



'Overcoming Mixed Feelings about Mixed Methodologies: Complex Strategies for Research among Hidden Populations'

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# Overcoming Mixed Feelings about Mixed Methodologies: Complex Strategies for Research among Hidden Populations

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## **Introduction**

Choosing a methodological approach for any research problematique can be difficult; choosing such an approach for complex social research agendas, especially those exploring issues or behaviours among hard to reach or difficult to study populations, also known as hidden populations, can pose real challenges. This article presents the challenges encountered and approaches engaged in two studies among hidden populations in Central Europe. For any study the approaches taken must suit the questions asked as well as the frame of understanding sought. For both of the studies presented here creating a greater understanding was the goal of each project; it is in this goal that one may see most clearly the human aspect of social research. Research methods are forms of practice, socially embedded, linguistically constituted and socially constructed. They are modes of praxis for inquiry, contributing to social understanding, as opposed to the oft-presented language of object-like 'tools' in a research 'tool kit'. By approaching modes of inquiry as practice, the subjectivity of both the inquirer and the inquired can be mutually enhanced. In such an intersubjective exchange the social quality of research and the goal of human understanding can be best realised. Too often, questions of methodology are treated in purely instrumental or technical terms; by shifting the emphasis away from the researcher and his concerns and moving it towards the respondent and her

subjectivity, the question of methodology changes to praxis. This is especially important when conducting research among hidden populations, which often avoid participating in social research for a number of reasons, the least of which is being objectified or reduced to a singular behavioural practice or trait. It is this very act of objectification that destroys and denies subjectivity; creating research strategies that preserves or even enhances the subjectivity of the inquired is social research at its best.

This article explores two projects presenting the research goals and analysing the approaches taken to best ask the questions grounding the research. My overall research concern is with the preservation of the subjectivities of respondents. That is, I am concerned with methods to preserve the voices of respondents, to present their world-views and self-understandings in their own words, and elicit the articulation of such subject positions with the least intervention on the part of the researcher. In the presentation of the first project, I explore my research experiences while listening to and engaging with populations that hold political viewpoints and social attitudes very far from my own. In this, the article explores engaging with the “respondent/other.” In the presentation of the second project, I describe some of the techniques I have employed in a larger research project to preserve and promote the subjectivity of the respondents while also using quantitative instruments. Concretely, the first project was connected with my doctoral research into the resurgence of Antisemitism in Hungary after the collapse of Realized Socialism. Here I present the considerations of working among ardent nationalists, many of whom expressed anti-Semitic sentiments, and the challenges of creating an environment in which these highly politically mobilized groups would talk about their own feelings and their thoughts on their political and social

articulations. The second project, which is currently being conducted, explores similar self-understandings and expressions of highly mobilised populations involved in 'radical' social and political action. This study, in which interviews are being conducted in four countries across six field sites, presents additional problems in terms of language access and translation. The challenge is to create a research approach which preserves the subjectivity of the interviewed while also allowing for cross-cultural comparisons. This challenge is redoubled considering that all of the populations involved can be considered 'hidden'.

### **Defining the Hidden**

Populations are considered hidden when public acknowledgement of membership can be seen as threatening or stigmatizing, driving group members to hide or deny membership or to otherwise evade group identification or affiliation. Social researchers who want to engage and study such communities face enormous challenges, not least of which are finding such communities, gaining access, and building trust with group members. For researchers far more fundamental are the problems of simply designing the scope and frame of a study: the very definition of a population can be difficult as members of a given hidden population may see themselves very differently compared with the terms of a research proposal. A more technical manner of defining hidden populations is that they are communities without a sampling frame. This poses methodological challenges in addition to the conceptual ones. Even when the population is delimited by an act, i.e. using drugs intravenously or engaging in sex with partners of the same gender, questions of degree or frequency arise: for example, should men with only one male sexual encounter per year be included in a study of gay men? This proves even more difficult

when the community is marked by sentiment or opinion. Where does a radicalised political community begin and where does it end? How racist, xenophobic, or nationalist does one need to be to be considered among ardent supporters of racist, xenophobic or nationalist politics?

Such questions pose obvious problems for quantitative methodological purists, particularly those associated with philosophical positivism; how can racism or xenophobia be constructed in 'time- and context-free' generalizable terms (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; C.f. Nagel 1986). On the other hand, while such questions appear to demand the approaches suggested by qualitative purists such as Egon G. Guba, premised on the assertion that the 'knower and the known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality' (1990, p.18), traditional qualitative methods can make cross-cultural comparison difficult because of linguistic and cultural specificity, although these concerns vary across the disciplines within the social sciences. Anthropology for example, has used qualitative methods to conduct cross-cultural comparisons since its very conception. In Political Science on the other hand there has been a sharp divide between researchers employing qualitative or quantitative methods, especially among those engaged in the sub-discipline of comparative politics. Out of this divide there has been a growing movement over the past twenty years in the English-speaking social research communities for a mixed methods research paradigm (Patton 1990; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004), however much of the work has centred on questions of sequencing between qualitative and quantitative techniques (cf. Cameron 2009). The mixed methods approaches presented here will focus on attempts to extend qualitative approaches to larger population segments, usually thought

