

Qualitative method in social sciences

How is scientific knowledge, professional knowledge and everyday knowledge created and developed?

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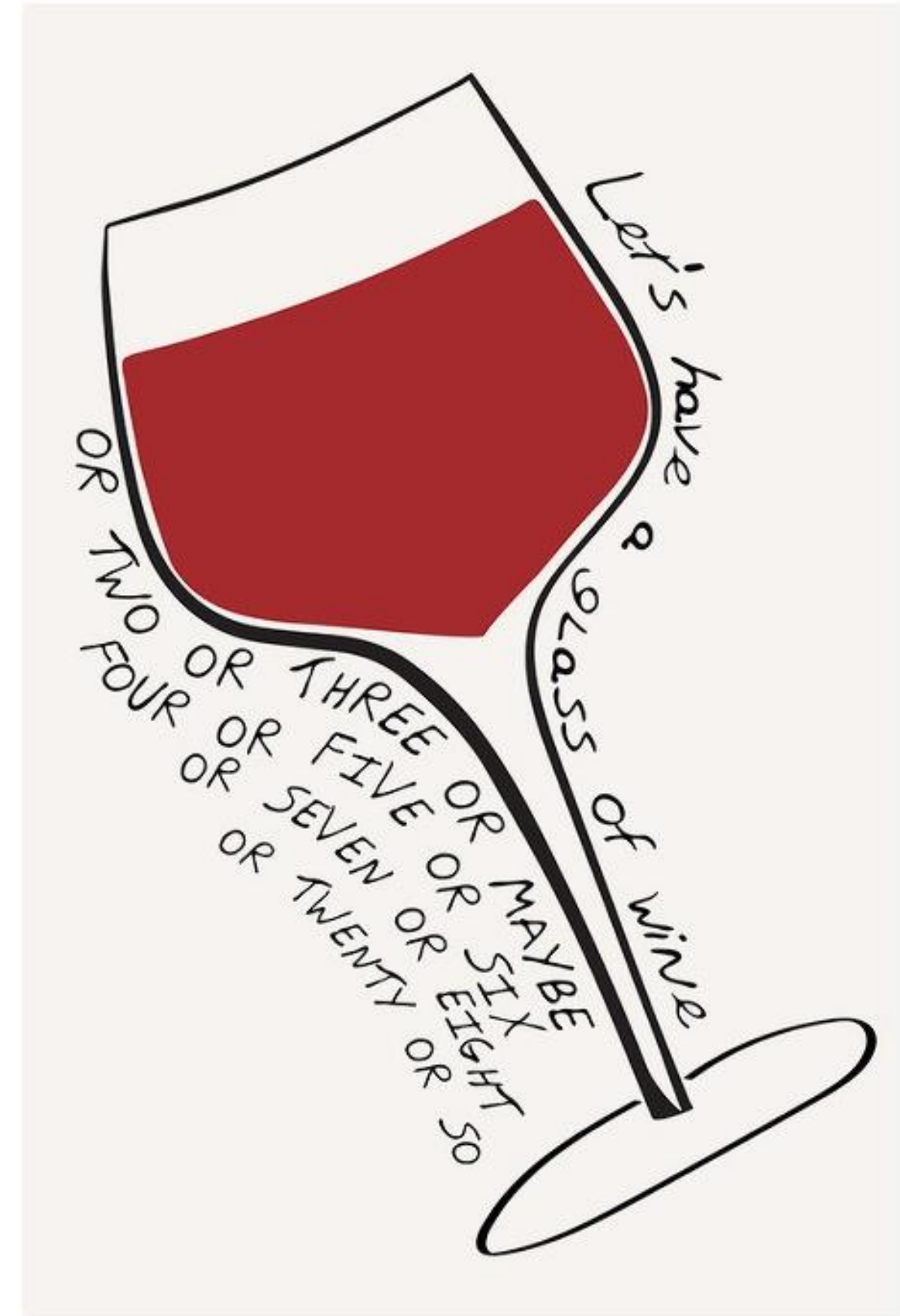
Quantitative and qualitative studies (surveys)

- When we count and do statistical analyses ("crunching numbers"), we do quantitative research
- For example, 80% of parents are satisfied with the quality of the kindergarten or 80% av the respondents are satisfied with their housing conditions (LOCUS)
- When we interpret interviews, field notes from observations, various texts, we conduct qualitative research/investigations



Research shows that.....

