

GROUNDED THEORY AND INDUCTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY: A SENSIBLE MERGING OR A FAILED ENCOUNTER?

Abstract. In the last decade the methodology of social research has been experiencing rapid growth. In this process, an important place has increasingly been taken by qualitative research methods which have also been foregrounded in fields that a couple of decades ago were exclusively reserved for quantitative research approaches. In the last few years attempts at merging and combining research approaches have been emerging within triangulation, along with the existence of more ambitious attempts at creating the so-called reflexive methodology. Based on this premise, this paper will address two methods: grounded theory (hereinafter GT) and inductive ethnography, with each of them employing its own specific way of solving quandaries faced by researchers who use qualitative methods in their work. The aim of this paper is to examine the potential of the research complementarity of GT and inductive ethnography in the context of the merging and combining of research approaches. First, we will look for answers by reflexively examining the properties of both approaches' research techniques which in the concluding part of the paper will end by identifying the methodological context enabling the coherent use of the two research approaches.

Keywords: Grounded Theory, Inductive Ethnography, Qualitative Research, Refleksive Methodology

Introduction – Methodological benefits of merging grounded theory and inductive ethnography research approaches

In the last decade the methodology of social research has been experiencing rapid growth. This is shown in both empirical research, with findings of cognitive sciences gaining ground, and in the epistemology of social sciences. In this process, an important place has increasingly been taken

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by qualitative research methods which have also been foregrounded in fields that a couple of decades ago were exclusively reserved for quantitative research approaches. In the last few years attempts at merging and combining research approaches have been emerging within triangulation, along with the existence of more ambitious attempts at creating the so-called reflexive methodology.¹ Researchers claim that the combining and complementarity of research approaches is necessary because any research method that is solely based on measurable (quantified) data can be disputed by a more complex research design that includes team work, the participation of lay actors, and by practising the so-called double hermeneutics or flow between theoretical and practical knowledge (Adam et al., 2012).

Based on this premise, this paper will address two methods: grounded theory (hereinafter GT) and inductive ethnography, with each of them employing its own specific way of solving quandaries faced by researchers who use qualitative methods in their work. These are related to the fact that contemporary social sciences operate on one hand with open empirical material lacking a clear structure and, on the other, with qualitative contents which “succumb” to rigid categorisation. Accordingly, either uninterpreted facts in the form of “pure” data or the approach whereby even an everyday human experience is denoted as a “discursive construct” are offered as two extremes of a range of answers to the question: what is the essence of research in the social sciences. Both approaches can be situated between the two methodological poles by taking account of the dangers faced by all approaches that leave a conventional and safe environment.

The aim of this paper is to examine the potential of the research complementarity of GT and inductive ethnography in the context of the abovementioned merging and combining of research approaches and in light of the “rebirth of qualitative research” (see Adam et al.).

Although both approaches are qualitative methods, at first sight the possibilities of their fruitful co-operation seem scarce. In particular, GT is considered an integrated research/scientific and cognitive approach rather than simply a type of analysis or a technique of data collection (Kavčič in Adam et. al., 2012).

As the title of their work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies of Qualitative Research* (1967) reveals, the basic intention of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss is to bridge this gap between big theories and empirical research. The authors claim that the principal aim in research is to

¹ The syntagm reflexive methodology is used by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) to denote the complex relationship between knowledge-development processes and variable contexts in which knowledge is developed, including all actors. The feature of reflexive methodology compared to “classical” methodology is that it fully accepts the fact that language, culture, social structure, norms, ideology, discourses etc. form a constitutive part of the scientific process.

discover theories rather than just verifying them as is the practice in quantitative research. Placing the generation of theories in the centre of research, they only see verification as part of the theory-generation process.

Glaser and Strauss proceed from their belief that theory has become a synonym for big theories, with the task of researchers being reduced to their more or less creative verification. Alternatively, the authors suggest a much less rigorous approach that enables virtually anyone to create their own theory, provided it is based on everyday experience of real life. While, of course, theories generated in this way also need to be tested, this mainly happens in terms of their modification rather than destruction or, in other words, a theory can only be replaced by another theory.

Glaser and Strauss insist on the inductive development of a theory against an empirical background. They claim this is the only way of preventing the separation of theory and reality which is a characteristic and also the biggest disadvantage of an approach based on logical deduction.