of as only being achievable through quantitative analytic techniques. Similarly the paper will explore how mixed methods within qualitative approaches yield important avenues of insight for working within hidden communities. To illustrate my points, I will draw on my own work from two empirical studies dealing with highly politically mobilized communities. Although I was trained as a comparativist and theorist within North American Political Science, my research methods are largely derived from Cultural Anthropology, which I use to explore the psychological aspects of social and political identity working within Social Psychology.

### **Engaging the Respondent-Other**

Often social researchers engaged in qualitative methods and working among hidden populations are motivated to present a more humanistic portrait of a given social group (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004), one which through what Clifford Geertz called ‘thick [empathic] description’, will present the multiple perspectives or opinions or beliefs. These are sometimes presented as the alternate ‘realities’ of that group (Phillips & Burbules 2000). This interest in bearing witness to that which goes unseen, or to present the genealogies of knowledge that are often excluded from more widely accepted or popular truth narratives, is a powerful motivating engine of social research to bring forth to social consciousness that which often is ignored or marginalised. Such motivations are at the heart of action research and qualitative methods designed explicitly to counter the hegemonic assumptions that often underpin positivistic approaches (Chilcote 1994, p.39). This struggle has been at the heart of the qualitative/quantitative/ mixed method debate. Commenting on changes of the mode of academic production, Keith Griffin noted that increasingly, American-style positivist formal modelling,

particularly that associated with economics or game theory within political science, has become a dominant form of the social sciences, crowding out other approaches especially within Political Science, Psychology, and certain schools of Sociology. He wrote,

[...] research in the social sciences has become globalised [with] the effect [...] of screening out eccentrics, radicals and critics of the establishment. The shift has further strengthened the mainstream and helped it silence heretical voices (Griffin 1991, p.6).

Much of qualitative social research works to counter such tendencies and has been the mainstay of resistance to this privileging of qualitative methods. Indeed, qualitative methods retain the 'social' as an important aspect of academic research, and it is the very basis of action research; as Michael Polanyi put it, 'knowledge is always gained through action and for action' (1962, p.47). This is an extremely important academic goal: maintaining the social in social research.

However, it is a frequent tendency for researchers when selecting a research subject or a community of respondents to choose a group for whom they have sympathy, or with whom they share a political social outlook. The sympathetic researcher promotes the experiences or perceptions of the subject community as part of the overall research project, and often suggests that by understanding the experiences of the subject community, the dominant or mainstream community may likewise come to engage the subject community with sympathy and compassion. There are, on the other hand, opportunities to encounter hidden populations with the same intention to promote understanding, and to perhaps ameliorate conditions that give rise to conflict or violence, and yet the research may not engage in promoting or advocating the experiences or

perceptions of the subject group. It is in these instances when a social researcher must engage a community with great empathy, but not necessarily sympathy. It is an engagement defined by the sort of respectful listening associated with the best intersubjective relationships, but it is not necessarily one of agreement. It is this aim, to represent the subjectivity of respondents, which is at the heart of qualitative research. There are many different techniques that can be employed under the rubric of qualitative research and each has its own repercussions on research with hidden populations. Being aware of how these techniques can be employed in conjunction with one another, each to complement the next and to compensate and balance for deficiencies, will vastly improve the overall quality of the research and the presentation of the population studied. This is of particular concern when the community of study can be considered a hidden population; one that either is so small in size as to have no statistical significance in any type of population sample, or one that is engaged in behaviours or holds social or political views that are perceived to be so divergent with social norms that they must be concealed from the public gaze. In the first instance, the fact that a group may have very few members does not mitigate the reality of their experience, nor does it render it socially, culturally or politically insignificant. A small number of terrorists does not render the problem of terrorism socially and politically insignificant, just as the remaining handful of fluent speakers of a language on the verge of extinction does not render their experience unworthy of note and record. On the contrary, research of and among hidden populations often documents a social phenomenon, which is ignored or maligned because it is misunderstood or was not even recognised in the first place. It is the very work of researchers within and among hidden

populations that creates the knowledge of which Michael Polanyi so passionately wrote.

