

Call for papers

**Seeing and the Other Senses – Making Sense of the Senses Through Language.
Opportunities and Challenges in Qualitative Research**

Mid-term conference of the Research Network 20, Qualitative Methods of the European
Sociological Association

August 26 – 28, 2020

(with a pre-conference workshop on August 25)

University of Kassel, Germany

The senses have been increasingly recognized as a means and subject-matter of empirical research. Whereas texts have a long-standing tradition as matter of investigation, current studies analyze how sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing are made accountable in interactions. The end of the linguistic turn already changed the focus of qualitative research and provided the non-verbal elements of communication more significance. However, many aspects of interactions are still unexplored. Apart from comparatively few studies, smell, taste and touch have only begun to be of interest for qualitative researchers. Equally, hearing is a neglected field. Sounds as well as language can be heard. Up to now, the sensual dimensions of hearing have been overlooked in empirical studies such as, for example, the sensuality of pleasant sounds or voices. In contrast, many dimensions of sight have been explicated and the related knowledge was made available. Due to the accessibility of visualization techniques, body movements and facial expressions have become observable and are the subject matter of professional assessment, such as in sport or in police conflict training. Seeing and visualization are particularly important for the articulation of implicit knowledge. Although it can hardly be verbalized, it can be observed. The way sailors' knots are tied, for example, can scarcely be described by word of mouth. But the related implicit knowledge can be made visible and learned from pictures. Seeing takes a special position among the senses, as it lends itself particularly well to mediate and explicate knowledge. Visual data have been recognized as adequate empirical data and are currently utilized along with textual data. Both are treated as quasi "objective" information such as numbers. However, it is still an open issue which dimensions of the other senses can be explicated and objectified. The conference will therefore ask how we make sense of the senses. How is sense articulated? Which dimensions of the senses can be translated into language and which dimensions elude this translation?

We invite contributions to the following themes:

1. Accountability of the senses: This thematic thread emphasizes how participants account for the sense of the senses. It studies the ascription of meaning in encounters between bodies and artefacts. Authors of contributions ask, for example, how the sense of the senses becomes verifiable and, as such, objective. What must be fulfilled in order to share a common perspective on a pleasant sound or a good taste? How do participants explicate their opinion and how do they achieve common ground or, reversely, misunderstanding?

2. Visualization: Sight has an advantage over the other senses. Modern science draws as much upon pictures as upon numbers in order to establish evidence. Authors examine the processes

of evidence-making in science, in professional or in everyday practices. They analyse the contribution of visualization to the search of “truth” and objectivity. Are pictures and numbers equally convincing? Moreover, sight currently benefits from the development of new media. Pictures as well as videos are used in the internet and their effect is only beginning to be critically reflected. What people intend to communicate when they utilize pictures and videos? How do they influence and permeate the practices of seeing? Which discourses of seeing are generated?

3. New forms of data: This thematic thread discusses new emerging forms of empirical data that seize as many dimensions of the senses as possible. Documents such as, for example, tasting charts can be analysed by qualitative researchers. The study of the practices of reading and writing documents is an established tradition within ethnography. Authors of papers ask whether – and if so, how – ethnographical analysis can be supplemented by other vernacular documents of sight, smell, taste, touch or hearing.

4. Sensual dimensions of language: This stream is dedicated to the sensual and sensory dimensions of language. In how far can language be felt? As much as vibrations of noise can be felt in the body, language can also pervade the body. How can these feelings be classified? What senses are concerned?

5. Biographical methods and analysis (in collaboration with RN 03): The University of Kassel has a long-standing tradition in biographical-narrative interviews and analysis, that can be traced back to Fritz Schütze, the former chair holder in qualitative methodology. This thematic thread is specifically focussed on the new developments in biographical research and creative applications of biographical methods. We welcome papers that demonstrate theoretical and practical approaches to the analysis of biographical data in textual and other forms. We invite papers that critically reflect on how analysis of visual elements can contribute to the development of biographical narrative research.

On August 25, a pre-conference workshop will be held for students and doctoral students. It will be dedicated to the same topics as the mid-term conference. The participants will have the opportunity to deepen the conference themes under the supervision of the keynote speakers.

Abstract submission

Proposals for contribution can be submitted through an online tool available on the conference website:

www.uni-kassel.de/go/midtermRN20

The abstracts should not exceed the length of 300 words. Moreover, it is required that they refer to a qualitative method or methodology.

Deadline for abstract submission: **April 20, 2020**

Notification of acceptance: **May 11, 2020**

For further information please contact: ESAKassel2020@uni-kassel.de