



The Creative Commons-Attribution-Noncommercial License 4.0 International applies to all works published by IASSIST Quarterly. Authors will retain copyright of the work and full publishing rights.

Managing, sharing and re-using qualitative data: Approaches that integrate data protection, research ethics and research interests,

or: How researchers and data providers work together to make qualitative research data available for scientific re-use

Kati Mozygemba¹

Abstract

In numerous research projects, researchers generate a rich variety of qualitative research data. It is generated through the application of different research methods and manifests itself in different data types and formats. In their heterogeneity, these data allow insights into people's everyday lives from different perspectives. Qualitative research data is rich and often offers analytical potential for further research. However, in comparison to quantitative social research, where the secondary use of data is established practice, qualitative data is still used rather hesitantly. This is where the article comes in. Infrastructurally established approaches to data sharing, that take into account data protection and research ethics aspects and enable FAIR data sharing of qualitative data, are presented. It is based on the solutions of various Research Data Centers (RDC) of a network of qualitative research data infrastructures (QualidataNet), which was established as part of the National Research Data Infrastructure in Germany. The QualidataNet network is open to all RDC, repositories and other archiving partners that hold qualitative data. It enables as a 'central point of entry' 1) to provide researchers with easier access to qualitative data, to support the management of qualitative data and to help find suitable archiving partners and 2) to promote the exchange among data providers and the development of best practices for the management, sharing and re-use of qualitative data. The article addresses how 'cooperative data management' makes it possible to integrate and accompany important steps of data preparation for data sharing into the research process, so that synergies also arise for the primary research itself.

Keywords

qualitative data, research data management, data sharing, qualitative research, re-use of qualitative data

Introduction

As an integral part of research practice, research data management (RDM) offers researchers a wide range of support in handling their research data. RDM aims at providing planning and action security, facilitating the handling of legal and ethical aspects in the research process and helping generate FAIR research data (Betancort Cabrera et al., 2020). In practice, however, qualitative researchers are often unsure how good RDM should be implemented and may perceive it as an additional management step (von der Dunk & Gille, 2020), which may even detract from the actual research work or is associated with the concern that RDM could also influence qualitative research itself with its attempt at standardisation (Eberhard, 2020; Imeri et al., 2019).

A central object of RDM is to ensure, that research data are used sustainably. Due to political declarations regarding the archiving and re-use of research data, which were formulated in the early 2000s by organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2003), data sharing became more and more important. As a result, questions of data sharing are once again being discussed more intensively in qualitative scientific communities. Scientific organisations see the provision and re-use of qualitative research data as a sign of good scientific practice (German Research Foundation, 2015). Recommendations and guidelines are adopted, principles for the archiving and provision of research data are formulated and discipline-specific needs are identified by scientific societies (Akademie für Soziologie, 2019; German Anthropological Association, 2019; Schönbrodt et al., 2016).

When talking about data sharing in Germany, two different ways of handling research data can be meant. Firstly, it is part of good scientific practice in Germany to archive research data for 10 years. This archiving is the responsibility of research institutions and is usually implemented to ensure transparency over time regarding the analysis and research results of published findings. The data archived for this purpose is not usually prepared for scientific re-use and is deleted after 10 years. The second option involves the possibility of archiving research data indefinitely and making it available for scientific re-use. Funding institutions such as the German Research Foundation (DFG) or the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) are very interested in this form of data sharing, whereby research data generated in the context of projects funded by them with public funds is made available for other research. There is therefore no general legal obligation for researchers in Germany to make research data available. However, there may be an institutional or funding obligation. Researchers in Germany can apply for funding to prepare their research data for archiving with the aim of scientific re-use.