### **Subjectivities and Social Research**

The greatest challenge in social research is accounting for the very impact the act of engaging in a study has on the subject of that study. This issue has two sides: one side is the potential to objectify the participant such that there is an erasure of the subject by the researcher; the other and related side is the researcher not being aware of his impact on the research respondent, ignoring how their interaction – researcher and subject – creates its own environment. The first situation is typically produced in one of two ways. In the first instance the research respondent is treated in such a mechanistic fashion that she is transformed into an object by the researcher. Her existence is reduced to automated or highly regulated responses. Research design itself often drives a supposition of causality. The reductionist tendency often derives from the pursuit of ensuring that research designs are replicable as stipulated in keeping with the fundamentals of Western ‘scientific method.’ The very engagement in qualitative research methods can constitute a move away from fetishising replicability in favour of promoting the understanding of specific subjectivities. As Peter Banister *et al* have written ‘[t]he aim of qualitative research is not [so much] replicability as it is specificity’ (2003, p.11). Specificity is further eroded when researchers actually fetishise themselves. That is in an effort to minimize the impact of any personal bias of the researcher on the research the researcher tries to eliminate herself from the study. In extreme cases the effort to ‘eliminate’ the ‘experimenter’s effect’, through the incorporation of

randomised double-blind trials,<sup>1</sup> the researcher will never actually meet the subjects she is studying; the result is the destruction of the subjectivities of both the researcher and the respondents. The personal interests, motivations, insights, experiences, and intuitions of the researchers are designed out of the model, just as the human quality of the respondents as people to meet and engage are discounted if not eliminated. Such efforts fetishise the notion of replicability. Concerns of replicability can be balanced through efforts regarding questions of validity and particularly ecological validity, whereby researchers ensure that methods, materials and setting of the study approximate or are appropriate to the real-life situations under investigation.

Peter Banister *et al* (2003) suggest that replicability concerns in qualitative research can be offset by efforts to explore consistency across research among similar populations by other researchers, by conducting research in similar but different locations, or among similar populations at different times. Do similar populations with similar self-understandings and self-presentations manifest the same phenomena or produce the same responses (Banister *et al* 2003, p.11)? Toward this end, Ronald Chilcote suggests that far from trying to eliminate or minimise a researcher's personal bias, a researcher should be open and frank about her own research orientation, motives, and relationship to the subject of study (1994, p.29). By placing the researcher within her own research, it becomes possible to see more clearly the position of the respondents. This insertion of the subject position of the researcher into the research design allows one to overcome the second problem of not taking

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<sup>1</sup> In double-blind trials neither the subjects nor the researchers actually know who is in the control group and who is in the experimental group. The goal is to eliminate both the subjective inferences of the researchers, but to also minimize attempt on the part of subjects to perform the "expected" outcome.

into account the intersubjective quality of social research: the respondent altering his response for the researcher.

The simplest scenario of the respondent altering his behaviour because of the presence of the researcher is that the respondent becomes quite self-conscious about being observed. This self-awareness leads to monitoring and self-censorship, which in turn alters the actions in which the respondent would normally engage. Anthropology and sociology in particular have been concerned with this phenomenon. Ignoring such concerns can create conditions related to what is known as the Hawthorne Effect. The Hawthorne Works outside of Chicago, USA, commissioned a series of experiments between 1924 and 1932 in order to evaluate what changes in the work environment might lead to increases in productivity. Initially the factory managers were interested in whether increased or decreased light conditions would lead to better production outcomes; the researchers found significant but short-lived increases in productivity when they both increased and decreased the light levels on the factory floor. Similarly cleaning workstations, opening space on the factory floor and even relocating workstations all resulted in increased production levels (Landsberger 1958). While there has been a great deal of controversy regarding the meaning and implications of the Hawthorne Effect (c.f Adair 1984; Gillespie 1991; Mayo 1949), what is clear is that the workers were influenced by what they perceived to be the sought after response by the researchers. The research subjects were cognizant that they were engaged in a relationship with the researchers. In the case of the Hawthorne Effect, it was the researchers who did not recognize this engagement: the significance was only found twenty-five years later by Landsberger.

This can occur similarly in the case of strong normative conventions. Most members of contemporary Western society understand there is a strong norm against public utterances that reflect racism, yet racism persists. In such an environment it may be difficult to evaluate racist sentiments frontally. In such circumstances it may be necessary to employ multiple types of engagements through multiple iterations under different conditions so as to obscure the direct object of study, in this case racism, among a particular subjective population. Such research-based engagements must provide respondents the space to perform acts or make utterances they may not be inclined to do in public environments (Dovidio *et al* 2009). In this case it may be the very willingness or inclination to engage in such behaviours or make such utterances that make a given cohort members of a population hidden in the first place.

The recognition of this relationship is reflected in the Reflexive Sociology of Anthony Giddens (1991) and that of Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc J.D. Wacquant (1992). In this consideration of the relationship between researcher and respondent, it is important that the researcher is cognizant of the modes of inquiry and that the categories theorised and implemented in the research may well be her own. It is vital for the researcher to not mistake them for categories that the respondents may necessarily make sense of or use for themselves. In this way the sociologist should take stock of the cultural conventions, rituals and discursive patterns employed in the study of cultural conventions, rituals and discursive patterns used by the hidden population being engaged: a sociology of sociology. Further, just as the researcher is capable of reflection on the process of inquiry so too are respondents; respondents are capable of learning, adaptation, self-criticism, and self-reflection: reflexivity.

