Coding

A short session for BlueUrban surveyors
Sept 8th 2022
• What are your own experiences with coding?
• What kind of 'material' did you work with?
• How did you approach it?
Working with qualitative data – a grounded theory approach
Working with qualitative data – a grounded theory approach

Main approach: researcher’s theory about a topic is constructed from the data that he/she analyzes

→ a grounded theory is one that is grounded in that data
→ Inductive vs deductive approach

This also means that the process of analyzing qualitative data is a crucial step in the development of a grounded theory
GT starts with a “study of a range of individual cases and extrapolates patterns from them to form a conceptual category” (Charmaz 2006: 188)
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What are advantages/disadvantages of such an approach?
One main critique towards early GT:
- Theories are not out there to be discovered by the researcher, but are actively constructed by the researcher (as a result of his/her interaction with the participants and the emerging analysis)
  ➔ Influenced by knowledges/positionality/values and beliefs of the researcher
  ➔ „Construcivist GT“
Grounded theory – a „family“ of methods

• There is not one grounded theory!
  • Three main schools: Glaserian, Straussian and constructivist GT

• But: similarities in methodological approaches, ways of organizing research, as well as analytical procedures

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Coding – it’s about...
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„naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data“ (Charmaz 2006: 43)
Phases of coding
(Thornberg and Chamaz 2014)

• Coding is a constant, often un-linear process that is done throughout the study phase
→ it can begin during and while data collection is carried out
• Usually, there are two phases of coding that often overlap and can be jumped between:

  • Initial coding
  • Focused coding
Initial/open coding

• Keep close to the text/stock of data
• Quickly but carefully move through data
• Construct and keep codes short, simple, precise and active
• Scrutinize and code data by asking questions (cf. Thornberg and Charmaz 2014):
Questions for initial coding

• ‘What is this data a study of?’
• ‘What category does this incident indicate?’
• ‘What is actually happening in the data?’
• ‘What is the participant's main concern?’
• ‘What do the actions and statements in the data take for granted?’
• ‘What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?’
• ‘How does this process develop?’
• ‘How does the research participant(s) act and profess to think and feel while involved in this process?’
• ‘What might his or her observed behavior indicate?’
• ‘When, why, and how does the process change and what are its consequences?’
Main aim

• Critically and analytically look at data
• Staying flexible and see what is happening in the data
• Find fitting codes/labels with the help of analytical questions

• Hint: using gerund forms can help finding suitable initial codes

→ e.g. „Believing that ...“ „Thinking that ...“ „Feeling ...“ „Avoiding ...“
Comparing data and transforming codes

• Constant comparison of data with data, codes with codes
  • Finding similarities and differences between the texts

• Initial coding and constant comparative practices lead to sorting and clustering of codes, also revising initial codes and creating new ones
  → More elaborated codes by merging and combining initial codes

• Pre-requisite for the second form of coding – focused coding
Focused coding

- As a result of initial coding and especially of constant comparative practices: researcher can identify/“discover“ the most important and/or frequently appearing codes
- Those codes are the outcome of synthesizing initial codes into one core category that makes most analytical sense and captures as many initial codes as possible (aggregation of codes)

→ This then guides further coding of texts and data collection
Example: Researching conflict around adaptation at Bremen’s Stadtstrecke

• Discourse analysis of a conflict around an urban adaptation project in a Bremen city quarter

• Two discourse alliances (the citizen initiative and the administration) that especially differed in their evaluation of the existing tree stock on the dyke

• „argumentative discourse analysis“ (Hajer 2003), combined with elements of sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller 2011)
Selection of documents
Data collection

Summary of data
Structure/categorize
Reconstruct discourses
Test and try
Plan further approach
Write Memos

'Localization' of documents
Coding
Evaluation
Comparison
Memos
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"However, you are responsible for the planned felling of the 136 plane trees on the Neustadt dyke, which are indispensable from an urban ecology point of view. [...] You are indeed responsible for this increase in pollution and the deterioration of the microclimate and the health hazards that go hand in hand with it, day after day, [...]. Especially as there are 3 old people's homes and the Red Cross Hospital in the front of Neustadt. Old and sick people are particularly affected by increasing heat periods and air pollution. [...]"

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Focused coding

Argument for saving trees: urban ecology importance

Danger: Health hazards through felling of trees

Discursive strategy: Dramatizing & personalizing the problem

Argument for saving trees: Planting new trees is not working

Danger: change of urban landscape
Recommended literature


