3 Text Writing

Research must lead to a final report which is normally written as a text: an article, a monograph or a lecture. The text must be written clearly as the majority of research projects are supported and sponsored by a certain institution. In the case of students, the final paper is a means to obtain an academic degree.

Since it is a qualitative report, the final text ought to provide a ‘fair and honest’ report on the essence of the phenomenon under study, its core (Corbin, Strauss, 1999, Kučera, 2010). The text is data interpretation and is submitted for an audience participating in this interpretation.

We can follow three different activities performed by the researcher during the creation of the text. When writing field notes, the researcher refers to the research field and seeks to capture what has been perceived and experienced. It is about communication between the researcher and the field. During the second stage, when the records are arranged, the researcher refers to the memory track and works with it, seeking the meaning of the phenomenon subject to his/her research.

The third activity consists of the formulation of the meaning which has been found in the research for the audience and in the production of a text.

Here we return to the issue of interpretation. Interpretation is part of all three activities. We have already said that the researcher should not give only a mere description in order to be able to understand his/her own notes. The notes always implicitly contain information on how he/she has understood the field, and the meanings are stored in his/her physical experience. Interpretation of the meaning is closely related to the understanding of one’s own physical experience. One’s own physical experience may not, of course, be the same as the experience of the actors or informants and as the meanings assigned by them to the given experience. (After all, the first interpretation is made during participant observation where the researcher ‘adapts’ his/her behaviour to the group under study.)

Chrz (2009) states that the meaning is explicated between the work on the archive (creation of the second text) and the production of the final text.
Explication contains the method of ‘how the researcher reads his/her data’ and how the ‘reading’ should ‘be written and delivered’ to the readers. The ‘reading’ may instead be an ‘experiencing of the meaning’, in particular if the research is conducted in a practical way and analysis is a practical manipulation of the data. Konopásek (2005) emphasises this practical and fair manipulation when he regards interpretation as writing and note-taking. In our opinion, this is not enough. We believe that if interpretation involves the data collected by the researcher who gathered the data on his/her own during ethnographic research, explication of the meaning is strongly tied to the researcher’s physical existence and experience and this physical existence is strongly present in interpretation.

For instance, getting up at five in the morning every day to milk the cows; the cool, humid air, the collective meals which were ritualised – starting with the lighting of a candle and ending with its blowing out (Camphill); the permanent noise and babble in the classroom, sitting on uncomfortable chairs, the gentle smell coming from the canteen and wafting through the entire school (longitudinal research at a basic school); several hours of sitting in the sun without suntan cream (group interview in an excluded locality); the smell of cooked meat, mould and cigarette smoke in an unkempt flat (visiting a family in an excluded locality).

The meanings behind situations differ from the perspective of the researcher (etic view) and the actor (emic view): The precise schedule which creates difficulties for the researcher and raises resistance gives certainty to the community that it will work (Camphill). Some actors may be annoyed by the noise at school, but they actively produce it; the small chairs are designed to fit their size and they regularly consume products from the canteen (longitudinal research). Some are annoyed by the smell of cooked meat while others see it as an indication that lunch is imminent. When someone lives in a rental flat, he/she is really glad to have a place in which to live and smoke (a flat in an excluded locality). There is quite a great difference between actors and researchers as to the content of the melanin in their skin; some are annoyed by the sun while others are not (a neighbourly debate in the country). The researcher often meets with actors and informants, but they are likely to have different feelings about a common situation; sometimes they understand each other, but at other times they have completely different opinions and experience.

We have already said that creating a relationship of trust is a condition for getting access to the meaning of the research actor’s social activities. A question begs to be asked: What happens to this relationship during report writing? Kučera (2010) addresses the issue of the researcher’s position in his
article *Kvalitativní výzkum: inspirace psychoanalýzou* (*Qualitative Research: Inspired by Psychoanalysis*) as follows: The researcher is a member of a certain academic community. In this respect, there is an obvious question related to what extent the researcher is identified with this group, how he/she identifies himself/herself with the group’s preferred theory (i.e. whether the researcher feeds the group with his/her research), or to what extent he/she remains autonomous. Should we view things from a psychoanalytical perspective, we can see how the researcher can identify with his/her instinct (or with ‘internal motivation’, to use psychological language), opening up a path to creativity. We differentiate two tendencies in the researcher’s efforts – is it an attempt to feed an existing theory and accumulate supportive findings or is his/her internal (instinctual) need being sublimated through research? (Kučera, 2010).