- People who drink a little alcohol have a lower risk of heart failure (American study 2015)
- One beer or two a day is healthy (Dutch study 2014)
- Alcohol may not be good for the heart (American and British study 2015)
- Very few people have health benefits from alcohol (Norwegian-Swedish gene study 2014)
- Alcohol is not included in the new dietary guidelines (2023)



Why Research Methods in BA Education



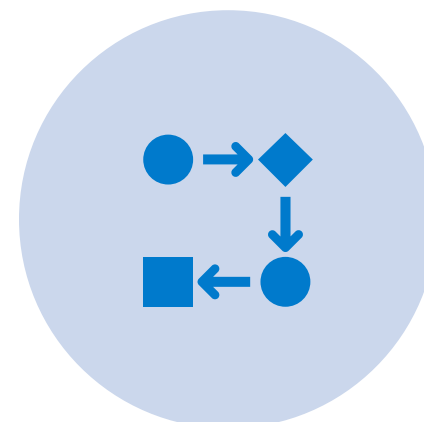
The knowledge conveyed in the education is theoretical and research-based and linked to practical learning



As students and later professional practitioners you must also be able to critically assess the academic literature, research and methods and approaches used in the fields of practice – and recognize the IMRAD structure as a "template"



You will carry out limited fieldwork where you will receive training in using research methods and work on the basis of research ethics obligations



The research question (what we want to explore/investigate) provides direction for which methodological approach is suitable, and forms the prerequisites for what knowledge is developed

What does qualitative research do?



Everyday practice, practical understanding, practical knowledge are concepts grasping the practice-oriented and relational activities



Qualitative research can contribute to increased understanding of relationships, forms of communication, power relations, decision-making processes and the exercise of judgement



Qualitative methods and procedures aim to investigate how we can experience and understand events and experiences in different ways – an important prerequisite for good professional interaction

To read and evaluate qualitative research

Understanding the connection between the research process and knowledge production is important for training a critical attitude to knowledge



The research is created by the researcher in the encounter with the field



Transparency and reflectivity (reliability) – how the data material has been developed and how the researcher justifies the choices that have been made



Reading and assessing qualitative research

Validity of the research

Conceptual validity – the correspondence between theories and concepts and the reality that is explored



Internal validity – where is the data material retrieved from?



External validity - is the research transferable to other areas? Explain the context



Generalisability is linked to the analysis process and is about gaining an expanded understanding of what is being explored

Assessing the quality of research

■ Data collection

Reliability
Reflexivity
Transparency

Data interpretation/analysis

Validity
Conceptual validity
Internal validity
External validity

Results

Generaliability
Transferability

"As you shout in the woods, you get an answer"

Where does the research question come from?

- The researcher's preconceptions
- The researcher's previous research and observations – review of previous research
 - Filling a knowledge gap – desire for knowledge – one's own curiosity

To use theory to focus and delimit the research question – to use the "glasses" to look in the right direction to gather information

To take off your "glasses" and ask an open research question (e.g. silent children in child welfare)

- The question the researcher asks is indicative of the answer/results

The purpose of the research question

- Theory-testing investigations – confirm or disprove existing theory
- Theory-generating investigations – includes new interpretations and explanatory models and contributes with new concepts and theory development

NB: Pure studies are rare

- Descriptive studies – bringing a phenomenon to light (e.g. fatigue among women, violence in close relationships)
- What, How, and Why Questions
 - What: Describe characteristics or patterns of social phenomena
 - How: When we want to better understand a phenomenon
 - Why: Explain or understand using theory(s)