A large proportion of qualitative research data is generated in the social sciences, education, behavioural sciences and economics. The [German Data Forum \(RatSWD\)](#) is an important data infrastructure for these disciplines in Germany. It is an independent body of empirically working scientists and representatives of important public institutions in data production. It advises the Federal Government and the federal state governments on questions of research data infrastructures. As an institutionalised forum for dialogue, the RatSWD facilitates a continuous exchange between data producers and data users in science and research with the aim of improving access to high-quality and scientifically potent data. These data are a product of public, private, and scientific activities. In order

to enable a high-quality and reliable infrastructure for research data in the social, educational, behavioural, and economic sciences, the RatSWD accredits Research Data Centres (RDC) that meet the criteria for FAIR data archiving and provision. Currently there is a total of 39 RDC accredited by the RatSWD (as of November 2025) that archive research data and administrative data and make them available for scientific use. These RDC offer science and research flexible and comprehensive access to sensitive data.

Five of these RDC archive qualitative research data and make it available for scientific re-use. The specialisation of these RDC helps to provide high-quality research data and to meet community-specific needs in archiving as well as needs resulting from the particular sensitivity of qualitative research. The RDC often originated from research themselves and have developed, implemented and tested specialised workflows in collaboration with researchers. Nevertheless, the services for qualitative data are not well known and researchers need a considerable amount of expertise in data sharing in order to find the right archiving partner, information on data sharing and suitable data sets. The growing interest in the possibilities of data sharing of qualitative data is associated with a growing interest in best practices that take into account the specifics of qualitative research both in RDM in general and in archiving and re-use in particular. In order to achieve this, research-orientated RDM and cooperation between researchers and professional infrastructures are key. In this article, we therefore address the question of how researchers and data centres² can work together to prepare qualitative data during a research process in such a way that it can subsequently be archived and re-used for scientific purposes.

The article begins with an introduction into the QualidataNet network, and a brief look at its' services to improve the FAIRness of qualitative data and then goes on to discuss the special features of qualitative data and a discussion of the special requirements of qualitative data that can be taken into account in data sharing. It presents solutions that data centres³ already provide for data protection, the integration of research ethics and interests regarding the re-use of data into data processing and provision in a balanced way.

Facilitating data sharing and re-use through networking at an infrastructural level – QualidataNet

Although archiving solutions for qualitative data have been implemented in Germany, researchers still have difficulty finding qualitative data for their research projects. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that the stock of qualitative data sets available for re-use is still limited. Another reason is that specialised archiving infrastructures tend to be difficult to find. To address this, the [NFDI, funded by the German Research Foundation \(DFG\)](#), provided an opportunity to improve access to qualitative data by centralising it more strongly.

The NFDI aims to systematically develop, sustainably secure and make accessible the data holdings of science and research throughout Germany, as well as to network them (inter)nationally. The NFDI comprises 26 consortia and the consortium network Base4NFDI. These consortia were selected in a science-led process managed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The consortia cover a wide range of scientific disciplines, from cultural studies, social sciences, humanities and engineering to life

sciences and natural sciences. One of these consortia is [KonsortSWD - NFDI4Society](#). It develops and provides services for the social sciences, behavioural sciences, educational sciences and economics. In this way, it also addresses the needs of qualitative social research and

The development and implementation of solutions for RDM and the archiving and provision of qualitative research data is complex. Individual solutions with expertise for a specific topic or data type are important, but they also mean that qualitative data and services are often difficult to find. In order to facilitate access to qualitative data and counteract the fragmentation of infrastructure offerings, QualidataNet was established as part of KonsortSWD-NFDI4Society. [QualidataNet](#) is a network of data centres that hold qualitative data and other partners who are involved in RDM, data sharing and re-use of qualitative data. As a central point of entry, QualidataNet brings together the previously rather specialised and fragmented landscape of data centres for qualitative data.

