

# 3. NARRATIVE INTERVIEWING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract (dt.)

Die COVID-19-Pandemie hat persönliche und berufliche Herausforderungen für Wissenschaftler\*innen auf der ganzen Welt geschaffen, aber die Feldforschung besonders stark getroffen. In diesem Artikel diskutiere ich die Herausforderungen, denen ich bei der Durchführung von Feldforschung in der Ukraine zu Beginn der Pandemie gegenüberstand, und beschreibe meine Bewältigungsstrategien. Jedoch wurden nicht alle meine Forschungsprobleme durch die Pandemie verursacht, sondern wurden oft von ihr verstärkt. Dieser Artikel trägt zur Literatur über qualitative Methodologien bei, indem er diese Probleme ins Zentrum stellt. Mit Fokus auf die ukrainische Identität im Lichte des andauernden bewaffneten Konflikts im Donbas basierte mein Forschungsdesign auf biographisch-narrativen Interviews, die mit der Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) analysiert wurden. Insgesamt hatte ich zwei Hauptprobleme: Die Einhaltung der Forschungsprinzipien der GTM (iterativ-zyklischer Forschungsprozess, theoretische Stichprobenziehung und theoretische Sättigung) sowie Probleme bei der Durchführung narrativer Interviews. Meine Bewältigungsstrategien können als pragmatischer Ansatz zur Forschung zusammengefasst werden. Eine meiner methodischen Erkenntnisse ist der Unterschied zwischen einem idealtypischen Verständnis von Forschung und der realtypischen Durchführung von Forschung und spezifischen Methoden. Darüber hinaus argumentiere ich in Bezug auf das narrative Interview-Format in meinem thematischen Kontext, dass die sowjetische Sozialisation die Auswirkungen von Schützes narrativen Antrieben und Einschränkungen hemmt, jedoch bereits im Prozess des Verblässens ist.

**Schlagwörter:** narrative Interviews, Grounded Theory, ukrainische Identität, Donbas-Konflikt

## Abstract (eng.)

The COVID-19 pandemic has created personal and professional challenges for scholars across the board, but it has hit field research particularly hard. In this paper, I discuss the challenges I faced while conducting field research in Ukraine at the onset of the pandemic and emphasize my coping strategies.

However, not all of my research problems were caused by the pandemic but were often amplified by it. This paper contributes to the literature on qualitative methodologies by bringing these troubles to the fore. Focusing on Ukrainian identity in light of the ongoing armed conflict in the Donbas, my research design was based on biographical-narrative interviews, analyzed with the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM). Overall, I faced two major methodological problems: adhering to GTM's research principles (iterative-cyclical research process, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation) as well as problems with conducting narrative interviews. My coping strategies can be summarized as a pragmatic approach to research, as one of my methodological lessons learned is the difference between an ideal-typical understanding of research and the real-typical conduct of research and specific methods. Moreover, concerning the narrative interview format in my thematic context, I argue that Soviet socialization inhibits the impact of Schütze's narrative drives and constraints, but is already in the process of fading out.

**Keywords:** narrative interview, Grounded Theory, Ukrainian identity, Donbas conflict

### 1. Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991, Ukraine has been confronted with the challenge of consolidating itself as an independent nation-state. Briefly, Ukraine has long been considered a deeply divided country (Zhurzhenko 2014, Riabchuk 2012): while the sense of national belonging has traditionally been significantly stronger in Western Ukraine, followed by Central Ukraine, it has been lower in Southern and Eastern Ukraine with simultaneously continuing strong(er) ties to Russia (Kulyk 2016). The implications of Ukraine's difficult nation-building are evident in recent history: the loss of Crimea and the outbreak of the armed secessionist conflict in the Donbas in spring 2014 appear “like a self-fulfilling prophecy” as the logical outcome of deep cleavages among Ukrainians (Zhurzhenko 2014: 249). The ongoing Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, since 2022, seems to underline the difficulties – but also costs – of Ukrainian nation-building.

Against this backdrop I focused on the national identity of Ukrainian internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the conflict region. Based on narrative interviews I analyzed with the Grounded Theory methodology (GTM) how the national identity of Ukrainian IDPs is constituted and how it has developed over the course of their lives, with a particular focus on the impact of the Donbas conflict.