From its beginnings in the mid-1960s grounded theory has undergone deep changes. If initially it represented a positivist model within a qualitative approach related to symbolic interactionism or its sensibility towards the world, today it is primarily considered a useful and flexible analytical technique.² Undoubtedly, its beginnings are linked to ethnography much more than its modern use. Due to the complicated procedures in GT, numerous researchers more often tend to use in-depth interviews, focus groups and other ethnographic techniques, which of course raises questions about the justifiability of using GT techniques for ethnographic research. However, in light of the requirements to combine research approaches, the question arises of whether “self-limitation” in the choice of ethnographic research techniques makes any sense. In this context, we see an opportunity for the complementary use of both research approaches, with the assumption that the combining of approaches can help us reach beyond the contradictions and tensions which, according to Charmaz, emerge from the attempts to methodologically incorporate ethnography in GT.

In our view, any attempt at combining methods needs to answer the question about the “hermeneutic” justification of the attempt. Therefore, mainly the following questions seem unresolved in the relationship between GT and inductive ethnographic approaches:

² *GT is rooted in the symbolic interactionism embodied in Strauss, as well as in statistical positivism which is part of Glaser's “intellectual baggage”. Researchers who use GT draw their inspiration from the very concepts which undoubtedly belong to intellectual heritage of SI, with its foregrounded pragmatism, idiographic research, qualitative methods, exploration, sensitising concepts, cognitive symbols, social action, empirical orientation and successive induction from empirical material. While GT is clearly not generated automatically as a sum of these concepts, it undoubtedly uses them in a way that provides the method with its empirical grounds (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000:12).*

1. From the viewpoint of GT, the question that remains unresolved is: what constitutes the basis of ethnography? While data obtained by researchers through in-depth interviews, focus groups or the analysis of archive material are considered to give at least ready-made answers to research questions, ethnographic field notes made on the basis of direct observation do not even meet this criterion.

2. The next question relates to the importance of theory in ethnographic research. Indeed, GT users have also never unanimously agreed on how it is that an inductively generated theory, which adapts to data, can concurrently contribute to the creation of the corpus of sociological theories. This applies to ethnographic research to the same or an even larger extent. In this view, realising the importance of theory is not enough.

3. The final simple question is: can GT improve ethnography? Here, Glaser and Strauss are entirely pragmatic – those methodological approaches that can “serve” researchers are good quality. This paper also challenges the sufficiency of this pragmatic criterion.

Later in the paper, the “tensions” identified by Charmaz in the relationship between GT and ethnography, and reformulated in the above research questions, will serve as the basis for formulating starting points for the complementary use of techniques from both qualitative approaches. First, we will look for answers by reflexively examining the properties of both approaches’ research techniques which in the concluding part of the paper will end by identifying the methodological context enabling the coherent use of the two research approaches.

The Theory and Practice of GT

Considering the emphasis it lays on the local (authentic), and its reservation towards big theories, in one part GT comes close to postmodernism while at the same time keeping a distance from postmodernism mainly due to GT’s pronounced rejection of postmodernism’s typical intertextuality. Regarding the role of empirical data, GT is in line with the principles developed by positivists. Both approaches develop the ambition of separating theory from empirical data, along with a subsequent testing of their relatedness, even though for GT the role of verification only comes second. Apart from the status of verification, positivists match with GT in more ways than would be expected considering their formal conceptual starting points. GT and positivists virtually fully match in their requirements for generalisability, reproducibility and predictability (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 29). Of course, these similarities do not eliminate the essential divergence of both approaches in their relation to theory. While symbolic meanings of interactions which generate theory are crucial for GT, positivists remain at the

level of verification based on quantitative data (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

Substantive and Formal Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss define two forms of GT – substantive and formal – which differ in their respective fields for which theories are developed. Substantive theories explain particular aspects of social life such as questions related to the emergence of youth delinquency, teenage pregnancy and similar, while formal theories help researchers reach for higher levels that provide GT with theoretical abstraction (Marvasti, 2004). A typical example of the use of formal GT is an analysis of social inequality requiring the simultaneous consideration of different factors.

