

CHANGING LANDSCAPES FOR THE THIRD SECTOR: QUALITATIVE LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

Kahryn Hughes and Rob Macmillan



Today will talk about:

- Qualitative longitudinal research
- Changing Landscapes project: New ways of working across data
- Some methodological conclusions: what do we gain?

Qualitative research (from Neale 2012)

- Generates rich, detailed, textured data about individuals and linked lives, using an array of interview, ethnographic and narrative methods
- Discerns social practices, subjective experience, identities, beliefs, emotions, values and so on
- Derives meanings from context and complexity
- Produces finely grained understandings
- Addresses how and why questions: significant explanatory power
- Authenticates personal lives and human agency.

[<http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/index.html>]

Conducted through time (from Neale, 2012)

- Explores the temporal dimension of experience: change, continuity, endurance, transition, causality
- Sheds light on micro processes and the causes and consequences of change or continuity in the social world; Illuminates how change is created, lived and experienced

Qualitative Longitudinal Research

- It is through time that we can begin to grasp the nature of social change ... Indeed it is only through time that we can gain a better appreciation of how the personal and social, agency and structure, the micro and macro are interconnected and how they come to be transformed, for the relationship is essentially a dynamic one. (Neale, IJSRM 2003)

QL: some challenges

- Qualitative and qualitative longitudinal (QL) research often considered to be small-scale and intensive:
 - Resource heavy both for researchers and the researched because of the frequency of visits;
 - Takes a long time to gather data and therefore often requires repeated commitments from organisations and funders
 - Produces a wealth of data that are often complex to analyse because they are not only considered once, but repeatedly and retrospectively in the light of new and emerging evidence

QL research

- Qualitative research is often considered to be specialist and specific to particular groups, in particular contexts, at particular times. For the 'what' questions, we often look at larger panel studies.
- *Timescapes* (2005-2012) ESRC-funded programme involving 7 empirical studies conducted across the life-course; developing methods of secondary analysis; developing the Timescapes Archive: a repository of QL data for the purposes of re-use.

QL research:

- Bringing thematically linked data together enables us to:
 - Scale up findings
 - Extend our geographical reach
 - Extend our analytical reach
 - Develop analytical skills which can be used across wide range of data and projects
 - Recognise QL data are BIG data

Changing Landscapes for the Third Sector: Sharing Knowledge and Informing Practice

- **Third Sector:**

- Sector in transition (Macmillan, 2014)
- Increasing number of QL research studies using range of methods, to capture that change
- Diverse sector, diverse research, diverse analytical foci
- Scaling these up, enhancing knowledge and increasing impact?

New ways of working:

- **Data-sharing** between specific projects:
 - Identifying what analytical possibilities there might be in bringing data together (volunteering)
- **Secondary analysis (Ellis-Paine and Jochum)**
- **Knowledge exchange** across a network of thematically linked QL studies:
 - Refining the research themes/questions that arose out of individual studies that can be asked across a range of studies
- **Synthesis (Macmillan)**

Specific challenges of working like this?

Ethics and participants

- Researching through time requires that we return to participants repeatedly; that how and when we need to engage with participants changes according to the needs of the project; and we are usually conducting QL research because we wish to achieve a profound depth of analysis
- Ethical complexities and challenges that are generally prevalent in qualitative research are magnified in complex longitudinal research (Neale, Henwood and Holland, 2012)

Consent: an example

- Consent cannot be 'once and for all' if we are repeatedly returning to the research field
- Can people be asked to consent to things that not even the researchers know may emerge as projects change shape and direction?
- Informed consent in the context of QL is not a one-off event, but a process, with continuous consultation necessary throughout all phases of the research, including data analysis and final reporting (France, Bendelow and Williams 2000).
- Principle of transparency: aims, extent of participant commitment and impact

Process-sensitive ethics

- Ethical practices cannot be fully determined beforehand for they are context specific and require an ongoing and sensitive appraisal of local circumstances and sensibilities.
- a shift from an accountability model to a process sensitive support model of pursuing ethical practice
- In other words, these complexities and challenges require that ethical reasoning and practice are temporally situated

Ethics in Changing Landscapes?

- relationships between teams of researchers and between differently constituted organisations;
- the ownership of data and findings;
- the sharing of sensitive and potentially disclosive data;
- the representation of cases and research participants in published outputs;
- the interface between primary and secondary analysis of QL data and how this process can best be managed within live projects and as part of the archiving process.

Some suggested solutions

- **Partnership approach** where data and interpretation are negotiated
- Full acknowledgement through citation for the provenance of both data and findings
- Agree and observe protocols for the representation of data in web resources and publications;
- Ensure that we use double anonymising, agreed with all the research teams, for any data this is re-used in our final reporting or in our web based case studies;
- Place sensitive data under approved access in the Timescapes Archive, thereby providing appropriate safeguards for participants and for primary research teams

In conclusion...

- Reflexive practices can aide the management of ethical dilemmas within QL research and help to build a knowledge
- Ethics Knowledge Bank of good ethical practice for the benefit of other researchers
- www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/resources/ethicsknowledgebank