Kučera (2010) compares the researcher-actor relationship to the relationship between a client and a therapist. ‘*The client comes to the stranger’* (therapist) ‘*who should know what is wrong with him’* (Kučera, 2010, p. 52). Initially he/she in fact unconsciously unveils his/her motives (instincts, *id*) for coming but later conceals himself/herself inside his/her image through identification with the therapist and his/her idealisation and demonstrates this image to the therapist. The therapist ought to guide the client to des-identification, to a real view of the therapist, to prevent any idealisation and to change the therapist into the ‘object of the client’s instincts’ (Kučera, 2010). (This does not mean, of course, that the client should eat the therapist or perform another similar activity.) The therapist’s efforts are to open the client up for therapy again.

Although it is the researcher who comes into the field during research, both actors and clients ask the same questions – *Why am I interesting?* And they portray an image although the researcher aims to observe their authentic conduct. However, the situation is much more complicated for its reciprocity. Principally, they study each other and idealise each other. The researcher is the actor’s student but the actor may not understand that he/she is also being ‘idealised’. Actors seek to cope with the researcher’s existence; as Kučera writes, they try to ‘*domesticate the researcher, giving him/her a native name, and the researcher talks big about it when coming back home.*’ Acceptance by the group under study is frequently perceived as a confirmation that the researcher has the right to speak on behalf of the group being observed, i.e. to write a research report about it.

There may be another example of *domestication*. It is when the researcher in a Roma community is introduced by saying *‘She is czech’* but she

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18 Written with small ‘c’ as it is complementary to the term ‘gipsy’ used by non-Roma Czechs.
is different than others’ (Levínská, 2009a). Being ‘czech’ means to be an undesired group outsider. On the other hand, the researcher can be active in this respect and identify him/herself with the attitudes of the informants and actors or support them in some of their activities. This means that the researcher imposes himself/herself and his/her interest in the research field.

We believe that it is impossible to avoid these bonds, and it is not even the aim of our research, because they represent the variety of relations established to be able to understand each other. Mutual understanding is of material importance to one’s research as the way in which the actors understand the researcher is the way they communicate their information and the image they direct at the researcher.

Nonetheless, if a final text is to be written, there must also be the process of ‘des-identification’ (Kučera, 2010, p. 53) with the actors and the field, and the researcher must write him/herself out of his/her instincts. Here the researcher encounters the framework limited or broadened by the scientific discipline with which he/she identifies. And the extent to which des-identification is carried out is up to the researcher (Kučera, 2010).

However, another question begs to be asked. The field establishes a kind of confidential relationship. It may happen that the informant says to the researcher: ‘I have never talked to anyone like this; I have never thought about my work like this,’ etc. The researcher must then clearly know that here is a rare moment when the informant is offering the opportunity to look into ‘his/her world’. And it can appear during interpretation that the informant is not an unambiguously positive hero (after all, like everyone else) and that many of his/her opinions and acts can result in multiple interpretations.

For instance, when people working in the helping professions secure accommodation for the socially weak, they have contact details about two housing operators who provide accommodation for these clients. It is only the socially weak who live in these quarters and there is no one else who wants to live there. Does this help or does it support the existing, much criticised system? And what possibilities do the people working in the helping professions have? (author’s archive)

The author should write in a manner which will not betray the informant from the reader’s perspective. Hence, one’s writing must be transference-based. Kučera says: ‘The researcher must use the transference-based way of

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19 Transference is a psychoanalytical term for the reproduction of emotions that a person has experienced or experiences in relation to a close person in respect of another person; e.g. a client can transfer emotions to the therapist (and vice versa).
writing so that the third objectivising reader does not have the impression that the researcher has betrayed his/her actor or informant. On the other hand, the researcher can afford to depict the actor as someone betrayed in life’ (Kučera, 2010, p. 53). He adds and we must say that we agree with him that ‘it is a much deeper position not to betray the hero as a writer than is offered by various codes of ethics’ (Kučera, 2010, p. 53).

