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Using the Internet for scientific publishing: *FQS* as an example

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Abstract Since the "Public Library of Science" launched its first open-access journals and the "Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities" has been released in 2003 and found enormous attention, the claim for open access—to make publicly funded journal articles available for the public—started to reach German scientists too. But still no experience has been made with electronic publishing in general and more specifically with open-access publishing. One consequence is that the potential capacity of open access—the (inter) national and (trans) disciplinary visibility and accessibility of scientific output—is not sufficiently used by German researchers. Ways to successfully establish an open-access journal are presented in this article by referring to "*Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum*: *Qualitative Social Research*" (*FQS*) as an example: after introducing the current state of *FQS* traditional and innovative ways of publishing are being discussed which had been employed while developing *FQS* and which helped *FQS* to become the most important electronic journal in the field of qualitative research.

This paper is based on the projects "Integration der Online-Zeitschrift *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (*FQS*) in die *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Sozialwissenschaften* (*ViBSoz*)" (BIB 44 BEfu01-01) and "Aufbau eines internationalen Open-Access-Dokumentenservers für die Sozialwissenschaften" (INST 12083/2-1), both funded by the German Research Foundation.

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Zusammenfassung Seit dem medienwirksamen Launch der ersten Open-Access-Zeitschriften der "Public Library of Science" und der Veröffentlichung der "Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities" im Jahr 2003 hat die Forderung nach Open Access, dem kostenfreien Zugang zu wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriftenartikeln, auch die deutschen Fachwissenschaften erreicht. Allerdings sind Erfahrungen mit elektronischem Publizieren im Allgemeinen und ist das Wissen um Open Access als Konzept und als Publikationspraxis im Besonderen noch vergleichsweise gering. Dadurch werden die wesentlichen Potenziale von Open Access für die deutschen Fachwissenschaften, nämlich breit national und international rezipiert zu werden, nicht hinreichend genutzt. Dass dies nicht zwangsläufig sein muss, soll am Beispiel der Open-Access-Zeitschrift "Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research" (*FQS*) gezeigt werden. Hierzu werden – ausgehend von einem Überblick über den aktuellen Stand von *FQS* – traditionelle und innovative Publikationsstrategien diskutiert, die für die Zeitschriftenentwicklung Anwendung fanden und wesentlich dafür waren, dass *FQS* innerhalb relativ kurzer Zeit zur international führenden elektronischen Zeitschrift für qualitative Sozialforschung geworden ist.

Résumé Depuis le lancement médiatique des premières revues en libre accès par la «Public Library of Science» (Bibliothèque publique de la Science) et la publication de la «Déclaration de Berlin sur le libre accès à la connaissance en sciences exactes, sciences de la vie, sciences humaines et sociales » datant de 2003, les sciences spéciales allemandes ont également commencé à revendiquer le modèle du Libre Accès (Open Access), c'est-à-dire l'accès gratuit aux articles de revues scientifiques. Mais les expériences avec la publication électronique en général et particulièrement la connaissance du Libre Accès comme concept et pratique de publication sont encore relativement limitées. C'est pour cette raison que les principaux potentiels du Libre Accès pour les sciences spéciales allemandes, à savoir le fait d'être largement accessible au niveau national et international, ne sont pas suffisamment exploités. L'exemple de la revue en libre accès «Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research» (*FQS*) est choisi pour montrer que cela n'est pas nécessairement le cas. Partant d'un aperçu de l'état actuel de *FQS*, il y a une discussion des stratégies de publications traditionnelles et innovatrices qui ont été appliquées pour le développement de la revue et sont responsables du fait que *FQS* est devenue la première revue électronique pour la recherche sociale qualitative au niveau international en relativement peu de temps.

1 How an international journal for qualitative research was initiated

While Paul Ginsparg at the Los Alamos National Laboratory started the "e-print archive" in 1991 by making physics preprints publicly available, it was impossible to foresee the future impact of the so-called open-access movement. The Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI)[1] and the "Berlin Declaration on Open Access to

[1] http://www.soros.org/openaccess/.

Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities"[2] represented significant milestones of this development. Its current international impact is obvious if one takes into account the numbers of signatories of the EU "Petition for Guaranteed Public Access to Publicly-funded Research Results".[3] On a national level, the importance of open access is documented by the information platform open-access.net,[4] funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG) and supported by the German Rectors' Conference, the Volkswagen Foundation, the Helmholtz Association, the Max Planck Society, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, the German Initiative for Networked Information, and additionally by two learned societies of psychology and linguistics, others will probably follow soon.