This paper contributes to the sociological qualitative methodological discussion rather than directly presenting results from my research. In academia, we find an abundance

of publications offering fascinating as well as socially meaningful research results. In contrast, we lack such an abundance of testimonies of research problems and failures that could empower and support students and junior researchers to manage unexpected problems in their own research projects.

I first present my ideal-typical research design (section 2) to provide contextual information for the following critical reflection on my work. Next, I outline the research challenges I faced while conducting field research at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In my case, I faced two major methodological problems: adhering to GTM's research principles (iterative-cyclical research process, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation) (section 3.1) as well as problems with conducting narrative interviews (section 3.2). I reflect on my research design and present my coping strategies. In the end, I sum up my methodological reflection by presenting two methodological lessons learned (section 4). First, my coping strategies demonstrate the difference between an ideal-typical understanding of research and methods on the one hand and the real-typical conduct of research and especially specific methods on the other. Second, in the context of my experiences with narrative interviewing in Ukraine, I argue that Fritz Schütze's narrative drives and could not unfold their impact in my study. I tie these problems to their socialization and experiences during the Soviet regime. However, the impact of Soviet socialization on narrative practices seems already to be in the process of fading out in Ukraine. Lastly, I want to stress that most of my research problems were not caused by COVID-19 but were amplified by it. Thus, these reflections have wider relevance for research undertaken in politically sensitive contexts, and particularly for researchers conducting narrative interviews and/or generating Grounded Theory.

## **2. The ideal-typical research design: narrative interviews and the Grounded Theory**

Regarding my research question, I chose to work with a qualitative rather than quantitative research design. The literature demonstrates existing scientific research interest in measuring Ukrainian identity, in the sense of its elements and their strengths (Shulman 2004, Kulyk 2016). Such quantitative studies offer quantifiable results and representative samples, which are useful for identifying causalities and correlations. In

contrast, I chose a qualitative approach to explore Ukrainian national identity. More concretely, I wanted to shed light on the identity markers that constitute contemporary Ukrainian identity and thus illuminate the collectively shared understandings of being Ukrainian, as well as the relation between national identity and the armed Donbas conflict. Since these aspects have previously not been (exhaustively) explored, a qualitative approach was necessary. Consequently, I chose a combined qualitative approach: the (biographic-)narrative interview for data collection and the Grounded Theory methodology (GTM) – following Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1996) – for data analysis and as general research style.

Aimed at reconstructing social phenomena in their biographical genesis (Rosenthal 2004), the biographical approach facilitates analyzing national identity through a contextual, procedural as well as subjective perspective. In this context, the biographical approach allows us to shed light on the processes of emergence, reproduction, and transformation of social phenomena as well as their functions (Rosenthal 2004). At the same time, this approach accounts for the fact that one's sense of national belonging can change at certain biographical (turning) points (Rosenthal and Bogner 2009), for example in times of war and crisis – as it was certainly the case in my study regarding the impact of the Donbas conflict. Lastly, it is also possible to interpret the results beyond the individual level as the individual life history as well as a society's collective history can be understood to be co-constitutive of one another (Rosenthal 1994).

The narrative interview, developed by the German sociologist Fritz Schütze in the 1970s, is widely used in and beyond biography research. It contributes to my research design as it focuses solely on the subjective relevancies of the interviewees. By using a single broad narration prompt this interviewing technique avoids externally structuring the interview, as might be the case in more structured interview formats (Strübing 2013; Rosenthal 2004)<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, this method also offers the flexibility to direct one's questions to the research topic at the end of the interview (Rosenthal 2004).

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<sup>6</sup> My narration prompt followed the modification of Schütze's narrative interview by the German sociologist Gabriele Rosenthal (2004): "I would like to ask you to tell me the story of your life as well as of your family, all the experiences that come to your mind. You can take as much time as you like. I will not interrupt you, just take a few notes and come back to it later."

The interviews were analyzed using GTM techniques. Since my research interest did not focus on biography itself, GTM was particularly suitable for data analysis due to its flexibility as well as its openness to a variety of research topics. GTM and the biographical-narrative approach share interest in the social embedding of individual experiences and have mutually influenced each other. In the context of biography research, GTM is particularly useful for examining identity work as a special facet of biographical work (Müller and Skeide 2018). Working with GTM contributes to my research design in various ways. This approach offers the most exploratory view of the data (Strauss and Corbin 1996; Corbin and Strauss 2008; Strübing 2013). In that way, GTM enables the development of theory from the data itself (Strauss and Corbin 1996, 2008; Strübing 2013). Such an approach allows this research to contribute to the theoretical and empirical discourse on national identity in Ukraine by providing new, exploratory empirical insights into the topic of Ukrainian identity, which can then be abstracted from.