When writing a text, the researcher interprets his field ‘experiences’ for his/her colleagues and the scientific public. The researcher’s task is to analyse his/her empirical experience and embody it in a theoretical framework where the researcher is present through a scientific discourse. If the researcher fails to do so, the academic ‘gang’ will not be satisfied with the research results. This does not mean that the scientist cleaves to his/her theoretical findings but that he/she verifies them through experience. The readers judge the validity of qualitative research namely through the writer’s credibility. This means that the writer should explain the research method and the theoretical framework used for interpretation. The final text is a dialogue between theory and experience which is interpreted by the reader.

Summary

The text is understood as the entire written work by the researcher. It is produced through the first field notes from participant observation, through the transcription of interviews, through making notes and observations. Memos, i.e. the commentaries accompanying individual codes or key words, can also be regarded as text. During research, the researcher produces a wide variety of texts, but only some of them are intended for publication. The final report, bachelor’s or master’s thesis, lecture or text presenting research results should be written according to its objective and audience. The meaning of the text is not in its writing, but is provided only when read. When writing, the researcher should always have ethical rules in mind (see the next chapter, ‘Research Ethics’). As for the ethics of writing, a question begs to be asked: To what extent must the researcher also consider the relationship created between the researcher and the research actors when writing?

Exercises

- Write a brief text, a report from an interview or an observation you have carried out.
Review Questions

1. What do you imagine the term ‘research text’ to mean?
2. Try to explain the statement that one’s writing must be transference-based.

Literature

11 Research Ethics

Objectives

- To inform students about the basic rules of research ethics.

Time Requirements

1 hour

Terms to Remember (Key Words)

- ethics
- anonymity
- security
- protection of actors
- protection of the researcher
- empathically neutral
- informed consent
- influencing of the researcher

We have encountered the issue of research ethics several times in this text. Ethical conduct has philosophical roots. These roots related to psychological research are discussed by Miovský (2006) who distinguishes 'three independent lines represented by the material ethics of values, existentialist ethics and discourse ethics' (Miovský, 2006, pp. 275–291).
For the purpose of this study text, ethics in respect of the ‘protection of persons participating in research activities’ (Miovský, 2006, p. 276) is of primary importance for us.

Miovský distinguishes between the researcher’s influence on the research field and the retroactive influence of the research field on the researcher, protection of research actors and protection of the researcher.

First, the presence of the researcher as such has an impact on the behaviour of the field subject to research. Nonetheless, the researcher can feel after a certain period of time that an intervention in the social situation of the people under study may be necessary. This is when the researcher’s situation completely changes, as does the position in the research field and the responsibility of the researcher. The researcher’s intervention can be harmful to the research actor rather than helpful. And, in the end, improper intervention can also harm the researcher.

Example:

Hypothetically, let us assume that the researcher encounters people in material need and decides to provide a financial loan or donation. However, this single act of charity will not save the person in need anyway; they need a regular income. Then the researcher can lose the trust of the field – ‘why does he/she lend money to my neighbour and not to me when we are in the same situation?’ However, if the researcher provides money to everyone, he/she will probably face material need himself/herself. Similarly, the researcher cannot adopt street children, intervene in family education with which he/she disagrees, or advise teachers if they are not interested, etc. The researcher is not in the field to make use of his/her potential. We can say from our own experience that it is sometimes very difficult to handle such situations and that we sometimes transgress the researcher’s competences by, for instance, expressing our opinion on the situation in the locality in an article in the local press.

Miovský mentions important rules in respect of the researcher-field relationship: ‘When in doubt, observe and ask. When certain, be even more conscious in your observations and ask about many more things’ (Hartnoll in Miovský, 2006, p. 278).

The researcher should also be empathically neutral. ‘This means that the researcher should express interest, sympathy, and understanding towards the research participants but should also be neutral in respect of the facts found’ (Patton in Miovský, 2006, p. 280). It is not the researcher who decides what is right and what is wrong; the researcher should try to understand why the people act as they do in a certain situation. The researcher often encounters ethically ambiguous situations. When conducting research at a basic
school, the researcher can see and hear that the pupils do not behave well towards each other; he/she can hear silly gossip and ideas and still, the researcher is not allowed to moralise. During interviews (during research in excluded localities), the researcher encounters people making money off people in need. The researcher even has the opportunity to look into the system’s interconnections and closedness and into the actors’ hopelessness and yet, he/she can in fact do nothing. A minor intervention by the researcher would not result in any change which would bring a complex and positive solution. Higher political circles are proclaiming that a positive approach will be taken and changes made even without the researcher’s contribution.