Examples

We want to describe individuals, events or situations to document a phenomenon

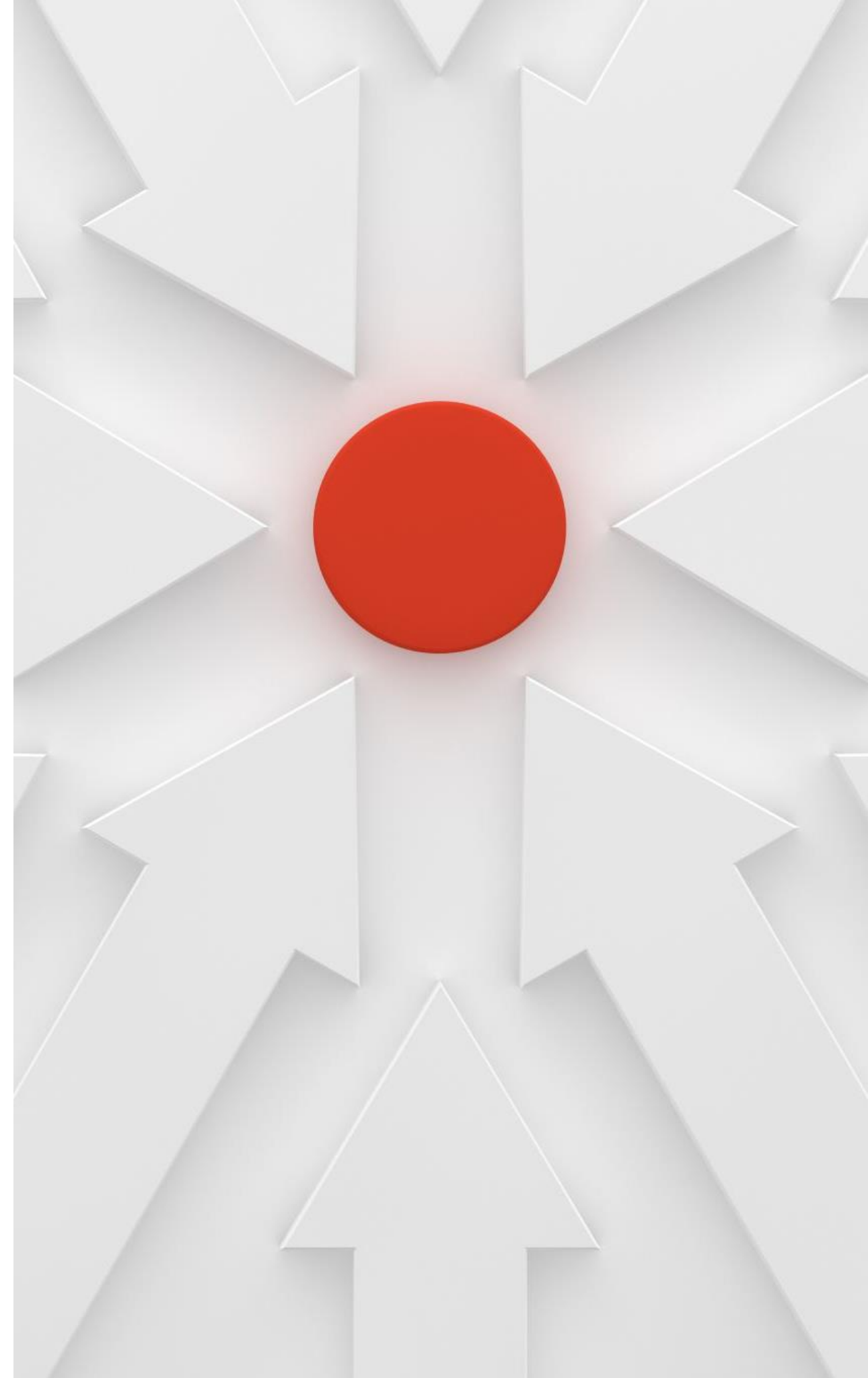
- *What are the social assistance recipients' experiences of participating in the qualification program?*
- Exploratory, descriptive study that involves both mapping and deepening users' experiences with the program

We want to understand a phenomenon and are concerned with what kind of meaning this phenomenon has that makes us understand it this way or that

- *How do the participants in the qualification program experience their own life situation?*

Applied research/commissioned research

- On behalf of the Ministry of Labour, the Work Research Institute was commissioned to evaluate the qualification programme
- Does the quality program contribute to achieving the goals set for the measure, especially to more people getting active or working?
 - Assumes describing, explaining or understanding the phenomenon being explored, in the case of a distance between purpose and reality, the researchers try to contribute with explanations as to why the measure does not work, and suggest what can be done better or differently



The design of the research – making a plan for the study

How the researcher will proceed to provide answers to the research question?