Although recommending that formal theory be generated on the basis of substantive theory, the authors suggest that both types of theory can be developed inductively from data.

However, while crucial in the authors' view (for example, they use this procedure to ground the syntagm of middle-range theories), this approach to generating theory has its downsides. Although Glaser and Strauss strive to clearly distinguish the two types of theories, they are only partly successful. It seems that in defining differences between both types, the authors presume that social entities are empirical while interrelationships and properties are conceptual. They claim that in some cases the difference only exists at the "level of generality". However, it is this claim that is most often the target of criticism given that differentiation between the levels of generality cannot equal the differentiation between the empirical and the conceptual. According to Alvesson (Alvesson in Sköldberg, 2000), these two authors establish an absolute difference (although with fluid borders) between two phenomena which only differ in relative terms (in terms of a higher or lower level of generality). In their view, the choice of the level of generality only depends on the researchers' aims.

As an example of such inconsistent use, different authors usually refer to Glaser-Strauss' fundamental work *Awareness of Dying* (Glaser and Strauss, 1965), an ethnographic study employed by the authors to develop a substantive theory of social loss (the case of providing care for a dying patient). In keeping with GT's methodological starting points and taking researchers' intentions into account the study of social loss could be expanded to the study of social values which is completely independent of the studied case and belongs to "formal" theory. It follows from this case that the substantial/formal dichotomy can be simplistically related to the two extreme positions on the scale of generality. In this case, a lower level of generality would mean focusing on the problem of a family or professional loss,

while a higher level would require an expansion of study to the problem of general social values. This mainly suggests that Glaser and Strauss' definition of the border between substantive and formal theories is completely arbitrary, and that they overlook the possibilities offered by the research process since the development of a theory, rather than necessarily ending at a certain level of abstraction or generality, has to continue to enable further research of properties rather than entities (Alvesson in Sköldberg, 2000: 32).

According to Alvesson and Sköldberg, the solution to the epistemological quandary leading GT to a dead-end can be efficiently solved by taking account of Bourdieu's critique which is mainly targeted at positivists and Lazarsfeld's statistical school, although the basic thrust of the criticism can also apply to GT. On one side, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2002) disputes the short-sightedness of an empirical approach which is unable to penetrate the deeper structures of social relations, and is thus limited to the "surface" and, on the other, the equally dangerous social sciences research reduced to common-sense concepts that is a common practice in qualitative research. That is why researchers in the social sciences should strive for a radical epistemological rupture centred around the demand to create social concepts (constructs of social objects) which are not based on the referential framework of everyday worlds nor on superficial empiricism.

In terms of their interrelationship, grounded theory (GT) and Bourdieu's constructionism represent extreme positions on a spectrum of possible methodological approaches, with their core resting on their attitude to the research object. In this view, the GT approach comes closer to the position of actors who are studied, while an "epistemological gap" exists between Bourdieu's construction of a social object and its empirical background. Bourdieu's construct is a representative of "big theories" (criticised by GT) with no empirical background which enables GT to "float on the surface, even though without revealing deeper structures". While in this context Bourdieu's constructionism and GT seem distant from each other, even incompatible, a distanced view of both approaches discloses their substantial research potentials which come to the fore when both methods are used parallel to each other and when (if) they are related to concrete research aims. Alvesson proposes a somewhat heretic combination of both approaches, suggesting that the epistemological rupture would be achievable by considering Bourdieu's "social object" to be GT's "formal" theory which reaches beyond the mere empirical basis of an individual study. In this case, formal theory would represent the "deeper structure", while substantive theory would represent the "superficial structure on which it leans" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 34). Therefore, introducing this rule would eliminate this basic deficiency of GT and at the same time reinforce its advantages - i.e. primarily researchers' competencies to develop new

theories with the emphasis on their creation rather than simply their verification. GT's significance lies in its ambition to liberate methodology from rigid quantitative schemes.

Data

According to critics of the inconsistency of the methodological approach Glaser and Strauss developed within GT, what most conspicuously stands out is the question of what is considered data within GT. Glaser and Strauss use the term "incident" (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000) without, however, offering a precise definition of it. Later in his work *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987) Strauss uses the term "event" as a synonym for "incident". Referring to the paradigm of symbolic interactionism, the term can be placed in the context of social interaction. Of course, such a placement does not provide all the solutions since some data do not correspond to the definition of event and, while some events are not incidents, not all incidents are social interactions.