### **3. Research challenges in the context of COVID-19**

Overall, I faced two major methodological problems: first, I struggled to adhere to some of GTM's research principles (iterative-cyclical research process, theoretical sampling as well as theoretical saturation), and second, problems conducting narrative interviews. I will outline these challenges and my coping strategies in the following two subsections. My focus thereby lies on the challenges with narrative interviewing.

#### **3.1. Working with GTM's research principles**

First, I struggled to adhere to GTM's iterative-cyclical research process that emphasizes the temporal parallelism and mutual functional dependency of all research phases – in contrast to the classical consecutive division between data collection, analysis, and theory building (Strübing 2014). Strauss and Corbin (1996, 2008) argue that this promotes the conceptual density of the evolving theory.

In my case, the outbreak of the pandemic spontaneously terminated my research stay far ahead of time – at a point when I had been in the throes of data collection while still figuring out how the iterative-cyclical research process works. Despite my best efforts, the abrupt end of my fieldwork meant that GTM's prescribed mutual intertwining of data

collection, data analysis and theory building was not possible. Instead, I had to handle this challenge pragmatically: in the end, I managed to conduct 15 interviews before I was forced to leave by the onset of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

My limited time in the field also affected the way I handled GTM's principle of theoretical sampling. This principle suggests that sampling should not be predetermined in the stochastic or statistical sense of quantitative research, or from a prior deductive-theoretical perspective, but should be based on theoretical deliberations that are fed by the iterative-cyclical research process itself, especially through the analysis of previous interviews (Strübing 2014). In my case, I was still beginning to establish access to the field when the pandemic began, meaning that this data was collected through snowball sampling. Hence, my research did not use theoretical sampling, which is one of the major tenets of GTM.

Lastly, my struggles with GTM demand closer examination of my results with respect to its principle of theoretical saturation, which defines the state when further data collection and analysis no longer produce new insights about the research object (Corbin and Strauss 2008, Strübing 2014). This is based on the idea of conceptual, in contrast to statistical, representativeness (Strübing 2014). In order to develop some sense of conceptual representativeness I used two coping strategies. First, I chose interviews for data analysis on the basis of variance in the data itself, looking for as much diversity of information in the interviews as possible. Interviews were chosen to be analyzed by virtue of the insights interviewees gave about my phenomenon of interest, which was expressed mostly in interviews of longer duration, higher density of information and greater openness in talking to me. Second, I enriched my findings through references to other studies. Comparing and contrasting my findings to other research on the topic allowed me to broaden my scope and present an argument on how contemporary Ukrainian identity is constituted, how it appears to have developed over the past decades, and how it has been affected by the armed Donbas conflict. In

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<sup>7</sup> 15 interviews, lasting between 30 minutes and 6 hours, were conducted in Russian language across Ukraine between January and March 2020, either at the interviewees' homes or at the university campus close-by. The interviews were conducted in Russian since it is still a widely spoken (mother) language across Eastern and Southern Ukraine. A bilingual interview approach would have been the best, but could not be offered. In the end, four interviews were chosen for analysis – due to a necessary pragmatist coping approach to the research challenges I faced, but also based on GTM's research principles (see section 3).

this way, I was able to interpret my findings beyond the individual level (in line with the biographical approach, see section 2).

### 3.2. Barriers to narrative practices in Ukraine

The second major challenge I faced was implementing narrative interviews, as conceived in my theoretical framework. Indeed, I was still figuring out how to make narrative interviewing work when pandemic circumstances forced me to terminate my field research stay early. As I was hastily departing Ukraine, I also left with the feeling that my research had failed, as none of my narrative interviews seemed to have worked in the way I had imagined. However, circumstances forced me to find a pragmatic solution: I proceeded to analyze my interviews as planned, but made the reflection on my challenges with narrative interviewing another topic of my project.