Compared to the starting point of open access in the North American sciences, the journal "*Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum*: *Qualitative Social Research*" (*FQS*)[5] in a way represents the opposite pole of the disciplinary spectrum: Qualitative methods are used to investigate individual, social or cultural meaning, if research questions require a "soft" approach by using for example interviews, field research, observation or group discussions, or more generally: if no theories are accessible to be tested by statistical procedures, but if such theories must be generated from empirical data (Mruck and Mey 2005). Such methods are widely used in the social sciences and humanities, but not necessarily limited to them: Researching for example "Problem-Solving Skills in Anesthesia" (Buerschaper et al. 2003) requires multidisciplinary teams, including physicians and engineers. And the importance of qualitative research methods is not limited to university research, as for example documented in two marketing research textbooks, recently published by Gabler Verlag (Buber and Holzmüller 2007; Naderer and Balzer 2007).

As qualitative research starts with reconstructing individual meaning and everyday practices in social groups or (sub) cultures, language plays a crucial role in the process of collecting and analyzing data. Therefore national boundaries work in a very restrictive way, and in addition various areas using qualitative research methods exist more or less independently of one another. It needed the Internet to make the extent visible to which qualitative research methods are applied all over the world and in a variety of (sub) disciplines.

While we started to discuss the launch of a journal on qualitative research in 1999, forerunners of using Internet technologies came mainly from Northern America: Discovering for example "*The Qualitative Report,*"[6] an electronic journal published by the Nova Southeastern University since 1990 and available for free, first of all meant to rethink traditional concepts of publishing on our side, socialized within a research tradition, which completely relied on print products and on distributing scientific knowledge by traditional publishers and bookstores. And the Internet not only questioned our ideas about how publishing and distribution of research results works, but also ideas of appropriate ways and

[2] http://www.zim.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/.

[3] http://www.ec-petition.eu/.

[4] http://www.open-access.net/.

[5] http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/.

[6] http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/index.html.

places for scientific communication: Examples like the mailing list "Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences" (QUALRS-L),[7] organized since September 1991 at the University of Georgia, helped to understand that the exchange of knowledge must not be limited to the own institute or annual conferences, but research and its outcomes could be discussed online continuously with colleagues worldwide.

The first concept for an online-journal *FQS* followed the North American examples on the one hand and tried to bring forward additional ideas about potentials of the Internet for scientific communication and publishing on the other hand. We set mainly two objectives: *FQS* should support the transdisciplinary knowledge exchange and should be a multilingual[8] journal, bringing international knowledge to German researchers and assisting German researchers to reach an international audience (see Mruck 2000). Nevertheless, in the beginning, the "old" format—(print) journals need publishing houses—still was dominant, but the German publishing houses we contacted in 1999 responded very skeptically against our idea of providing an international and multidisciplinary electronic journal for qualitative research: "From a publisher's perspective such a heterogeneous target group is not interesting as it would be too difficult to reach, and marketing therefore would be too cost-intensive". Moreover, at that time providing a pure online journal asked too much from the publishers we contacted.

Although we too did not own adequate technology and also had only vague ideas of distributing our journal by means of the Internet, from our perspective the time was ripe, and the feedback we received from colleagues from all over the world we contacted to share our concept encouraged us to start *FQS*. Our decision to make the journal accessible free of cost was first of all a pragmatic one and not informed by an open-access movement: On the one hand, we had no idea of how to manage *FQS* on a subscription base online, on the other hand and far more important we decided for an open-access model as our aim to address an international and interdisciplinary audience as broad as possible would have been out of reach otherwise (without using the label "open access" at that time; open access reached a broader audience outside the sciences only after the BOAI[9] was published in the beginning of 2002).

[7] http://www.listserv.uga.edu/archives/qualrs-l.html.

[8] From the very beginning *FQS* published in the German and the English language. A Spanish version was created up from 2001 successively, after colleagues from Spain and Latin America contacted us and an Ibero American *FQS* team was established.

[9] See Mruck et al. (2004) for a summary. As soon as the BOAI was published, we became involved in the open-access movement: the *FQS* editorial team created the German version of the BOAI and started to inform German research communities about open access and in close collaboration with other partners; see for example Mruck and Gersmann (2004) and the "Berlin Ad Hoc Symposium: Open Access—State of the Art and Perspectives in the German Humanities & Social Sciences," organized at the Freie Universität Berlin in October 2003 (http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/presse/info-e.htm).

