

CALL FOR PAPERS

Revue française de sociologie

Special issue

“Combining sources and methods: mixed methods in sociology”

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Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in the social sciences generally and in sociology is not a new practice (Maxwell 2016). Already in the early 1930s the sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda, and Hans Zeisel ([1933] 1971) analyzed and combined observation and interview data with population statistics, a questionnaire survey, and a time-use survey to analyze the impacts of unemployment on the community of Marienthal. But in the last twenty years, the number of studies based on mixed methods designs, and of articles dealing specifically with methodology issues that arise with mixed methods, has soared. Fueled by epistemological debates and proposals for how best to define mixed methods (Johnson et al. 2007), a new type of reflexivity on ways to practice mixed methods has developed, together with proposals for formalizing or standardizing research practices. The debates and practical proposals are structured through the publication of monographs (e.g., Greene 2007) and handbooks (e.g., Plano Clark and Creswell 2008; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009), new journals (*Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *International Journal of Multiple Research Methods*), and a network active on different continents that regularly holds multidisciplinary conferences (Mixed Methods International Research Association or MMIRA). Though the impetus first came from the United Kingdom and the United States and most publications are in English, mixed methods are eliciting growing interest in continental Europe.¹

In sociology, the epistemological, methodological, and practical questions raised by the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and by existing formalization procedures tend to be discussed outside mixed methods groups and media (Pearce 2012). In France, for example, the literature mentioned above is not really cited or even debated², although a considerable number of mixed methods-based sociological studies of various forms have been conducted, particularly in social network analysis (Lazega 1992; Grossetti 2011). Some of these studies combine qualitative data with quantitative

¹ For example, a mixed methods network was set up in 2020 at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS) to develop thinking on the subject in both research proper and university teaching.

² For an exception, see the recent file on the subject published in the *Revue française de science politique*.

surveys (see, for example, Roupnel-Fuentes 2014; Lambert and Remillon 2018; Beaubatie 2019; Dubuisson-Quellier et al. 2019; Bidart and Dupray 2014); others combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to study archives (Perdoncin 2021). Last, qualitative studies that draw on existing national surveys have become quite common; in this connection we can cite studies based on France's "Trajectoires et Origines" survey" (Santelli and Moguerou 2013), the "Génération" survey of the Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur les Qualifications or CEREQ (Frickey 2010), and INED's (French Institute for Demographic Studies) "EPIC" survey (Bergström and Vivier 2020).

For this special issue of the *Revue française de sociologie*, sociologists are invited to shed light on the process of sociological knowledge production that is based on combined quantitative and qualitative methods. To proceed, we advise contributors to take some of the questions raised in the literature seriously; i.e., to discuss them with reference to current research practices in our discipline. To what end are do we mobilize mixed quant-qual approaches and data? Is the point to consider heterogeneous sources and to multiply perspectives from which to view our research topic? Is it because one or the other method is better adapted to investigating certain questions or research issues (Avril, Cartier and Serre 2010)? Do we seek to confirm or further detail a finding obtained through one of the two approaches, or to multiply means of achieving greater generality by simultaneously highlighting statistical and analytical generalization (Halkier 2011)? In this issue, we propose to ground these questions in current debates by reflecting on the concrete ways methods are combined; namely by distinguishing how it is done at the different stages and levels of the research process (research design, methods and data collection, interpretation and presentation of findings). With this in mind, contributions may take up one or more of the following lines of inquiry: the construction of a mixed methods research study; epistemological questions and issues; integrating data, methods, and findings during analysis; benefits and limitations of mixed methods.

First, we hope to receive contributions that discuss how to use mixed methods to construct a research study; i.e., design and overall implementation. What types of research questions and objectives require or justify combining quantitative and qualitative data? There may be several motivations: e.g., sampling, completeness, enhancement, triangulation, complementarity (Bryman 2006 or Greene et al. 1989). Given the researcher's aim, what research strategy should be used to achieve it? The literature offers different mixed methods designs: parallel, exploratory or explanatory sequential, and convergent, among others (see Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Schoonenboom and Johnson 2017). In what ways can these mixed methods designs help sociologists? Do they make it possible to formalize the research process and give greater transparency to the empirical demonstration, or may rigid procedures become a hindrance to the research (see the critique by Timans et al. 2019)? Can they actually take into account the complexity of the research process, necessarily characterized by moves back and forth, possible changes in direction, or even innovations (Lemerancier and Ollivier 2011) essential to pursuing the study? Moreover, the status of data types may change during the research. Here, contributors should give explicit descriptions of such changes, explaining the difficulties they cause and implications for the initial research plan. They may also discuss the aims of mixed methods or the epistemological choices associated with them, in which case they should clarify the research stages involved and difficulties encountered and propose strategies

for overcoming them. Contributions may also discuss some of the many tools presented in mixed methods literature.