This separate analysis showed that all interviewees had difficulties engaging with the narrative interview format. First, the narration preamble or in other words the interviewee's broad and instinctive response to the prompt, a summary of their life, was in most cases very short. While interviewees in the ideal-typical vision of narrative interviews continue to narrate from there on, my interviewees showed uncertainty with the interview format. Instead of freely offering their stories, they asked me what the prompt meant and demanded clarification.

Second, most interviewees spoke only in a brief, concise and 'dry' manner about their lives, so that the interviews seem more like a verbalization of one's CV: their narration is structured chronologically according to specific stages of life, such as school, studies, work, etc.

The following quote illustrates both points of argumentation:

*I10: My name is NAME. Well, uh I am from CITY1, Donetsk oblast. Well, and all my life I lived there, up until the last time when we moved to CITY2 because of the conflict. Well, we are here since 2014 [...] I am an Entrepreneur. I worked for myself. I had my own business. [...] And dealt pretty successful with this. Well, I think for me it would be easier if you would ask me questions and I answer them.*

In line with the flexibility of GTM and the narrative interview, and especially as I did not focus on the topic of biography, I decided to accommodate my interviewees with

questions that were clearer than the original prompt but were still broad enough to get them talking without structuring their narration too much. Thus, I continued with biographically orientated questions, for example addressing different life phases, hoping that clearer questions would bring them back into a narrative flow. Comparing the interviews, it seems that restructuring the format reduced difficulties. This was most visible as demands for further clarification lessened and as interviews got denser in many cases.

Finally, the interviews consisted less of typical narratives than of descriptions, argumentation and evaluations.

Against this backdrop arises the question of where their difficulties in engaging in this interview format came from. I argue that Schütze's narrative drives and constraints seem to be less effective in my sample, since it rarely happened that interviewees could give in to the narrative flow. I suggest there are several social and cultural reasons for this. First of all, the 'open' character of the narrative interview may not be that common in Ukraine. This seems plausible as all interviews developed more smoothly and with denser material after switching from an open to a more structured interview approach. At the same time, several interviewees were more accustomed to a structured interview approach, considering that giving interviews or speaking in public is part of their profession or personal commitments, e.g., doing PR, being active in a party, or being a leader in a volunteer group.

Moreover, I argue that Soviet socialization still has an influence on narrative practices in Ukraine. First, it was common in the USSR to present one's biography orally, in the sense of verbalizing one's CV, for example in the application process, as Jochen Hellbeck (2009) emphasizes. In this context, one had to demonstrate achievements in life, especially with regard to education and profession, as well as to demonstrate one's personality as an unfolding subject of Soviet consciousness (*Ibid.*). According to Polly Jones (2018), the publication of biographies written in a dry narrative style, with strong references to the development of the Soviet state and the Communist Party, was an element of state propaganda aimed at creating a new socialist image of humankind. Against this backdrop, Hellbeck (2009) concludes that this understanding of 'biography' has been the way by which a life could be adequately represented and understood during the Soviet era – an understanding that still persists today. This is visible in my interviews, considering how frequently answers were brief, concise, and 'dry', and

arranged chronologically around specific life stages, including frequent emphasis on outstanding achievements:

I5: My name is NAME. [...] Uh I am forty-one years old, I was born uh in <1970s> in CITY1. [...] Next moment, I finished SECONDARY SCHOOL in CITY1. Afterwards I studied [...] and graduated [...] with honors.

Second, I argue that narrative practices in Ukraine are still influenced, at least partly, by Soviet taboos that limited what one could or could not say out loud (Humphrey 2005). I link this to the fact that many aspects of contemporary Ukrainian nation-building have been taboos in the Soviet era. In this context, most of my interviewees did not mention these 'official' aspects of Ukrainian nation-building.<sup>8</sup> However, Soviet taboos seem to be fading, as suggested by a younger interviewee strongly emphasizing various aspects of Ukrainian history that changed from being Soviet taboos to elements of Ukraine's official nation-building, like the Holodomor<sup>9</sup>(Simon 2013):

*I9: "I clearly grew up with that understanding who the aggressor is. Because my grandma was in prison when there was Holodomor [...] and in our family there is big resentment against the Soviet regime, meaning that uh never anyone from my family thought that the Soviet Union is good and the regime is good. [...] Yes, her family survived, but I clearly understand that they wanted to kill us."*

Third, the Soviet regime used biographical questionnaires to track down dissidents. In this context, Hellbeck (2009) speaks of 'biographopolitics', a specific variant of bio- and population politics, as the Soviet regime recorded and controlled the population in a 'biographical' sense. It was therefore safest to reveal as little as possible about oneself

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<sup>8</sup> However, this does not mean that referring to Ukraine's official nation-building elements is the only and right way to express one's national sense of belonging.