Ideally researchers should document and track the dynamic processes of adaptation both among researchers and respondents (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.213). These moments of reflection are themselves opportunities to understand the dynamic processes of social change and social recognition that may define hidden populations. In this, as Peter Banister *et al* wrote, ‘subjectivity is a resource not a problem’ (2003, p.13). To capture the different aspects of respondent subjectivity it may be necessary to engage in a multiplicity of research techniques associated with qualitative methods.

### **Empathic Engagements as Intersubjective Encounters**

Quantitative methods and approaches to social problems most certainly have their place within social inquiry. However it must always be remembered that quantitative methodologies require quantification; that is only that which can be quantified – that which can be counted or measured – can be studied. This process of creating an objectified reality is itself a theoretical construction derived through abstraction and formalization. This process of moving toward idealised, abstract forms which can be verified, moves away from the subtleties and nuances of the everyday life-world. Yet, meaningful and significant cross-cultural comparisons can be made through qualitative methods. Moreover, qualitative considerations can inform quantitative methods in order to retain the subjectivity of those engaged and observed. In order to relate how multiple techniques associated with qualitative methods may be employed so as to capture the subjectivity of respondents and contribute to both the validity and the specificity of a social research project, I present below two studies in which I was intimately engaged and responsible for designing. Across the two research designs I employed a full range of qualitative techniques associated

with ethnography: observation; informal and formal interviews and questioning of what I observed; interviewing as narrative research; discourse analysis; action research; focus group analysis; and visual anthropology. The first project is the research I conducted in the mid-1990s for my doctoral dissertation; the second is on-going and comprises a larger, international, multi-site collaborative research project exploring youth socio-political radicalisation and the potential for youth support for violence. The second study is similarly a mixed method research project that also employs quantitative methods. Thus I conclude with a discussion on applying qualitative sensibilities to quantitative methods.

In the autumn of 1996 I engaged in a year-long data collection project of exploring the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Hungary since the collapse of Realised Socialism in 1989. I believed the resurgence of very public expressions of anti-Semitic sentiments – such as graffiti, political pamphlets, public pronouncements by political figures, expressions on placards at rallies, and the circulation of jokes – was related to a sense of disappointment on the part of particular elements within the Hungarian polity. The end of socialism did not bring about what certain segments of Hungarian society anticipated and hoped for, at least not for them. Additionally the presentation of these sentiments coincided with a resurgence of public expressions related to losses resulting from the end of the First World War. The Treaty of Trianon became a by-word for the accumulated losses associated with the end of the First World War, ranging from the loss of the Emperor Franz Jozsef in 1916, through the collapse of a short-lived 1919 Soviet Republic, to the 1920 annexation of nearly two-thirds of the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary to the newly created states of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the enlarged Kingdom of Romania, and the newly formed though

truncated Austrian Republic. This period culminated in a vicious White Terror pogrom. In the mid-1990s, following the collapse of socialism, public narratives reviving these events circulated throughout Hungary.<sup>2</sup>

To explore these phenomena and to assess whether they were related it was imperative that I be in the field, and that I meet people engaged in these activities. I undertook a great deal of observation, but I was also concerned to maintain a distinction between observation and participant observation. I would attend many rallies, meetings and marches of those expressing disappointment with the trajectory of the transition since the end of Realized Socialism, which frequently included people publicly demonstrating anti-Semitic sentiments. However, it was important for me to remind myself that I was merely an observer and not a participant. This was often difficult when attending a rally, or march or other demonstration, because my very presence could be interpreted as another body expressing support for the political and social views advocated by the organisers. Yet, it was important to me that I maintain an acute awareness of my own subject position, in that I did not in any way feel that I had to pretend to support their political or social positions in order to walk among them. As much as I did not want to participate in their activities, it was extremely important that I was among them; for in order to conduct a proper ethnography I had to ask questions to better understand what I was observing. This is the driving motivation of ethnography: building understanding (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, p.17). Moreover, I used my own reactions and feelings as points of connection and even as information themselves. My emotional responses from being among these crowds formed the bases of my questions, and thus were a

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<sup>2</sup> Murer 1999a; Murer 1999b; Murer 2002; Murer 2009.

means of concretising concepts. I did not ask about hypothetical responses, I could use my own.

While present at these public demonstrations I collected numerous publications, flyers, pamphlets, and other sources of printed material to subject to discourse analysis. These textual sources also became a first corner for triangulating ecological validity. These published texts could be compared with the transcripts of spoken text produced in the form of interviews, especially formal interviews, as a second corner. Finally, press reports, articles, books and the personally related observations of other scholars, academicians, government officials and reporters would form the third corner of triangulation. In addition to using discourse analysis in order to imagine and engage the worldview of speakers in their own terms, I would also engage in narrative research, exploring how individuals wound the story of their own lives together with larger collective narratives marking both significant personal and collective events. Analysing how respondents assembled their life stories provided insight into which historical events they perceived as having a profound impact on both their individual and collective identity formation.