Five research data centres accredited by the German Data Forum (RatSWD) were involved in setting up the network: [The RDC Archive for Spoken German](#), [the RDC eLabour](#), [the RDC for Business and Organizational Data](#), [the RDC for Education](#), [the RDC for Higher Education Research and Science Studies](#), and [the RDC Qualiservice](#). These data centres either specialise in specific topics or disciplines or define their portfolio based on the types of data that can be archived and made available. For example, the RDC Education and the RDC for Higher Education and Science Research focus on data with these thematic priorities in the field of education research and archive qualitative and quantitative data generated in this context, while the RDC eLabour and the RDC Business and Organisational Data concentrate on qualitative data from the sociology of work and organisations, and the RDC Archive of Spoken German archives and provides audio and video data of oral communication (corpora) that are used in conversation analysis and linguistics, among other fields, and are annotated accordingly. The RDC Qualiservice has no thematic focus and archives a wide range of qualitative data across topics and disciplines and makes it available for scientific research.

Other partners have joined the founding partners, including archiving partners such as QualiBi for qualitative educational research and avida for videographic research data, as well as actors with expertise in specific specialist communities or specific areas of RDM, archiving and the provision of qualitative data, such as specialist information services, the data portal for research on racism and right-wing extremism, and the Qualitative Working Group of the Data Document Initiative (DDI). QualidataNet is open to all institutions that work with qualitative data, that have an interest in networking. Whether it is to make their own data more present or to develop solutions together with others for the challenges associated with the RDM of qualitative data ([contact: info@qualidatanet.com](mailto:info@qualidatanet.com)).

QualidataNet is aimed at qualitative researchers and data centres, archives and repositories that hold qualitative data. It pools information, promotes exchange and counteracts duplicate developments. Data providers can have their data indexed in the search portal, what increases the findability of the datasets. It is a service for archiving infrastructures addressing the specifics of qualitative data as well as a service for researchers.

For infrastructures such as archives and data centres, QualidataNet offers the opportunity to exchange information, with specific expertise for a particular type of data being taken into account and

integrated into joint developments. The visibility and findability of data sets is increased, and their re-use is facilitated. The data centres in QualidataNet work together on solutions for the sharing of qualitative data. For example, in order to improve the description of qualitative data, a controlled vocabulary (QualiTerm) is being developed within the framework of QualidataNet in collaboration with researchers and has already been partially implemented by the partners. QualiTerm is intended to help fill gaps in the methodological description of qualitative data in particular by providing data centres with standardised terms for data collection methods, methods of processing and data analysis for qualitative research, which are also important descriptors for assessing the data fit of a dataset of interest. For example, on the initiative of QualidataNet the term ‘theoretical sampling’ was adopted into the DDI standardized vocabulary for the description of sampling methods (DDI Alliance 2025). Another example, as part of the [DDI Qualitative Subgroup](#) QualidataNet is involved in the metadata developments of the DDI Alliance, which is working on an international metadata standard for Cross Domain Integration to provide integration-ready data, and which should play an important role in the context of the CDIF Framework of the WorldFAIR Project. Together we are focusing on the model development for describing qualitative data across disciplines (Betancort Cabrera & Mozygamba, 2024).

Researchers find centralised access to qualitative data that has been prepared for scientific re-use and helps them find a suitable archiving partner. QualidataNet collects information on helpful tools and guidance documents that assist researchers in the RDM of qualitative data and in preparing this data for data sharing. This information is incorporated into a harmonised and integrating [RDM portfolio](#) that takes into account the requirements of qualitative data.⁴ The background to this is that researchers often find it difficult to apply generic RDM templates in qualitative research projects. Here, too, we take on board the needs that are brought to our attention by researchers and incorporate the feedback of individual researchers into our work. The guidance on RDM and data sharing of qualitative data incorporates the considerations and knowledge of all stakeholders involved in the preparation and sharing of different types of data. In the following, I will discuss some of the aspects of this joint RDM portfolio.

Research-friendly RDM means integrating the special features of qualitative research

In order to provide suitable templates and instruments for qualitative research RDM, it is essential to take into account the special characteristics of qualitative research and to understand how this data is characterised. These characteristics of qualitative data include the diversity of methods and data types, the sensitivity of the data and the topics discussed, the openness of the research process, and the contextual density of the material and the references it contains. It includes the fact that the research process is often circular rather than linear, and it also includes the fact that qualitative researchers often move confidently in the lifeworld of those being researched, which gives rise to a special sense of responsibility on the part of researchers towards those being researched.