Categories

While in GT data represent the first research prerequisite, categories are the key link to data. Unfortunately, also when it comes to defining categories Glaser and Strauss are not very accurate and they do not give an unequivocal definition of category. The only uncontroversial fact is that the data-coding process includes a categorisation of data. Glaser and Strauss speak of two ways of developing categories: most commonly, categories are developed by conducting interviews with the actors who are being researched; categories can also be developed on the basis of an individual "incident" which in the research process is joined by other incidents that ultimately develop and create a category. In this case, researchers simply:

- read texts (field notes, interviews, documentary material);
- try to identify categories to which the data belong (especially in the case of common-sense concepts) and
- write memos on categorised data (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000).

Strauss also proposes a special procedure which should consider the circumstances, the interaction between the actors, strategies and tactics, along with consequences.

It follows from what has been said that techniques in GT's research process can vary, with the coding process being its only constant. Coding is a constant comparative analysis of new data which are being categorised with previous data in the same categories so as to describe the properties of

individual categories. The coding continues to finally end in theoretical saturation which is reached when new data no longer bring anything new to a category. During this process researchers mainly face the problem of how “to represent reality in an unambiguous way”. The question here is of researchers interpreting what they are seeing in light of their own unreflected frames of reference (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 27). The problem lies in the pre-scientific categories grounded in common-sense thinking, which is what makes the category development process extremely important.

In practice, researchers tend to choose one of three ways of developing categories. The first and most common way is taking field notes and writing memos on how categories’ properties are interrelated. As a rule, memos contain diagrams, matrices, tables and figures which help the discursive context to emerge for the researcher. The other way is identifying a core category or a central concept which permeates all others and represents the key to generating a theory. A core category is developed as follows (Strauss, 1987):

- it has to be central and relate to other categories;
- it has to occur frequently;
- it has to be linked to other categories in a simple way;
- it has to have implications for a formal category and
- it has to develop a new theory.

The third way is to make diagrams or models which illustrate how individual categories are interrelated on the basis of their properties. The aim of this process is to achieve so-called “conceptual density” or saturation. This way of coding is called focused coding by Charmaz who sees it as the possibility of expanding concepts’ level of abstraction and increasing their applicability, i.e. they become more theoretical and apply to a broader range of observations (Bryant and Charmaz, 2002: 686). By carrying out focused coding, researchers are able to reduce “the universe of meanings” to a manageable number of categories of meaning. In this sense, Charmaz is in favour of “action codes” which direct the researcher’s attention towards a continuing process of social interaction.

However, according to many authors the saturation and integration process comes at a “high price”. Closeness to or similarity with an actor’s views can cause a so-called over-formulation when at best we use different words to describe what is already (implicitly or explicitly) known (e.g. a mastectomy as an invisible handicap)

Theoretical sampling

Considering the empirical nature of GT and its foregrounding of the importance of data in theory generation, the question of sampling proves

to be relevant. Here, it needs to be pointed out that sampling in GT is inadequately compared to quantitative probability sampling. In Strauss' view, sampling as the central principle in the "data-category-theory" triad is "theoretical" (1987: 38-39) and he describes it as: "a means whereby the analyst decides on analytic grounds what data to collect next and where to find them" (1987: 38-39). Researchers deal with the question of which groups, sub-groups, events and activities come before others in the data collection process, "and for what theoretical purpose" (*ibid.*). Therefore, the entire context of data collection relates to the context of the emerging theory.

GT is unique in that any groups at all can in principle be compared, while with classical comparative methods groups that are too different from one another are excluded from the comparison. This can be understood as an advantage if the comparison is sensible or grounded and not only depends on the principle of the distance between entities in some abstract conceptual space (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000: 27).

Theoretical sampling includes two steps. In the first step researchers minimise the differences between groups and, in the second, they maximise them. Sampling concurrently involves the process of a theory's emergence. The purpose of the first step is to look for the basic categories and their properties. The procedure usually begins with an individual case, with a question which does not reach deep but is wide and non-specific. In the second step (maximising the differences between comparison groups) category properties are researched and linked together to make sensible contents (a theory) (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000: 28).