Often these various strands of research would coincide through the textual analysis of images. I found it extremely useful to present respondents with photographs and to ask them to explain to me the significance of the image. Even when the significance of an image appeared quite self-evident, I found it useful to ask a respondent to explain it in her/his own words. In this way I was not engaged in speculation, but asking a respondent directly to explain his or her subjective relation and understanding to a particular set of texts or images. Perhaps the best example of this is the photograph in illustration 1. I saw this placard while attending a rally in Budapest in

1997. Although more than 100,000 people attended this rally, the placard pictured below stuck out to me. The icon in the centre of the placard is of course a Star of David, a symbol associated with Judaism. The triangles composing the outer parts of the star are coloured red; the interior hexagon is coloured blue. The title of the placard states simply: 'The Current Coalition.' The caption at the bottom of the placard continues: 'A picture which needs no explanation.' I approached the young man in his twenties, who was holding the placard, and asked if he would explain it to me. After looking at me incredulously and pointing out that the placard made it clear that the picture 'needed no explanation,' he was happy to explain the exact meaning to me. He stated that the then current political coalition was an alliance of liberals – depicted by the colour blue – and the former Communists *cum* the Hungarian Socialist Party – depicted by the colour red. He stated that since everyone knew that liberals and communists are Jews (a favoured term at this rally was '*liberalbolshhevik*' (Murer 1999a; Murer 1999b; Murer 2009)) the coalition was depicted with a Star of David. It was important that I did not merely speculate that this was what he meant. By asking him, I had his direct language and his direct interpretation of what was to be understood by reading the placard.



Illustration 1: Placard ‘depicting’ the composition of the Hungarian government at a Nationalist Political rally in 1997. Photograph by the author, Budapest, 15 March 1997.

Perhaps it was the most important interview I conducted. In both the formal and informal interviews I was very attentive to the relationships in which I was interested: how did the respondent feel about life since the collapse of socialism? How would the respondent characterise her political or social position before the collapse? What were the respondent’s thoughts on liberalism as a political or social project, and what did she think of capitalism as an economic project? What forces does she believe are directing politics, domestically or internationally? What are the significant markers in both the respondent’s personal life and those in Hungary’s history? I found it important to give the respondent as much room as possible in which to navigate these tricky topics. I also found it important not to prompt any responses, as pre-determined categories would limit the

range of responses. Even more importantly discrete yes/no responses had to be avoided at all costs. The format needed to provide the greatest range of options and the most conceptual room for the respondent. I made great efforts to pose questions in a comparative framework, inviting the respondent to place herself within a continuum of her own description. Even when a respondent would make a direct response addressing the larger themes in which I was interested, I would press for further elaboration. I made a point of stressing that I wanted to be perfectly clear in my understanding, and I would ask similar questions repeatedly to triangulate the responses, and be assured that the interpretation was not merely my own. By repeatedly asking the respondent to relate to the themes and questions that were theoretically important to my study, I was engaged in Bourdieu's reflexive analysis of my own scholarship in my relationship with my respondent. I also conceptualised this relationship in terms of what is known within psychoanalysis as the therapeutic alliance.

At the heart of the therapeutic alliance is an intersubjective relationship based on trust. While the relationship is a real one, it is not a friendship, nor is it reciprocal, insofar as the analyst has a professional responsibility that is not reciprocated by the analysand (Meissner 1996). This is parallel to the professional responsibility that the researcher has to the respondent. However, the metaphoric parallel to the therapeutic alliance is all the more profound along this axis of responsibility, for in the clinical setting the analysand seeks out the analyst, where generally it is the researcher who seeks out the respondent. Yet just as the focus on the analysand's experience and interpretations requires the analyst to listen closely and carefully, and to be present and emotionally available, neither the analyst nor the researcher should share their personal perspective lest it overly

influence the analysand or the respondent. When, for example, I was asked by respondents whether I am Jewish, I would respond by asking how a response from me either way would make the respondent feel. I would use such moments as opportunities to explore hypothetical situations, but they were not of my construction, they were of the respondents'. Facilitating the expression of personal constructions is extremely beneficial to this kind of research.

### **Mapping the Self, Locating Others**

Personal construct approaches are at the heart of the second project. This psychological theory, most often associated with the American psychologist George Kelly (1955), begins with the assumption that individuals organise thoughts of their own experiences and world-views in highly coherent ways. Kelly and others believed that there was much to be gained by listening to the articulations of subjects regarding their own interpretations of the world, and their experience, without direct interventions or directions by the psychologists or researchers. This theoretical and methodological approach is often associated with 'constructivism' whereby concepts or truths do not exist in their own right, but are constantly and socially negotiated between individuals and groups, each of whom have their own notions of what is being negotiated. It is the agreement on these concepts that creates and holds their form. This is a highly discursive process of social engagement. The challenge of this second research project, which aimed to incorporate this approach, was to design protocols and instruments that would best allow respondents to portray their experience, as they understand it, but would also as utilise quantitative tools to best allow for cross language comparisons.