These special features of qualitative data are relevant for RDM, for example, because they require a different approach to tools and planning instruments than standardised templates offer. For example, one central characteristic of qualitative research, which is important to address when RDM is planned,

5/18 Mozygamba, Kati (2026). Managing, sharing and re-using qualitative data: Approaches that integrate data protection, research ethics and research interests, or: How researchers and data providers work together to make qualitative research data available for scientific re-use, *IASSIST Quarterly* 50(1), pp. 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29173/iq1158>

is its openness. This means that the phenomenon under investigation emerges in the course of the research, research questions and research instruments are handled flexibly and adapted during the research. It is often unclear at the beginning of the research how large a sampling will be and hypotheses for the selection of cases are also dependent on the initial analysis steps and are only formulated during the circular research process. The openness of the research process means, for example, that information about the aim and procedure of the study cannot be described comprehensively for informed consent, or that ethical considerations in advance cannot address all ethical challenges that may arise in the field.

In addition, the wide variety of methodological approaches (interviews, group discussions, observations and the analysis of document corpora, often in combination etc.) qualitative research encompasses, produces complex and particularly information-rich data in a wide variety of types and formats (e.g., texts, images and audio-visual materials). The heterogeneity and complexity of this material, which also often contains sensitive personal data, poses particular challenges for RDM. Furthermore, qualitative data allows researchers to gain insights into people's everyday lives from different perspectives. Qualitative data offer deep insights into the lives of the people being studied. These include sensitive topics that are explored and illuminated in depth in qualitative research (Medjedović, 2020). Qualitative researchers are often confidently integrated into the field and thus into the lifeworld of those being researched. In ethnographic field research, researchers often even live in their research field and identify themselves as a research instrument that 'co-produces' knowledge together with research participants (Pels et al., 2018). The trust placed in them is coupled with a special sense of responsibility towards the research participants and in dealing with the data obtained, which is also of great importance in the context of re-use considerations. The special relationship of trust with the researched field, the trust in the researcher as a person, is often the fundamental key to people opening up and sharing their life stories. Qualitative researchers are aware of this and are keen not to disappoint the trust placed in them as researchers.

Qualitative data is highly context-sensitive. They contain dense descriptions and references in the material. The contextual embedding of qualitative data is the basis for reconstructing, understanding and comprehending social meaning (Eberhard, 2020; Hollstein & Ullrich, 2003). Therefore, the contextualisation of a data set including different contexts (institutional, content-related, methodological and situational contexts) is a prerequisite for their research and relevant for the analysis, especially if researchers were not involved in the data collection.

The special features of qualitative research described above mean that researchers need flexible solutions that meet their project-, material- or discipline-specific needs and that they trust. Solutions that prioritise data protection, research ethics and data security while maintaining the analytical and re-use value of the data and materials. Some solutions are presented below, most of which have been developed in co-operation with researchers.

Addressing the special needs of qualitative data in RDM and archiving-practice

Taking the special characteristics of the research process and data life cycle into account – continuous guidance and cooperation with researchers

The broad experience in RDM of quantitative data can only be transferred to qualitative data to a limited extent, because qualitative data are diverse and place different demands on RDM than standardised data and a linear research process (Medjedović, 2020; Minion, 2023; Pyo et al., 2023). If RDM templates and instruments are to be helpful for qualitative researchers, they must take into account the needs of qualitative data. Qualitative research requires an RDM that is just as open, cyclical and intertwined as the research process itself (von Unger, 2020). Accordingly, RDM templates must be flexible and manageable.