- What is the quality of the services offered at a NAV office?

Who should the researcher talk to – random or strategic samples

- The professionals, the users/clients or relatives?
- How many people should be talked to, how similar or different should they be, how typical should they be, how to access informants
 - Extreme samples, maximum variation, minimum variation, the snowball method - in smaller studies, one often choose a pragmatic approach

Data collection

The close link between the researcher and the data collection

Can connect many different sources of information – verbal communication and conversations, observation, text, documents, interaction and events

Data is information that has been processed, systematized and registered in a specific form with a view to specific analyses

Primærdata og sekundærdata

Transparency and relevance – to clarify the steps in the process and the challenges we face as well as what questions are asked about the data

What distinguishes the research interview from other interviews?

- An open form of conversation where the purpose is to understand and get hold of people's experiences - to be consciously naïve
- Unstructured, structured or semi-structured interview
- In-depth interviews, life story interviews, life mode interviews are often unstructured
- Focus group interview



Intervjuguiden

Innledende spørsmål, overordna temaer – hensikten er å få en utvida forståelse.

Gode svar krever gode, ÅPNE, korte spørsmål – oppfølgingsspørsmål, utdypende, spesifiserende, fortolkende spørsmål

Unngå hvorfor- spørsmål

Challenges

Silence – rejection – silence can be transformed into data – stepping out of the conversation and being together (Vindegg 2011, p.78)

Researcher position – status and power

Truth



Participant observation Fieldwork

- Objective: To gain an expanded understanding of people's actions, interactions, behaviors and values through participation in people's everyday lives
- Everything from structured interviewing to "hanging on the corner"
- Participatory attitude – informants as possible conversation/discussion partners – "go native"
- Reflexivity
- The sources can be verbal and non-verbal, body expressions, perceptions and sensations



Dimensions in the data collection

Room (what does the room look like?)

Actor (Which people are involved?)

Activity (which characterizes the field)

Object (central thing)

Events (What's going on?)