<sup>9</sup> 'Holodomor refers to the collective suffering under a great famine in the early 1930s that resulted in the death of millions of Soviet citizens, in particular Ukrainians and Kazakhs. It is considered to be the consequence of the harsh Soviet collectivization of the agricultural sector, which began in the late 1920s, with the broader aim to develop the USSR into an industrialized country (Kappeler 2014, Simon 2013). However, under the Soviet Union, discussion of this topic was forbidden (e.g., Graziosi 2005). The Ukrainian state, on the other hand, recognized the Holodomor as a genocide on the Ukrainian people in 2003, blaming the Soviet regime and now Russia as its legal successor (Kappeler 2014, Simon 2013). The large number of Ukrainian famine deaths, the prevention and prohibition of relief measures, and the act of sealing Ukraine off from the rest of the USSR constitute, among others, the basis of the thesis of the Holodomor as genocide by starvation to death (Simon 2013). According to Simon (2013), the Holodomor was the punishment of the peasant population for their resistance against collectivization and particularly against grain requisitions, classed as nationalist resistance, and was thus intended to break Ukrainian nationalist tendencies against the Soviet regime.

to avoid repression. Although Soviet rule has long passed, political repression continues to be an issue in Ukraine, considering that its democratic transition has been fraught with difficulties since independence (Democracy Reporting International 2019). This became most visible in the case of an older interviewee: despite sharing a common acquaintance, she expressed great fear that I might publish her interview and it seemed that she was afraid of saying something (politically) wrong. This fear is evident in the extraordinary brevity of her interview, her constant demands for clarification of the purpose of my questions, as well as my impression that some of her answers were formulated in a 'politically correct' way. The following quotes illustrate this:

*I3: "I am worried, this won't be used on any mass media?"*

*I3: "I don't know. I don't understand. I am a citizen of this country, and of course, I live here. That's all. And what it means, I don't know. I live and work, the whole life I was working. More than 40 years. I gave my best to work for the good of this country."<sup>10</sup>*

Soviet-style narration still seems to be prevalent in contemporary narrative practices in Ukraine, but they are likely to fade away with younger generations. Whereas my interviews with older respondents were mainly characterized by a short, concise and dry report of one's biography, younger respondents tend to be more open-minded, given the length, richness and density of their interviews (e.g., criticizing the Ukrainian government, speaking of difficulties with one's partner, addressing previous taboos).

Lastly, research shows that conducting interviews with vulnerable groups is generally challenging: Hella von Unger (2018) states that asylum seekers are generally influenced in how openly they answer in interviews, explaining this with respondents' fear of stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion as a consequence of giving an interview.<sup>11</sup> This also seems to be the case for some of my interviewees who experienced discrimination, integration difficulties and acceptance problems among the local population interviewees (e.g. addressing a series of car arson in the neighbourhood affecting IDPs) – as it is shown for Ukrainian IDPs in general

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<sup>10</sup> This answer was a response to a question on the meaning of having Ukrainian citizenship.

<sup>11</sup> Although von Unger mostly focuses on the fear of getting problems with one's asylum process which is not the case for Ukrainian IDPs as they flee within the country's border her work addresses an important thought of general relevance.

(Goncharuk 2019). Consequently, as a stranger I seemed to have represented a factor of uncertainty and risk, regardless of my promises of data protection and anonymization.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, trust was one of the major challenges concerning my access to the field. Although simply locating IDPs for my research project was difficult in itself, trust seems to be one of the key factors for 'successful' interviews. Trust not only made a potential participant more likely to take part in my research, but also made them more open to share their stories. My field access strategy was, at first, based on help from third parties, mainly from members of my institution, Bielefeld University, Germany, and the Karazin National University in Kharkiv, Ukraine, which actively supported my research project. As I spent more time in Kharkiv, I began to make own acquaintances. My institutional as well as personal acquaintances served me as sponsors and key informants. In summary, most of my first interviews were organized with the help of others. These interviews were mainly short and less dense, especially with regard to one's national identity, a topic that was already highly sensitive due to the conflict. In contrast, I conducted my later interviews mainly with people whom I got to know myself in a more private context before learning about their IDP background. These interviews were comparatively much longer, denser, and more open in the information I received. Thus, my experience showed me that mediation by others might be enough to secure an interview, but not necessarily to secure the trust necessary to speak freely. As von Unger (2018) explains, consent for interviewing is not necessarily as voluntary as it seems: the request of a common acquaintance to take part in a study might evoke a sense of obligation to participate, but not to talk openly.