The project – the European Study of Youth Mobilisation (or ESYM), sponsored by the British Council, directed by myself and a team of researchers at the University of St. Andrews, and executed by local academic research teams – seeks to compare the political and social experiences of young people who express themselves along a diverse set of political and social orientations and to see if they share motivations, self-understandings, senses of purpose, or senses of agency. It explores the concept of political and social radicalisation among young people aged 16 to 30 in eleven countries across Northern, Central and Baltic Europe, including Scotland. The study explores young people who are motivated by religious identification, whether Muslim, Christian, Hindi, or otherwise; by ethnic identification, for example Kurdish, Roma, or Dutch; by class politics, for example on the Left, anarchists, trade unionists, socialists, or Marxists; or community politics, for example on the Right integralists, nationalist, or skinheads; by environmental politics; or by something altogether different and defined in an exclusively local context. With so many different potential strands of motivation the St. Andrews team decided that the total number of people to be interviewed should exceed a minimum of 1000 and will ideally approach a level of 1500 individuals. The St. Andrews team also decided to limit the study to young people found in certain designated research cities. At present, the cities include Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, Dundee, Glasgow, Krakow, Prague, and Warsaw. In the future research will also be conducted in Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Tallinn. The interview instrument was designed to capture a great number of qualitative concerns, particularly those arrived at through personal construct approaches. By remembering Bourdieu & Wacquant's (1992) admonition noted earlier in this paper, we sought to create spaces for respondents' personal

constructions of meaningful categories. However, this created enormous logistical and methodological problems. In the present research sites alone there are five official languages, let alone numerous other languages spoken by immigrants and other communities. Translation was to pose an enormous logistical challenge. Moreover, it would be difficult to engage and assert the validity of discourse analysis if it was all presented in translation (or if the analysis was conducted in translation). For this reason the St. Andrews team decided that formal interviews would be conducted through a survey instrument in official country languages, but would be largely reported in quantitative terms.

Additionally the ESYM research is comparing different methodological approaches to mixed method enquiry. The ESYM research will compare three different approaches to respondent selection. In Bratislava, Brno, and Prague respondents were found through traditional chain-referral methods. To find the initial respondents – or ‘seeds’ – who would serve as the bases for the follow-on snowballing chains, local researchers engaged in ethnographic research, observing where young people would congregate and discuss politics. In the second instance, in Budapest, Krakow and Warsaw, the local research teams look to expand beyond the more traditional, non-probability methods of snowballing or location sampling, and engage in a more sophisticated mode of respondent driven sampling where the biases associated with chain referrals are analysed in such detail as to suggest a known level of precision (Heckathorn 2002). To facilitate this, the Hungarian and Polish teams will engage in a very thick ethnography to find the necessary respondent ‘seeds’, and will be very interested in the social

network relations between respondents.<sup>3</sup> This will be compared with the largely ethnographic-only study in Scotland where each respondent will be selected separately by the researcher without scrutinising the relationship between respondents. Thus the ESYM study will compare results derived from chain-referrals, respondent-driven sampling, and ethnographic interviewing.

In all three case studies ethnography is a key method to initiate the study. This appears similar to the most common relationship in a mixed method study: ethnographic research functions as a pilot study before the more traditional quantitative instruments are deployed. However in this case, the ethnography is not separate; it also directly facilitates the application of the survey instrument. The ethnographic component is essential to the overall design of the study, as it provides not only the contacts for the interviews, but also the content and the context. The concerns of local groups were incorporated in the interview structure both as a means of connecting with the respondent, but also as an indication that the researchers are taking these concerns into account, and are listening to the various groups. This was not done to parrot young people's concerns or articulations, but rather used to shape the interview in a way that better connected with the respondents. By making the interview process responsive to the data and observations collected through ethnographic engagement, the respondents understood that

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<sup>3</sup> Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) was developed by Douglas Heckathorn in 1997 as a means of overcoming what had long been a problem in working with hidden populations or populations of a very small size. Chain referral sampling or snowballing offer insight into those engaged but offer little in the way of knowledge of prevalence, population size or the relationship of those engaged to the population as a whole. Heckathorn devised a mathematical balancing for the non-random fashion by which participants are recruited. In RDS respondents recruit their peers to participate, and the researchers track who recruited whom and their number of social contacts within the network. This is done through coding so respondents can remain anonymous but the relationships within the social network can be tracked and evaluated.

the researchers had not simply dropped out of the sky. It is this demonstration of responsive social engagement, as opposed to cold, clinical scientificism often associated with political research, that opened access to many groups and also, in my estimation, provided much better interviews in which many respondents felt they could be spontaneous and disarmed.