In terms of technique, the first and second steps are about a constant comparison of data in order to generate and develop categories and their properties, which brings good results, while its disadvantages are revealed when events are arbitrarily ascribed to categories whereby organic relations between the incidents are broken (*ibid.*).

Inductive ethnography

Like GT, ethnography is also considered a "data-oriented" qualitative method which, however, is the point where its similarities with GT nearly end.

Ethnographic research is concerned with the interpretation of society's cosmogony in a way which takes account of actors' participation along with their interpretation of the world they live in (Zoe Bray, 2008: 301). Through descriptive generalisation and development of explanatory interpretations of the "social world" researchers try to identify variability and common traits of societies in the studied period. By allowing for the intrinsic inter-relatedness of objective observation and actors' subjective interpretation

researchers explain (make sense of) the process of the making of meaning that the actors confer on a social object and their own participation on the basis of their own beliefs and social conventions.

The basic idea of the ethnographic approach is contained in researchers' tendency to understand social action in a specific environment from the perspective of another culture or the experience of the other. In these terms, Silverman (1993) reaches farthest by regarding as ethnographic every research technique which includes an observation of events, incidents and participation in the natural context, based on the premise of the interdependence of theory and data. The key maxim of the ethnographic researcher is to "be here", "merging" with the research object.

In contrast to GT, ethnography does not have a concrete and pre-established methodology. It develops and uses a relatively wide selection of research approaches commonly based on techniques such as observation in natural settings, case and artefact studies, interviews, projective tests, along with the much asserted combination of ethnography and triangulation. Mapping is also typical of ethnographic studies (mapping of vast sections of local communities or groups with a focus on their symbolic thinking and behavioural patterns).

Ethnographic techniques vary in accordance with the aims of research. So-called inductive ethnography relies strongly on data, either quantitative or qualitative, while interpretative, critical and postmodern ethnography develops technical critical reflections, representations and narratives. Both approaches typically involve theoretical openness and strong self-reflection.

In technical terms, an ethnographic approach includes three basic steps:

- identification of the research object
- data collection
- analysis of empirical material

Here, the sequence of steps and a continuous reflection on the research work being carried out, including a reflection on one's own culture and social position, are vital.

In the first step, researchers focus on so-called sensibilising concepts (Ragin, 2007; Bray in Della Porta et al., 2008) which help researchers indicate the direction of their research. In the data collection phase they focus on their research object in the widest sense, including their submission to the authentic context. So-called submissiveness to the object is established (Bray in Della Porta et al., 2008) along with the abandonment of any pre-established concepts. At this point, researchers play the role of independent variables. The third step involves the analysis of empiric material in which researchers' self-reflection comes to the fore, which according to Gadamer (Gadamer in Della Porta et al., 2008)) always also includes a

pre-understanding in tune with the researcher's tradition, education and cultural environment.

In comparison with GT, ethnography foregrounds the researcher's personality and allows for a more flexible attitude to data. A point shared by both approaches is their assumption that the data being studied are the key to the research result and that theory and interpretation are in second place relative to the data. Apparently, however, due to the described properties of ethnography, this approach holds stronger implications for ethnographic research than for GT. Fetterman therefore "recommends" (Fetterman in Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 49) that researchers decide on a theory on the basis of its appropriateness, simplicity and explanatory power. In his opinion, theories' ideological bases often "blind" researchers rather than guiding them to find ways to successfully process the complexity of data obtained during field work. In this respect, Fetterman's instruction is simple: when the data do not support the theory, it is time to look for a different theory (*ibid.*).

However, the standpoint that researchers can freely choose a theory, and that its usefulness is simply defined by data, seems somewhat overly *na ve*. In this respect, we agree with Alvesson that the choice of a theory cannot be simple in the way suggested by Fetterman due to the fact that a theory is always "paradigmatically determined". Without concepts and theory, "nothing at all emerges as meaningful, as data" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 47). Suitability, explanatory power and the ability to guide the researcher do not "emerge" atheoretically and aparadigmatically by reference to data. In this respect, ethnographic researchers are faced with the fact that ethnographic data are often ambiguous and interpretatively open so several different theories may appear suitable as a response to a specific research question. However, according to Alvesson this fact is far from implying that a theory freely chosen according to the available data is the most suitable and will bring the optimum result.