2 Eight years later

In January 2000, the first *FQS* issue was published with 31 articles, each available in HTML and in PDF format. Authors came from 11 disciplines and 10 countries. Until May 2007, additional 24 issues followed, during 2007 the thousandth article will be published. Besides articles, linked directly to the respective topic of an issue[10], each issue contains selected single contributions and articles, belonging to different *FQS* rubrics.[11] Some selected information about the current state of *FQS*:

- Members of the editorial team come from 3 disciplines and 8 countries, editorial board members from 9 disciplines and 11 countries.
- Most articles (about 70%) come from social sciences, educational sciences, and psychology. About 750 articles are available either in English or in German, the rest in Spanish, in English and German, or in English and Spanish.
- *FQS* authors come from numerous disciplines and from more than 40 countries with a focus on Germany, Austria and Switzerland on the one hand, and Northern America, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom on the other hand (Fig. 1).
- Readers come from about 100 countries and from various fields within and outside university.

Figure 2 describes the number of hosts, accesses to HTML files and downloads of PDF files between January 2000 and December 2006.

All in all, from the start of *FQS* until May 2007 2,327,016 hosts accessed 13,886,163 HTML files, and 2,904,182 PDF files had been downloaded. About 7,800 colleagues from all over the world are subscribed to the newsletter, distributed once in a month to inform about new publications and additional details (conferences, interesting web sites; since 2003 also about open access news).

3 Strategies: combining tradition and innovation

From the very beginning we tried to design *FQS* by combining traditional publishing strategies and innovative strategies, arising from the use of the Internet.

3.1 Traditional strategies: ensuring quality

Whenever a target group of a journal is not limited to just one country or just one (sub) discipline, it must be secured that the respective scientific infrastructures and researchers—often organized on a national/disciplinary level—are addressed in a way, with representatives, and in a language close to the standards and habits the

[10] http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/rubriken-e.htm.

[11] *FQS* Reviews (reviews of books, CDs, etc.), *FQS* Debates (ongoing debates on issues like qualitative research and ethics, qualitative and quantitative research, etc.), *FQS* Conferences (conference reports), and *FQS* Interviews (interviews with leading qualitative researchers).

Fig. 1 The open-access journal *FQS*

	Dez 00	Dez 01	Dez 02	Dez 03	Dez 04	Dez 05	Dez 06
HTML	374806	627816	1162975	1511583	1985073	2735736	3760760
Hosts	33317	78681	186257	285032	381116	512642	686144
PDF	19638	94896	270764	385654	456794	573167	759385

Fig. 2 Accesses to *FQS* 2000–2006

respective (sub) cultures are familiar with. So *FQS* needed an editorial board, prominent on an international level. Peer review and copy-editing by native speakers must be organized for English, German, and Spanish articles. Depending on the kind of submissions articles are either double-blind peer reviewed by external reviewers or reviewed by two independent issue or rubric editors.[12]

[12] Since the end of 2000, abstracts are available in the three *FQS* languages; since January 2003 the complete *FQS* site, from the beginning available in German and English, is available in Spanish too.

3.2 Innovative strategies: electronic publishing

Usage of the Internet for scientific publishing has opened up various advantages compared to print journals, including the speed of publishing, flexible place resources (no page constraints etc.) and possibilities of combining different media (text, audio, video) and text types (for example providing primary data and information about the research process like field notes, research diaries, etc., in addition to the article itself).

Furthermore, the Internet provided new ways of disseminating knowledge, a practice *FQS* gave attention to from the very beginning: News about new articles/*FQS* issues were posted to various international mailing lists, information about *FQS* was included for example in the Open Directory,[13] a project Google used while staring the own services. Therefore *FQS*' rankings in search engines are rather high, whether one looks for specific keywords or uses services like the Google Page Ranking.[14] Using Internet media proactively also had consequences for traditional publishing strategies: *FQS* received EBSCO Publishing's attention, and a license agreement was signed to include the *FQS* full texts in SocINDEX;[15] the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences[16] and others asked for indexing *FQS* abstracts—a German print journal would have been hardly visible in a comparable way for such actors.

3.3 Innovative strategies: open access

It is difficult to imagine possible consequences in the case *FQS* would not have been free of charge: While starting *FQS*, our German target group(s) were not familiar with the Internet, partly we experienced reservation against new media (see Mruck and Mey 2001 for a summary). So with regard to the German market, a traditional way of publishing (print) at that time would have had some advantages. But having the Anglo-American market in mind, *FQS* would not have been able to fulfill its genuine claims (internationalizing, transdisciplinary exchange), and within the German market *FQS* would have started in competition to two other qualitative journals—"*Zeitschrift für Qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung*" and "*Sozialer Sinn. Zeitschrift für hermeneutische Sozialforschung*", both starting in 2000 as print journals under the umbrella of publishing houses. The way open access influences the visibility of journals is evident in Fig. 3, comparing these two German print journals to *FQS*, "*The Qualitative Report*" and two further international open-access journals: the "*International Journal of Qualitative Methods*" was launched 2003 in Canada, the "*Qualitative Sociology Review*" started 2005 in Poland.