What is important are the rules **protecting research participants**. Generally, research can be carried out with people who have provided informed consent. ‘*This consent must make it clear that the participant understands the nature and consequences of the research and is also aware of the risks, advantages and disadvantages resulting from his/her participation in research. Participation in research is voluntary*’ (Miovský, 2006, pp. 280–281). We cannot but agree with this statement, however theoretical and idealistic it is. In practice, it is difficult to inform a research actor about the research rules and the reasons may differ considerably.

Informed consent is often given in writing and requires the participant’s signature. It uses academic or legal language. This is not adequate for some actors and it is not trusted. The actual signing of a ‘piece of paper’ brings many complications in life which have often resulted in distrust.

If consent is not granted in writing and is only oral and recorded on a dictaphone or just given orally without any recording, it cannot be articulated in scientific language. A lengthy speech about the risks of research participation may dispirit the research actors. The researcher aims to establish a relationship and arouse trust. His task is to promise and fulfil anonymity and *‘to not betray them in writing’*, as Kučera states (2010, p. 53).

Some individuals become research actors during participant observation ‘by mistake’; they are present in the group under study, primary attention was not centred on them, and they gradually draw this attention through their activities. When is the right time for the researcher to inform them that they have become part of the research? Or do they already know it and their performance is deliberate?

In the field, the researcher encounters a variety of informants, actors who often compete with each other or ‘sponge’ off each other or are not fair to each other. The researcher (as far as we can say from our experience) assumes a certain attitude — supporting one group, i.e. identifying with it, while not fancying another; with some informants, the researcher wants to be ‘accepted’,
while words of recognition coming from other actors are accepted with resistance. What we want to say is that it is not easy to comply with ethical standards and proclaim them and that the researcher feels a certain internal power not to harm other people, realising that they have the right to their own integrity, opinions or attitudes even though the researcher may not agree with them.

The issue of the researcher’s protection is primarily related to beginning researchers. It is the task of the tutor, supervisor or team leader to consider the risks to which the beginning researcher is exposed and to provide him/her with sufficient information and support to eliminate any risks. For instance, there is the issue of the border in the contact between the researcher and the research participants. When feeling or being at risk, the researcher has the right to give up his/her research. The tutor should also notify him/her of any risks and instruct him/her as to how to cope with them (Miovský, 2006).

For instance, female students must be notified before going to do field research in eastern Slovakia that women cannot go to restaurants and pubs in Slovak villages on their own or otherwise they can be exposed to the risk of sexual harassment. Or see the chapter on participant observation where the tutor acts as a mediator to prevent the researcher from identifying too strongly with the field of research.

**Summary**

The chapter about research ethics aims to show that ethics is not only about the protection of information under Act No. 101/2001 Sb. (Coll.), but is also about the mutual safety and security of the actors, the informants and the researcher. Ethics is associated with the research objectives and discourse – the manner in which one speaks about the research and its results. There are official rules which define the researcher’s conduct for the purpose of not transgressing research ethics. The provision of a standard is definitely a necessary and legitimate social consensus. We also believe that ethical behaviour is not fixed and invariable but is something that is always built anew in each new relationship.

**Literature**

Conclusion

The purpose of this study text was to provide information about the basic principles of ethnographic research and give students certain referential instructions in the broad field of qualitative research. The first chapters contained basic terms, the reason why methodology is divided into two principles, and what the philosophy is behind the qualitative approach.

The researcher is the main instrument of qualitative research, which is why his/her personality is subject to many requirements which are not always easy to satisfy. First, there are professional requirements, and second, social competences also play a role. Other factors include ethical responsibility, practicality, the ability to organise and understand the research field, and the ability to self-reflect.

We have shown that there are three important areas for research and the researcher, i.e. the field, the archive and the text. Each area is specific and in a way separate from the others. Yet, they are closely connected. Using a metaphor, we can compare these three areas to picking mushrooms in the woods (field), their subsequent conservation and drying (archive), and their consumption (text).

Qualitative research, in particular the ethnographic approach, is a scientific method which is very close to the life and stories of other people and is a chance for academics to have their theories remain alive and fruitful.

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