This flexible approach includes, that the data life cycle must also be read and applied differently than in a linear research process. Qualitative research processes go through the individual phases of the data life cycle again and again, refer to each other and repeat themselves. This means that passing through individual areas must itself be thought of as cyclical. DMPs, which are intended to help researchers deal with their data, also support qualitative researchers in their reflections, for instance with regard to the definition of responsibilities and the documentation of technical and organisational measures for handling the data. However, in order to be able to record and plan the qualitative research process, DMPs must be handled flexibly in the sense of a 'living document,' which simultaneously helps to plan, document, adapt and reflect on the research process and the decisions made during it.

How RDC cooperate with research communities – Qualiservice' continuous guidance and cooperation with Specialized Information Services

Good data management is even more important if the research data is to be made available for subsequent scientific use. Ideally, the data should already be processed during the research project in cooperation with the data centre selected for archiving. This approach avoids additional tasks at the end of a project and at the same time harbours synergies for the primary project itself – for example with regard to the transparency of the documentation of the research process (Fielding, 2004).

How data centres cooperate with researchers in the data preparation before submission varies. Some data centres support researchers throughout the entire research process, whereby the type of support differs. QualidataNet recommends that researchers contact their chosen archiving partner very early on in the research process (ideally during the application stage) to find out what support and assistance is available for data preparation. Researchers can usually contact the RDC where they wish to archive their data if they have any questions, and templates and guidance documents will be provided. Even further is the approach to accompany researchers from the application stage in all relevant steps of data preparation including helping with informed consent, the development and implementation of an anonymisation concept or contextualisation. This is the approach Qualiservice offers. The consultants, who have research experience themselves, are in contact with the researchers throughout the course of the project. The continuous guidance aims at integrating data preparation into the research process as far as possible in order to utilise synergies in data preparation for the project itself and avoid a backlog of tasks at the end of the project. Special requirements of a supported research

project can so be responded to flexibly during the course of the project. Together with the researchers the data is jointly conceptualised in one or more data sets. In addition, the contact before the application is submitted ensures that the costs for processing in the project and for the data centre are considered and calculated.

RDC also cooperate with researchers and research communities in the development of infrastructure, for example to integrate discipline-specific requirements into curation workflows and data preparation. One way of implementing this is through cooperation with Specialist Information Services (SIS). The RDC Qualiservice cooperates with the SIS Social and Cultural Anthropology, SIS Politics, SIS Sociology, SIS Criminology, and the SIS Gender Studies for the RDM and archiving of qualitative data. SIS aim to provide scientists with quick and direct access to specialist literature and research-relevant information. To this end, SIS develop offerings for the individual disciplines. Depending on the focus and specific interests of a subject, various services can be developed in consultation with the specialist community, e.g., tools for accessing digital resources can be provided. SIS have a very good knowledge of their respective disciplines. The cooperation between the RDC and the SIS opens up access to qualitative research data for specific communities and makes it possible to work together with researchers in so-called use studies on workflow development for certain subject-specific data types.

Data protection and research ethics – data centers procedural and technical support for controlled access

Data protection and research ethics aspects are another of the key points when deciding in favour of or against data sharing. The question of whether data sharing can be implemented at all in terms of data protection law and research ethics must be answered by each project itself. Here, too, the challenges for qualitative data are different from those for quantitative data, as targeted narrative incentives evoke comprehensive narratives and interwoven information, which in their combination can be particularly sensitive for research participants and third parties and are often personal. In addition, vulnerable groups and sensitive topics are often researched qualitatively.

On the other hand, qualitative data is often so dense in the topics covered that it is frequently not evaluated exhaustively and offers further interesting research approaches for theory and method development beyond the original project. In order to enable the re-use of sensitive qualitative data, the RDC represented in QualidataNet work with various protection and security measures that combine different elements. This includes that the mentioned data centres make research data itself available exclusively for scientific purposes after signing a user agreement with qualified scientists for a specific period of time. The technical organisational measures of data centres can also include classifying data records or parts of data records into different security categories that limit access to varying degrees. The spectrum of options ranges from protected download to use at an on-site guest research workstation, which is separate from the Internet. To include the dataset- or project-specific needs into account, there is the option for primary researcher of contractually agreeing dataset-specific conditions for subsequent use in addition to the standardised regulations. Examples of this include embargoes or the exclusion of data from teaching.