[13] http://www.dmoz.org/.

[14] See http://www.google.com/Top/Science/Social_Sciences/Sociology/Journals/ for "Science > Social Sciences > Sociology > Journals".

[15] http://www.ebscohost.com/titleLists/si-coverage.htm.

[16] http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/IBSS/about/alphabeticalJournals.htm.

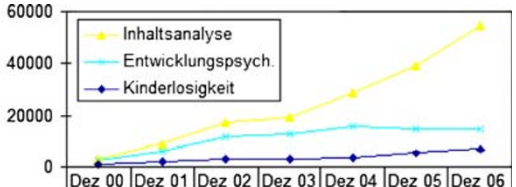
Hits in	Google	Google Scholar
The Qualitative Report	42.600	1.170
Forum: Qualitative Social Research	76.000	2.260
Sozialer Sinn. Zeitschrift für hermeneutische Sozialforschung	259	26
Zeitschrift für Qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung	54	109
International Journal of Qualitative Methods	20.900	535
Qualitative Sociology Review	738	75

Fig. 3 Comparison of different qualitative journals

Only because *FQS* is available free of charge, a growing number of researchers came to knew about the journal and joint its development: by participating in the editorial team or editorial board, by serving as reviewers, copy-editors or translators, by representing *FQS* during international conferences etc. Their engagement vice versa helped to improve the publicity, attractiveness and reputation of *FQS*, probably an important pre-condition for receiving funds from German Research Foundation up from 2001, which again helped to improve technology and in this way minimized the editorial work.

The extent to which the open access character of *FQS* helped German authors to worldwide disseminate their research findings is shown in Fig. 4, presenting access data between 2000 and 2006 for three articles: the first one deals with an analysis procedure (content analysis) of principal interest beyond the respective disciplinary scope, the second one describes the state of qualitative research within one sub discipline (qualitative developmental psychology), and the third serves as an example for articles, addressed to a limited field of research (involuntary childless marriages).

Figure 4 demonstrates the tendency of increased accesses in course of time in the case of open access, a tendency also continuing in 2007, as for example the article on qualitative content analysis with all in all 171,322 accesses between 2000 and 2006 had been accessed/downloaded additionally 26,946 times between January and May 2007. Results like those reported above may indicate that it might be attractive



	Dez 00	Dez 01	Dez 02	Dez 03	Dez 04	Dez 05	Dez 06
Inhaltsanalyse	2844	9020	17332	19337	28807	39193	54789
Entwicklungspsych.	2613	6141	11663	12738	15633	14976	15021
Kinderlosigkeit	1079	1872	2927	2982	3550	5569	7108

Fig. 4 Accesses to articles, published in *FQS* (3 examples)

for publishers to make available electronic copies from print journals to a wide audience at least after a short embargo time to improve the publicity and acceptance of the own products, a strategy the "Social Science Open Access Repository" (SSOAR) invites interested publishers and journals to.[17]

Authors immediately experience the visibility of their work, published in *FQS*: Within a survey, currently undertaken to explore the use of *FQS*, less than 20% of the authors mentioned no feedback after having published in *FQS*, the others reported citations of their work in online and print media, having been invited to conferences or to participate in other journals or book projects, having been contacted by colleagues and even—in a few cases—having received job offers or research assignments. Additionally, we continuously receive requests for reprints of articles, originally published in *FQS* in print journals or international handbooks; within the rubric *FQS* Reviews cooperation with various German and international publishers was arranged.[18]

3.3.1 Beyond the scope of a journal …

Already in its very beginning *FQS* claimed a forum character that is providing publishing, information and communication facilities alike. But we soon had to learn that potentials of scientific exchange, arising from the Internet and its media, not necessarily mean that such potentials are used. In the case of *FQS,* this reservation partly may have been due to an antiquated technology used in the beginning, new tools for commenting articles directly are in preparation and it will be seen in the future if an improved technology will be more attractive to support also discursive practices. So we established tools complementary to the journal: Following the example of QUALRS-L, in 1999 we initiated the mailing list QSF-L[19] as an electronic information and communication forum for German language qualitative research. QSF-L today is the most important list in the field of German language qualitative research with more than 800 subscribers and about 40 postings per month. But still discussion plays a subordinate role, compared to information requests. One consequence was the idea that the Internet and its tools for synchronic and asynchronic communication might be supportive for research endeavors within smaller groups with a closer shared interest. Since 2001, we additionally have started the "NetzWerkstatt", a collaborative Internet research platform especially for students, undergoing their PhD: within the NetzWerkstatt currently four groups

[17] http://www.cedis.fu-berlin.de/ssoar/.