Second, quantitative and qualitative methods are grounded in various epistemological frameworks (Bryman 1984) that are often quite distinct. These include inductive, deductive and indeed “abductive” (Pearce 2012; Halkier 2011) approaches, as well as generalizing on the basis of representative surveys of the target population or through analysis and discussion of whether or to what extent findings are transferable to other contexts (Morgan 2007). Paradigm issues are central and widely discussed in mixed methods literature; some authors suggest adopting a multi-paradigm position while others call for a single position, such as pragmatism or critical realism. But, concretely, how can such tensions be resolved—the tension between positivist and constructivist stances, for example—in mixed methods research, which is often done in teams? Should researchers select or separate approaches or, on the contrary, compare them critically throughout the empirical work? And what might critical comparison contribute to the research underway? Last, does the quant/qual opposition—and so the very notion of mixed methods—still have meaning now that more and more studies are using automatic procedures to process and quantify qualitative materials (textual statistics, web scraping) or “reading” quantitative materials qualitatively (the social history of statistics, ethno accountancy)? We welcome contributions that deal with these epistemological questions by situating method mixing and the mixed methods issue within the history of the discipline and the various paradigms, or by way of specific inquiries.

Third, integration in mixed method studies can be done at different research levels; specifically, at the methods level, during data collection, and during the interpretation phase or presentation of findings (see Fetters et al. 2013). This raises such questions as how qualitative and quantitative data can be matched for a mixed analysis. What role might a chosen strategy for selecting qualitative study participants play for the possibility of achieving greater generality? Are some analytic techniques more suited than others when it comes to integrating qualitative and quantitative data? For example, geometric data analysis (factorial analysis, correspondence analysis) works well in inductive approaches (Tucci et al. 2021), and the findings and typologies thus generated can then be used to select respondents for the qualitative part of a study (Le Roux et al. 2021). For this special issue, we are interested in contributions that present ideas on combining qualitative and quantitative data through sampling or data matching. In addition, studies are needed that can offer some precise answers on integration possibilities at the level of findings interpretation and presentation (Fetters et al. 2013). How can quantitative and qualitative lines of inquiry and results dialogue with each other in practice, moving beyond mere juxtaposition? What becomes possible if one type of data is converted to another? In what ways might this facilitate dialogue between the two types of findings? What might discordant results contribute, and what do they tell us? How can qualitative material be used to interpret results of multivariate analyses—regressions, for example? And last, how can findings from the two types of data be presented other than sequentially (see the “joint displays” in Guetterman et al. 2015)? Mixing different types of sources and data that pertain to the same individuals also raises the problem of anonymity. Does the tension between personal data protection and open science principles create particular difficulties for mixed methods studies?

Contributions on data integration at the stage of data collection or the analysis or writing stages are welcome.

Last, what is the ultimate added value of mixed methods research? One highly probable advantage is that it uses the strengths of each methodology and method. The approach would seem particularly appropriate for analyzing social processes, a key concern in sociology. Using qualitative interviews—biographical, for example—in addition to a cross-sectional or longitudinal survey might be a way of taking into account the process dimension, or of comparing “objective” situations and actors’ experiences. Some approaches, such as the life course perspective (Elder et al. 2003), explicitly call for a combination of quantitative data or techniques and life course data in order to explore the role of agency and social relations or context without ignoring the weight of social structures and history (Bidart and Dupray 2014, 2015; Carpentier and White 2013; Legewie and Tucci 2021; Dubucs et al. 2017). Can mixed methods research enable sociologists to explore afresh the thorny question of causality, currently dominated by econometrics-based approaches? Moreover, does the history of French sociology—specifically the fact that geometric data analysis is used more widely in France than elsewhere—give it a unique position on the question of mixed methods? Contributors are welcome to take up these questions in connection with concrete cases, showing the value-added, difficulties, and, possibly, the impasses of mixed method studies.

Articles may handle the theme of this special issue in various ways:

- a literature review, a historical or epistemological overview of the reception of mixed methods and how qualitative and quantitative techniques are made to fit together in French or international sociology;
- the applying of a mixed methods approach, accompanied by an in-depth analysis of how the study unfolds and of the research practices used, with special emphasis on the benefits and limitations of this way of proceeding;
- a critical investigation of methodologies and tools used in mixed methods research, and a more general discussion of how data and findings can be integrated and to what end(s).

Contribution proposals must be between 1,000 and 1,500 words (not including bibliography) and written in either French or English. They should be sent to **Christelle Germain**, assistant editor of the *Revue* (christelle.germain@cnrs.fr) and the three special issue scientific coordinators (rfs.mixedmethods@services.cnrs.fr) before **March 1, 2022**.

Proposals will be examined jointly by the scientific coordinators. Acceptance notices will be sent out by **May 2, 2022**, at the latest. Authors of accepted proposals must submit their full papers by **October 30, 2022**.

Two formats may be used for the full papers:

- texts in the classic RFS format: 75,000 characters maximum, including spaces, tables, figures, and bibliography;
- shorter texts of up to 40,000 characters, this format being better suited to a review of the literature, presentation of a precise point of procedure or method, a reflexive study of a mixed methods study whose findings have already been published, etc.

Please specify your preferred format in the contribution proposal.

Each article will be evaluated independently by the scientific coordinators and anonymously by the editorial committee of the *Revue*.

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