Moreover the instrument was designed to capture many qualitative aspects of social and political engagement. Much as grounded theory explores concepts and terms developed by respondents and engaged communities of study, the local expressions and terminology contained in the survey were determined through local focus groups with young people similar to the target population. Local researchers explored terms that best expressed the ideas that theoretically ground the research; by following the decisions made in the focus groups, the terms incorporated in the survey instruments are expressed in a fashion that would be recognised locally and by the target respondents. Thus, we used the words used by the young people, and in the ways that they would use them in everyday encounters with each other and on the street. Indeed one of the biggest challenges in designing the interview script was finding the proper wording for the most basic question: 'with whom do you discuss politics?' This may seem straightforward enough from an academic standpoint, but for many of the young people we hoped to interview they did not believe that they are involved in 'politics'. For most 'politics' suggests formal, parliamentary political parties and elections only. For many of these young people having opinions about immigration, the economy, or the role of religion in society is not considered 'political', but this is precisely what we as researchers were interested in knowing more: the politics of the everyday. In addition to the focus groups and

ethnographic observations to structure the interview scripts, the interviewers made reference to particular local events that were the most prominent of the day. So the interviewers would ask ‘with whom to talk about local event X?’ Even though the answers were being recorded in a numerical form, the respondent and the interviewer completed the question schedule together. Interviewers were briefed about the approach to the overall project and discussed with project managers ways to draw out interview subjects. Most importantly all field teams were briefed on the need to promote intersubjective engagement through all aspects of the research. By referring to specific local events, the interviewer prompted the respondent to discuss his or her activity in a more conversational and less abstract fashion. These interventions also built trust through the course of the interview, reinforcing the more conversational approach to the formal interview.

To compliment the information reported quantitatively, the survey includes sections in which the respondents are asked to express themselves with reference to presented maps, provided pictures, and self-constructed drawings. Thus in addition to being asked how they relate to a number of political and social situations by identifying their level of agreement or disagreement along a numerical scale, respondents are asked to place themselves graphically within a spatial representation of political attitudes. Further respondents are asked to map or draw their social network. They are asked to diagrammatically portray where they see themselves among their friends, colleagues and family. They are also asked to map their relationships to authority and to power. The graphic representations will help the research analysis teams interpret the respondents’ numerical expressions. This also functions as a primer to encourage a more open discussion with the respondent regarding her social

network, and became the basis of the randomised selection of network members for the next waves of the respondent driven sampling.

Finally, respondents are asked to map their conceptions of the cities in which they live and are politically and socially active. As can be seen in Illustration Number 2, below, the respondents are presented with a map illustration of the research city. They are asked about their perceptions of the dynamics of the city in terms of where different economic classes reside, where crime occurs, where they feel safe and where they do not, and where they perceive change to be occurring. The respondents then draw on the page indicating their perceptions of the changing environment around them. Also on this page, respondents indicate along a single axis where they would position themselves with regards to binary terms: left/right; liberty/order; non-believer/religiously devout. Each of these graphic representations is then coded to correspond with a set of numerically represented scales or item blocks within the survey (Dixon & Durrheim 2003). A similar combination is deployed in the project's use of the life event calendar whereby respondents represent their life story and personal narrative by denoting particular events and their significance graphically within a time-line that relates both chronological (*chronos*) and social (*kairos*) time (Axinn *et al* 1999). In each of these cases the ecological validity of the study is sustained and enhanced as the research setting, both spatial and temporal, is explored with the respondents (Banister *et al* 2003, p.11). Drawing the respondent into the research in this way both recognises his subjectivity, engaging him as a knowing active subject, and enhances the strength of the study itself.