[18] AltaMira (London), Anthropos (Barcelona), Asanger (Kröning), Auer (Heidelberg), Beltz (Weinheim), Barbara Budrich (Leverkusen-Opladen), Campus (Frankfurt/M.), Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag (Wiesbaden), edition diskord (Tübingen), gedisa editorial (Barcelona), Halem (Cologne), Haupt Verlag (Bern), Huber (Bern), Humanities Online (Frankfurt/M.), Juventa (Weinheim), Peter Lang (Frankfurt/M. and New York), Left Coast Press (Walnut Creek), LIT (Münster), OUP—Open University Press (Buckigham), Pabst (Lengerich), Sage (London), Schulz Kirchner Verlag (Idstein), transcript (Bielefeld), UVK—Universitätsverlag Konstanz (Konstanz), Waxmann (Münster), WUV—Wiener Universitätsverlag (Vienna), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (Göttingen), VS Verlag (Wiesbaden).

[19] http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/kommunikation/mailingliste/.

of 8–10 researchers work together, partly supervised by the NetzWerkstatt-team, partly organizing their work in peer groups (Mey et al. 2006). While developing the NetzWerkstatt we recognized a need also for offline meetings, accompanying the everyday online exchange. So we initiated an annual conference "Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung", combining lectures, workshops, poster and resources sessions, panel discussion etc. Starting 2005, it needed only three years that the Berliner Methodentreffen became the most prominent German language meeting for qualitative researchers (see Mey et al. 2006, for details about the concept and about evaluation results of the conference).

Within this ensemble of linked resources *FQS* just has been the starting point and still is the most prominent example. Most of the colleagues participating in the annual meeting learned about the conference by information, disseminated in *FQS* and QSF-L. Selected articles from the Berliner Methodentreffen are published in *FQS* and linked back from there to the archive of the Berliner Methodentreffen, containing texts, posters, video and audio files. So around these resources a community was successively built, which in a next step probably will participate in the benefits from the so called "green" way of open access publishing—to deposit preprints and postprints from articles, published in print journals, in open access repositories—after having been familiar with the "golden" way (publishing in an open-access journal) for some years: The Social Science Open Access Repository (SSOAR) will be a new crystallization point for qualitative researchers, providing, accessing and sharing their knowledge with others worldwide. It is just this sharing—giving and taking—which was in the center of our idea of "prosuming", of consuming and producing at the same time we invited our readers to while starting *FQS* in 2000.

4 Future perspectives

For sure, the success of *FQS* is partly due to the specific segment—qualitative research. Trying to establish journals with a similar visibility and impact within the core disciplines of open access, i.e., in the sciences, will be far more difficult having the strong and already well-established North American competitors in mind.

Despite of the limited generalizabilty of the "example *FQS*" open access would mean to enormously improve the visibility and impact of German journals, a development which just only started. The necessity for further information and for future action was stressed by the study "Publishing Strategies in Transformation?", conducted by the German Research Foundation (see Fournier 2005 for a summary). The platform open-access.net, funded by the DFG and providing information about open access for different disciplines and publishing roles (authors, editors, publishers, etc.) is a first and important step in a process of "giving back researchers the control over their own publishing efforts" (Schneider 2004:122). Similarly important is that funding organizations like the DFG not only stress the importance of open access to publicly funded programmatically, but directly support the establishment of open-access journals and repositories.

For sure, the debate about open access still has a partly polemic character. In a way these polemics result from fears, originating in a transformation process which affected the traditional value added chain in the sciences in a fundamental way: The Internet provides new ways of scientific knowledge (exchange) and in this way creates new models of scientific communication and publishing (Bargheer 2006). Whatever position a concrete person or institution might take within this controversy field: New ways of producing, consuming and distributing scientific knowledge disturbed the old and relatively stable balance between authors, publishers, and libraries, and so new role definitions will be necessary as well as flexible arrangements of co-constructing the relations between the agents involved. Within this process, *FQS* is just one example.

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