Grounded theory and inductive ethnography: a sensible merging or a failed encounter?

Essentially, grounded theory represents analytical choreography whose ultimate aim is to achieve a higher level of abstraction. This aim can be achieved through an in-depth examination of data carried out concurrently with an accurate, conceptual recording. The approach developed by grounded theory requires researchers to be focused on data, to continuously sharpen their sensibility and to gradually develop the final text. Perhaps the biggest advantage of GT is that it forces researchers to continuously reflect on their work and thereby carefully select the studied material.

If, typically, GT is methodologically convergent and linear, this is far from true for ethnographic approach with its typical sensory saturation, cacophony of information and the researcher's personal involvement. According to Casper (Casper in Bryant and Charmaz, 2007), an ethnographer does not create a report, but they instead live it, often with disastrous effects for the research results.

This automatically raises the question of the usefulness of ethnographic research or, in returning to the original question posed in the introductory part of this paper: *what constitutes the basis of ethnography?* The answer seems simple. The ethnographic approach is designed to understand interactions, and interaction is the "heart" of sociological research.

What is common to all variations of the ethnographic approach in sociology and anthropology is the researcher's commitment to reconstructing the actors' everyday world. Through observing the course of the actors' day-to-day activities and their impact on changes, the researcher tries to explain the collective patterns of social life, leaning on the actors' "practical knowledge" of their functioning, and aiming to transfer the findings from "micro-situations" to the societal level.

Here, grounded theory can function methodologically and theoretically as a mediator between ethnography and its research subject, i.e. interaction. The methodological approach offered by Glaser and Strauss requires researchers to constantly verify "temporary" findings to finally create, discover a theory. Researchers' involvement in the reality of everyday life confers them with a mandate to form their final interpretation (theory).

Can the position of theory and method in ethnography be strengthened by GT?

Less experienced researchers often feel insecure when using the methods of grounded theory. Grounded theory offers a middle way between the "use of data to describe a popular theory" on one hand and field research using no theoretical starting point at all on the other. GT's commitment to an inductive approach in research distances it from the classical research approach based on verification and the ability to scientifically confute (big theories), although Glaser and Strauss are far from denying the importance of the researcher's "pre-existing theories" for the course of the research. On the contrary, researchers constantly move between the empirical world and the conceptual world full of abstractions and theories. Therefore, what is the difference between the usual ethnographic field work aiming to test theories and the approach advocated by GT? In response to this question, Bryant and Charmaz (2007) consider Popper's well-known idea about science as falsification. According to Popper (1998) a theory is scientific and sensible

if it is refutable, i.e. if it assumes conceivable attempts which could prove its falseness. Popper thereby repudiates the inductive method which considers an assumption as proven simply through tests that corroborate it: Popper regards this kind of testing as always insecure, with a possibility always existing that the assumption is refuted by a future test. For Popper the scientific method is the hypothetico-deductive method: first you postulate a hypothesis, and then think of attempts to refute it (Popper, 1998; Vattimo, 2004). At first glance, it is seemingly impossible to bring the requirement of refutability close to GT's inductive approach. However, Popper's principle of refutability can also be understood in a way which does not exclude GT, if refutability works as a continual and internal method aiding discovery and theory building (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007: 11).

For researchers in practice this would mean that temporary micro-theories created within GT and based on empirical material constantly face instances (tests) which can prove them false. In this view, the aim of GT (and analytical induction) is to develop the theory of causality in a way that allows for continuous (internal) refutability (falsification).

For GT this process does not imply acceptance of the assumptions of the deductive approach. In its initial period, GT offered a new vision of how to generate theory and new knowledge – through an innovative research practice (applied throughout from the research plan to the writing of a text for publication) – directly from data rather than through testing hypotheses arising from theories (Kavčič in Adam et al., 2012: 165). Grounded theory's abandoning of verification and the "improvement of big theories" enables it to make sense, make meaning and provide conceptual relevance to categories in the course of research, whereby it comes very close to ethnographic approaches.

Can this improve ethnography?