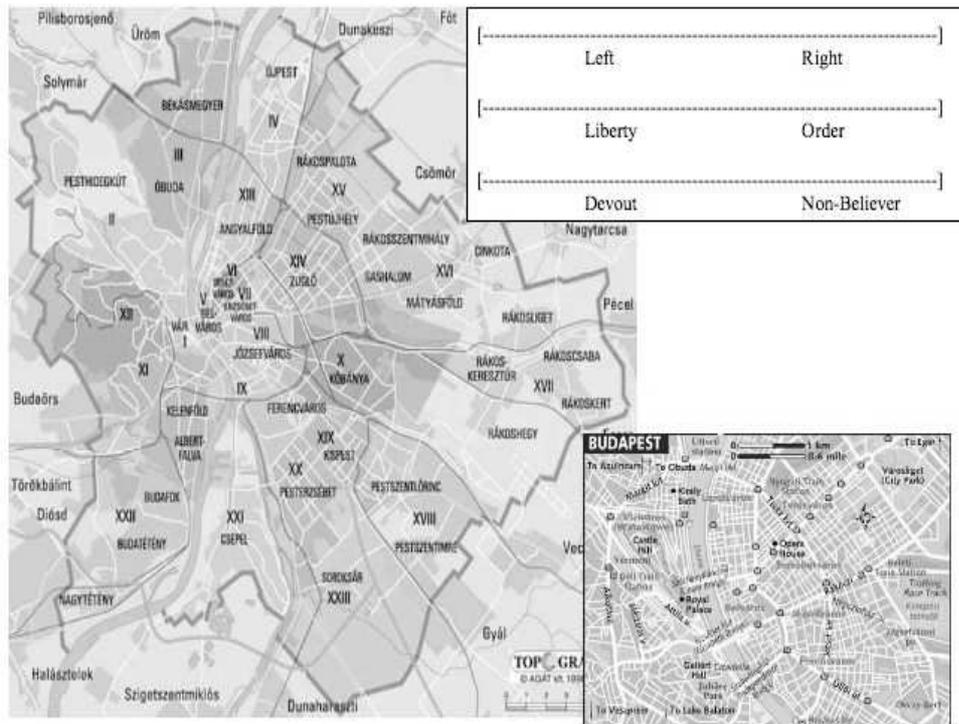


Illustration 2: Reproduction of Research City Map, here as Budapest. Respondents indicate on the map where they believe changes to be happening in the city.

One of the main considerations driving this research project was generating as many interviews as possible, with young people holding as many different political and social perspectives considered outside of the mainstream as possible. Much of the research regarding political involvement has been conducted on a very small scale (for example, see the work of Andrew Silke or John Horgan). Further, many of the recent studies (i.e. since 2001) concerning radicalisation in Europe focus on young Muslim men (see Bakker 2006, Tille & Slotman 2006) . The point of our study was to listen to as many young people in the field sites as we could and then compare their experiences both across political persuasions within a given field site as well as both across different and among similar positions in other

field sites. The greatest challenge was gaining access to the various political communities we were interested in engaging. It was the ethnographic portion of the research that provided access. Just as in my personal research in Hungary more than a decade ago, the key to access was trust, and trust was built through the act of listening. It was this principle that structured the formal interview. Through the use of ethnographic research before conducting the formal interviews, the interview script could include insights and bridges for connection engendered by previous interactions between the various groups and the researchers. In this way, the formal interview script and content were structured and refined by a range of methods: engaged observations through ethnography; discourse analysis of those engagements; and focus group discussion of these findings. This made the engagement between interviewer and respondent less distant and less cold. Each research component contributed to the next for a complex mixed methodological approach to the research question of exploring the self-understanding and motivations of young people involved in political and social mobilisation outside of mainstream politics.

## **Conclusions**

One of the most challenging aspects of working with and among hidden populations involves avoiding the kind of reductionism whereby members of a group are identified with a single quality or a single set of qualities. Striving to recognise the subjectivity of respondents and to promote a greater human understanding should be one of the main goals when exploring hidden populations in any research study. Such research goals necessitate the creation of open spaces for respondents by not limiting the response ranges to pre-determined choices or prompting respondents with a nod toward a

normatively preferential choice. For example, by providing neutral contrasts or comparisons, or by providing distancing primers that suggest a large range of valid responses none of which are specifically aligned with a position (especially a normative position) within the given socio-political environment. These open spaces can be created through the idiom of engagement in the therapeutic alliance. In this space the researcher, like the analyst, listens without judgement; yet the researcher can also use her reaction to the respondents' presentations as a data point, just as the analyst must evaluate her own feelings of counter-transference against her perceptions of transference by the analysand. This type of engagement focuses on the respondent, and just as any interview violates the norms of polite social discourse, the therapeutic alliance idiom makes no pretence to being a regular conversation. It is a special kind of dialogue where the rules of polite discourse can be suspended, yet it is one made by profound empathy and careful and energetic listening of both participants' parts.

These attempts to maintain and ensure the recognition of the subjectivity of respondents can inform both qualitative and quantitative approaches. While these goals of social research may be more traditionally aligned with quantitative techniques, it remains important to explore the various modes of interface among a range of qualitative techniques, just as it is important to analyse how qualitative and quantitative methods can be mixed. This is a long way from the declarations of twenty years ago that 'the accommodation between paradigms is impossible' (Guba 1990, p.81), leading some academics to advocate an 'incompatibility thesis' which precludes the complimentary employment of qualitative and quantitative modes of inquiry (Howe 1988). Rather, researchers should look to mixed methods as a mode of inquiry that builds upon

complementary strengths and has the potential to reduce or compensate for methodological weaknesses. What should be chosen is that which presents research subjects with the greatest humanity and builds a greater sense of social understanding, regardless of the positions taken by the groups under study. The researcher, therefore, shapes the methodology of the study as a mode of engagement, as a mode of praxis. This may be the best goal for social research.

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