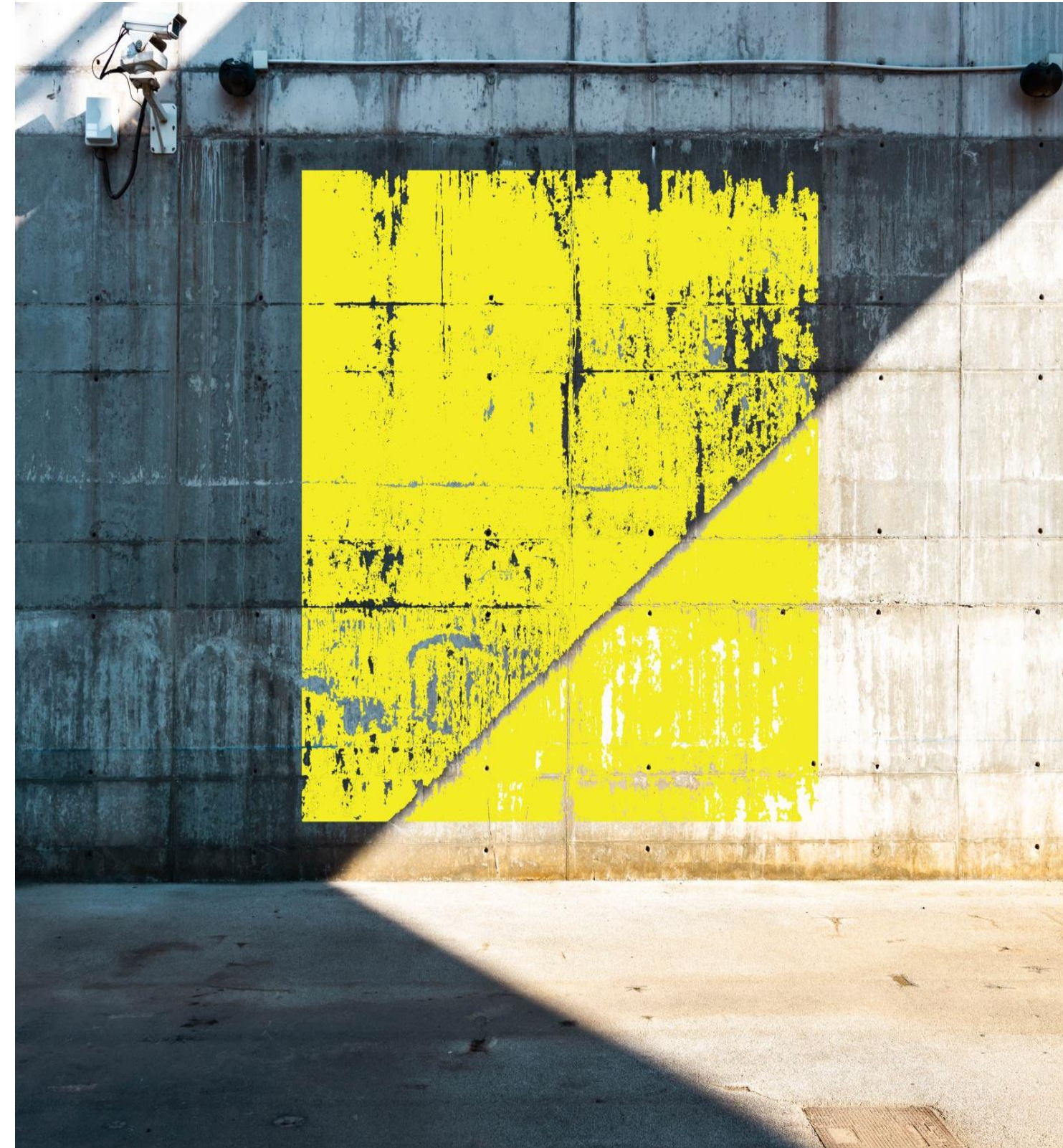
Time (time sequences)

Goals (what people are trying to achieve)

Emotions (as expressed in the field)

Field Notes

- Transforming a transient event into a written account
- There and then (or afterwards)
- Data constructed through the researcher's practice, presence and interaction with the informants
- Use words and concepts that the informants use, concretely, in detail, multifaceted and close to experience
- Naïve observation and naïve description as a starting point for later analysis



Document studies

1

Texts that exist prior to the research project - how we can use and interpret other people's texts as a source of research

2

Analysing a text as a gateway to understanding a larger context

3

Studying welfare texts:
textbooks, journal entries, county board decisions,
Class diaries with the teddy bears
wandering between
home and school