#### **4. Conclusion and outlook**

Critically reflecting on the 'methodological training' in my sociology study program, it is clear to me that I was ill-prepared for some of the ordinary and extraordinary challenges I faced in the field. I was trained thoroughly in various methodologies and specific

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<sup>12</sup>My experience was also underpinned by Ukrainian scholars I met during different academic occasions in Ukraine and Germany: many of them reported from their own research experience that it is still difficult in Ukraine to speak about the conflict, even with local scholars who are still sometimes held to be spies by the local population they seek to interview. Thus, trust is important when interviewing vulnerable groups, like IDPs, as well as with regard to the ongoing influence of Soviet socialization on current narrative practices in Ukraine, as already outlined.

methods, which included practical exercises, but that mainly meant that I was trained in how these should function in their ideal-typical form. At the same time, I received far less training on how to manage and cope with research challenges.

Coping with research challenges is, of course, an essential experience and postgraduate educational objective, particularly for prospective scholars. Nonetheless, I believe that we need more academic opportunities to exchange honestly and constructively about problems and failures while conducting research. This is especially true for students and junior scholars who lack extensive research experience. Whereas there is an abundance of publications on research results, we lack such an abundance of testimonies of research problems and failures that could support and empower struggling early-career researchers. This article contributes to sociological qualitative methodologies by exploring these difficulties, and may thus also be useful to the empirical training of students and prospective researchers.

In order to show how a researcher might deal with significant challenges, I first presented my ideal-typical research design based on narrative interviews and GTM (section 2) and revealed some of the challenges I faced during my research project. In short, I struggled with two research challenges: adhering to GTM's research principles (iterative-cyclical research process, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation) (section 3.1) and problems with conducting narrative interviews (section 3.2). I presented my methodological reflection in which I questioned the adequacy of my research design from the very beginning and presented my coping strategies.

I conclude by summing up two methodological lessons I have learned. First, my coping strategies highlight the difference between an ideal-typical understanding of research and methods in general on the one hand and the real-typical conduct of research (and my specific methods) on the other. For experienced researchers, this reflection may seem trivial at first. For students and junior researchers, however, this insight offers hope in an environment where researchers often despair when methods or research principles are not working as they 'should'. This article makes the case for understanding research methodologies and methods as a scientific toolkit that never restricts, but always supports research. Here, I am not suggesting that researchers simply choose the 'easy' elements of their chosen methodology and methods. Instead, I understand sound scientific work to be about coping with real-typical research

conditions and challenges in a reflexive and transparent way. Nonetheless, coping strategies have to be in line with the chosen methodology.

Secondly, I argue that socialization and experiences in the Soviet Union inhibit the impact of Schütze's narrative drives and constraints even beyond Ukraine's independence. However, this seems to be already in the process of fading out.

As Rau and Coetzee (2022: 704) emphasize "storytelling may be cross-cultural in as far as stories are told in all cultures but data collection methods are not cross-cultural and need to be designed with the participants foremost in mind". Thus, further research on the specificities and intricacies of qualitative methods in specific contexts, in this case Ukraine, can help to navigate these research contexts successfully. For example, we need further research regarding how narrative practices in Ukraine are constituted and how they have changed, especially with regard to the country's Soviet past, and how to research them. In this context, I also see interesting links to other sociological research topics, in particular to studies on politics as well as cultures of remembrance.

However, my reflection should not obscure that the narrative interview is a difficult and demanding method in general. Thus, we need more reflection on the theoretical assumptions, the methodological preconditions as well as difficulties when working with narrative interviewing, both on a national but also international-comparative level. This also requires a critical reflection on researchers' own interviewing skills.

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## **Tagungsbeiträge**

