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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY

A Methodological Approach

Edited by
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Throughout the years, research has shown the visions that humanity has over certain topics. Therefore, it is understood the fact that interdisciplinary studies have a strong impact on how the world is seen and, more specifically, how Geography methods of research have evolved. As a logical approach, the book "Qualitative Research in Regional Geography", edited by Oana-Ramona Ilovan and Iulia Doroftei, follows a series of meaningful issues concerning the subject of qualitative research in Regional Geography.

The book is a paradox, because it is both full of substance and briefly structured, covering most of the aspects of qualitative research. The book has two thoroughly important aims.

Firstly, it clarifies the importance of qualitative methods in research fields, especially by pointing out that human beings are both rational and subjective, therefore there is a need in crossing the objective ways of research in order to understand the complexity of humankind. Secondly, the book answers a desideratum: "that of exploring the role of qualitative research methods and their usefulness and relevance both for research and for university students' professional training" (p. 9). In other words, the book stands for an initiative to involve students in research activities, a matter that is mandatory nowadays in order to develop competence and skills in Geography fieldwork. It also represents a step forward in any students' future career, which might be very convenient and close-at-hand.

Remarkably, more than half of the authors are M.Sc. students, a fact showing the increased importance that is given to students and their

academic inquiry, all under the professors' mindful supervision. After this learning experience, the overall view was better than expected, as the editors state in the foreword: "Therefore, as coordinators of the hard work of documenting for and writing this volume, and as editors, we testify that involving both students and researchers in such a process was fruitful and rewarding for everybody who participated" (p. 10).

Structured in thirteen chapters, the book vividly shows some important aspects of qualitative research and methods. To have the needed coherence, the editors gave some suitable and effective information in the first chapter entitled *Brief Approach to Qualitative Research and Qualitative Methods*, which represents the basis for what will follow. In this introductory chapter, valuable information is given to the readers, starting with a definition that clarifies the subject properly. Accordingly, qualitative research is presented as "practices that make the world visible", which "turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self" (p. 14). The editors also bring to light the fact that qualitative researchers are studying Geography in a more natural perspective, renouncing at the "objective" scientific methods.

Moreover, this chapter follows a historical track in which is presented the development of the concept in some parts of the Globe, such as Anglophone countries and North America. By using the information given, readers can understand how these methods have evolved and changed throughout the years, making it easier for them to comprehend the techniques used in the research procedure. Another aspect utterly important stated in the first chapter refers to the fact that "human beings are both rational and subjective" (p. 20), thus, there is a mandatory need in crossing the objective ways of research in order to understand humankind.

In the following chapters, the students provided fruitful information about a series of qualitative research methods, the chapter taking the name of that specific research method. For example, chapter four is entitled *Questionnaire Survey*, in which it is explained the importance of using questionnaires as survey research instruments and how effective this method could be in order to solve some specific problems regarding certain topics. The primary goal is gathering factual data and use them in order to enhance how a certain community lives.

Therefore, the authors Zoltan Maroși and David Bauer underline the importance of how to conduct a survey in order to become successful and how the superficial design of the questionnaire can compromise the whole research. Moreover, the involvement of the researcher and the importance that he/she gives to the subject can lead to the success of the questionnaire, as stated: "The success of the questionnaire has more to do with the researcher's ability to think through and integrate the various stages of the process than with following a rigid set of rules" (p. 78). Because this represents a crucial aspect in the elaboration of a survey, the authors also give to the readers a set of rules that can lead to the desired goal. In the well-constructed theoretical background, the authors put together a graphical organization of the standard stages of an analysis in order to make it easier to comprehend the steps that need to be followed.

The 6th chapter, *Visual Methodologies*, written by Iulia Doroftei, reveals an innovative perspective over the book's subject. This unit gravitates around the fact that images are the result of particular means of understanding and attributing meaning to the world. This way of seeing things is called *visual culture* and, by definition, it refers to "a multitude of ways in which the visual is integrated in social life" (p. 117). The importance of this chapter arises from the fact that it debates the subject of "Geography and the visual" and how this discipline is based on observational practices, often referred to as the "visual discipline". The author draws the attention towards the fact that "knowledge has been mostly associated with the visual" (p. 119). Consequently, it occurs the need to use this qualitative approach in the research process. Also, the writer reviews a case study entitled "Investing Urban Transformations: GIS, Map-election and the Role of the State in Regeneration" (p. 123), in order to express the importance that has to be given for this type of methods in research.

The other chapters are written in the same meticulous manner by the committed authors, in this way creating a captivating process in discovering the real meaning and importance of qualitative methods. Meaningful subjects are presented, such as cultural approaches in the Chapter 10, entitled *Cross-cultural Research* written by Ioana Scridon and Alexandra-Maria Colcer and in the Chapter 12, *Analysing Cultural Texts* written by Ioana Scridon and Claudia Violeta Tomoiaga.

It is to be admired the editors' and professors' dedication to involve their students in academic life and make them aware of the fact that they need to be individually accountable and purposeful in what they do. In addition, I find it promising that students have the opportunity to work in such attractive environments, side by side with researchers and professors and on such captivating subjects, because in this way they can have an impact on the society they live in. Nonetheless, it represents a big plus that it is written in English, because its accessibility increases and it is available for a larger community.

To conclude, the book edited by Oana Ramona Ilovan and Iulia Doroftei is the image of an intense scientific process, a thesaurus for those who show interest in Regional Studies or in Geography in general. It is indispensable when it comes to references, because it contains an important amount of information that may be used by students in their further scientific work. Furthermore, the book is a synthesis for this complex subject of qualitative methods, meant to bring to light the importance of this type of innovative research.

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