4

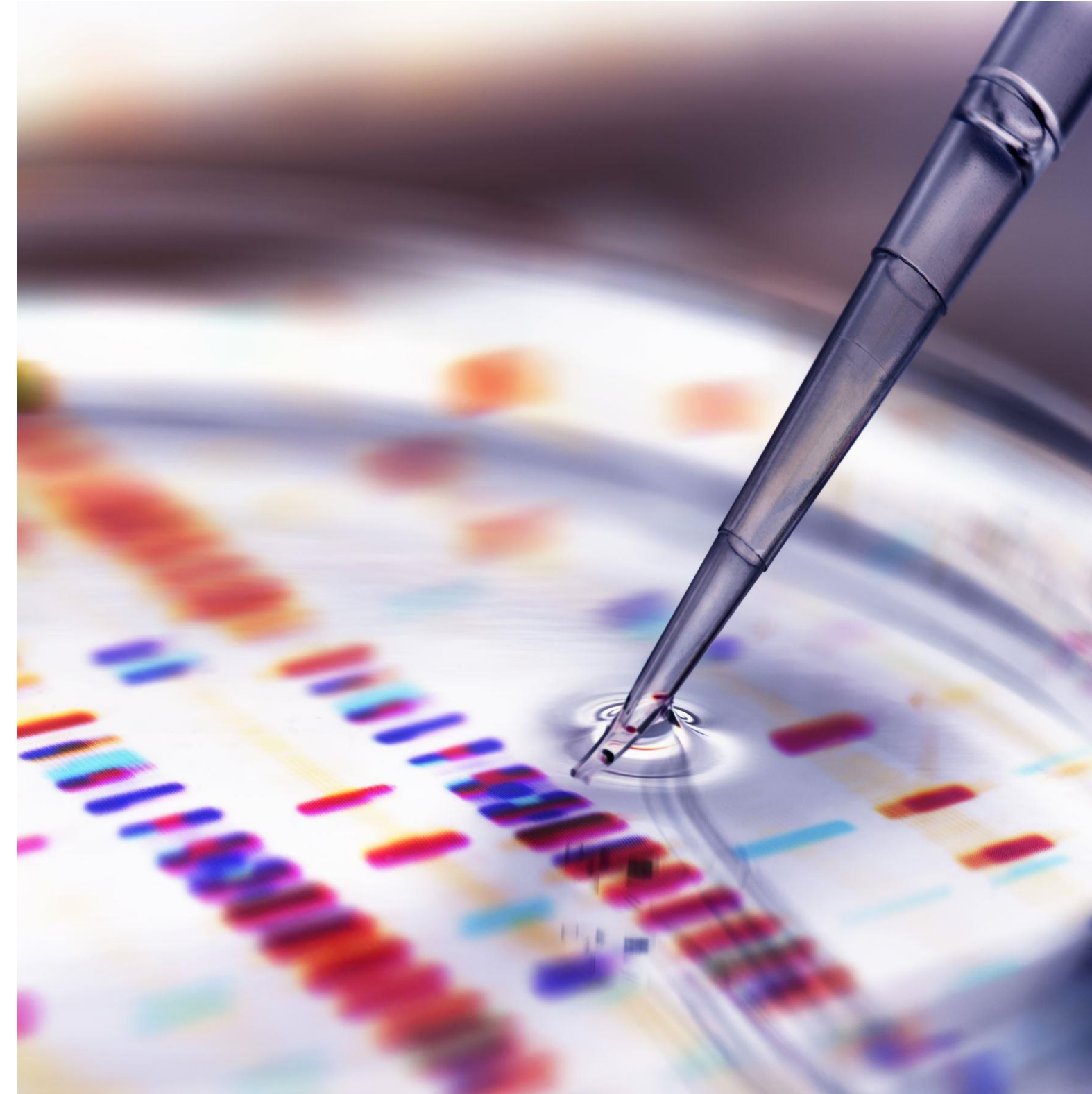
Combining texts (news reports) with interviews (criticism of NAV)

5

To study texts that form the basis for a specific political decision, (e.g. Child Brain Protection in Oslo municipality)

Qualitative analysis

- Asking questions about the material
- Connecting the empirical data to theories and concepts – analytical distance
- Thick descriptions – add as much context as possible
- Tians Sørhaug's analysis of the actions of drug addicts (hunters and gatherers' way of life)
- Gubrium and Holstein's analysis of interviews with elderly people about growing old (nursing homes)
- Experience based and experiential (theoretical) concepts



Qualitative analysis – adding a new level to the data

- Grasping with concepts
- e.g. sensitizing concepts such as care, treatment
- "Translate", establish contrasts, look for general concepts (gender, kinship)
- Drawing on (others') theories and concepts, e.g. rituals to contribute to an expanded understanding
- Coding and categories
- e.g. inductive thematic analysis
- Adding a new level to the material
- Narrative analysis/ analysis of narratives
- how sequences and consequences are connected and linked to meaningful connections (the plot of the story)
- For example, look for variations in social workers' practice narratives – how they construct the stories to describe the mothers and fathers and how mothers and fathers talk about their practices and understanding of problems and their opportunities to influence the system and the professionals