According to Bryant and Charmaz, (2007: 15) the answer to this question is more complicated than it first appears. This is presumably due to GT being relatively rarely used in qualitative research, along with opinions about the usefulness of the GT method being strongly divided even among the researchers who use it. They agree more strongly that GT's research purpose differs from original or classical ethnographic approaches, i.e. rather than mainly describing a phenomenon or process GT emphasises their study, thus resting on the attempt to conceptually interpret the functioning of the actor or the observed phenomenon. Compared to common ethnography, GT is much more analytical, and much less conventional in its use of sources, committed to developing middle range theories by laying emphasis on a processual rather than a structural approach (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). For GT science is not systematised "common sense".

There are also problems regarding the provision of a description of the criteria defining what is good ethnography or how to understand its contribution (research scope). Researchers' answers to this question depend on the research traditions or schools to which they belong. Within this spectrum there are researchers who see ethnography's contribution in the context of the ethnographic method's ability for political intervention or its potential for social change. In this sense, these researchers' perspective of the role of ethnography is different from the perspective of researchers from the post-modern school who are mainly interested in ethnographic approaches for their ways of understanding and interpreting the everyday world, i.e. they are interested in what is called ethnographic reflection. Recently, so-called "realistic" ethnographers have been asserting themselves and they primarily point out ethnography's methodological contribution to research or its insistence on the validity of research results.

Therefore, it can be agreed that having emerged as a reaction to "futile" research work limited to descriptions while contributing only a little to the development of theories, and by pointing out the significance of conceptual work and the generation of theories, GT does strengthen ethnography. However, since GT's approach has its own disadvantages it is important for ethnography in what way GT enters ethnography. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), GT should not be a short-cut in the process of collecting data or a handy excuse for the absence of a theory. Although time spent in the field is perhaps ethnography's biggest advantage, it is at this very point that GT can be extremely helpful by being able to importantly contribute to structuring the time of the fieldwork phase of research by suggesting the research priorities (which area of fieldwork needs more attention), by calling attention to "grey areas" in the research process, directing towards the study of theoretical sources etc. By compelling researchers to organise their empirical material, grounded theory makes writing become a form of understanding and analysis rather than just an analytical prerequisite. Moreover, the role of GT is no smaller in the education of ethnographers.

Conclusion

Silverman (1997) suggests the following two criteria for evaluating research: (a) the persuasiveness of the researchers in the substantiation and interpretation of their findings; and (b) the theoretical and practical relevance of the research question. We can agree with Silverman on the importance of these criteria, and add the requirement of methodological rigour which should also apply to approaches in qualitative research if the latter wants to avoid the "anything goes" reproach. Good ethnography (and this

is where we see the greatest contribution of GT considering data management) should thus include:

- credible empirical arguments;
- interpretative “openness” in explaining social phenomena;
- a critical reflection on the political and ideological contexts of the research;
- taking the indexicality of speech (observance of contexts) into account and
- the generation of theory.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the ethnographic approach should be “richness in points” which, however, is rarely achieved through ethnographic methods due to their disadvantages described above. While drawing on empirical material, research “rich in points” concurrently reaches beyond it, through interpretation and conclusions. This is what Bourdieu calls the “epistemological rupture”, denoting the rupture with “every-day knowledge”. In this view, an interpretation that is “rich in points” refers to empirical material, but without necessarily taking it as “firm proof”. Whilst the data support and inspire the interpretation and offer arguments, they do not require (or allow for) its unequivocalness. Empirical data can also prevent an interpretation or lead to its senselessness, all of which speaks of the interpretation’s meaning. Typically, a research study rich in points involves a tension between the empirical material and the researcher’s imagination in creating an interpretative breadth and depth of the repertoire of data. In this view, GT can enable ethnography its interpretative creativity which the classical ethnographic descriptive cacophony does not. If limited only to what is common knowledge (and which is established after a lengthy observation) a research endeavour is senseless. Avoiding making any definite statements about “how things are”, research rich in points emphasises the importance of “looking at things in some particular way” (Alvesson in Sköldb-berg, 2000: 277) which allows for a new understanding.

According to the criteria of interpretative richness, a good research study enables a qualitatively new understanding of relevant fragments of social reality, and is capable of challenging the leading ideas and raising key questions about the way contemporary societies function, in turn changing the “taken-for-granted” model. This is the only way to enable the creation of new research alternatives.

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