Informed consent and anonymization – data centres various approaches of verification and tools development

Another aspect that is linked to data protection and is of importance in terms of research ethics is the instrument of informed consent. With regard to informed consent legally verified templates that can be adapted to specific research projects (Qualiservice, 2025a, 2025b) are offered as well as discipline-specific guidance evaluating on alternatives (Huber & Imeri, 2021). With regard to the application of informed consent in the qualitative research field, researchers frequently express concern that participants could drop out or that data generation could otherwise be legally overridden.

In addition to assumed disruptions in fieldwork, informed consent in qualitative research harbours further challenges, which in turn are linked to the openness of the research process. For example, study content often changes during the project, which has an impact on the study description in the Informed Consent. Similar challenges also arise when using templates for applying for ethics votes, because requirements often become apparent and relevant during the course of a research project and have not been foreseen. At the beginning of a qualitative project, for instance in an application for an ethics review, they can only be anticipated to a limited extent. Qualitative researchers therefore need to continuously implement ethical reflection at every step of the research and at every step of the data life cycle (von Unger, 2018). If there is a cooperative data preparation the RDC can help in reflecting difficulties. In Germany, research ethics is still largely absent from the methodological curricula of academic education. Researchers therefore have a great need for guidance and support in this area, especially when it comes to sharing qualitative data.

If the processing of personal data is allowed original data and pseudonymised data or contact details for later longitudinal analyses can be archived. However, data is often anonymised before it is passed on to a data centre. The challenge in anonymising qualitative data is to protect the personal rights of the participants while at the same time preserving as much socially relevant information as possible. Depending on the specific data center, support is offered via guidance and through accompanying the creation of an anonymisation concept (e.g., FSSDA; Mozygemba & Hollstein, 2025; QDR; UKDS). The anonymisation itself is usually carried out in the research project itself. An approach, that allows for different degrees of sensitivity and so for keeping relevant information on different abstraction levels is the 'Flexible Anonymisation' developed by the RDC Qualiservice (Mozygemba & Hollstein, 2025). Flexible anonymisation involves finding replacements for information that can be stored at different levels of abstraction, resulting in text versions with varying degrees of sensitivity that can be re-used under less or more protected access conditions. This concept is also the base of the anonymisation tool [QualiAnon](#)⁵ (Nicolai et al., 2025). It was developed to support researchers in anonymizing or pseudonymizing text data. The QualiAnon tool enables data protection-compliant project organisation (e.g., ID data can be stored in a different location than the anonymisation project itself) and enables fast, uncomplicated exports of text versions with varying degrees of abstraction. The differentiated replacement schemes can then be shared with other researchers and developed further. The tool was developed by Qualiservice. Its maintenance is now part of QualidataNet.

Once the data has been prepared in the project and handed over to the data center, the curation begins. Here, too, there is usually contact with the researchers in specialised RDC. For some data centres, checking anonymisation or pseudonymisation is part of the service. This check also involves

9/18 Mozygemba, Kati (2026). Managing, sharing and re-using qualitative data: Approaches that integrate data protection, research ethics and research interests, or: How researchers and data providers work together to make qualitative research data available for scientific reuse, *IASSIST Quarterly* 50(1), pp. 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29173/iq1158>

liability issues in the event of any damage to third parties, which are regulated by contract. This is where the data centres differ. There are ways of completely excluding liability and making the data provider liable, and there are ways of assuming liability. At the end of the curation process, researchers usually release the data set in a final discussion.

Metadata and documentation – Qualiservice’ metadata schema and other curation support

The RDC that are currently part of QualidataNet do not made datasets openly accessible online. This also means that the description with metadata is of particular importance. The metadata is the central showcase of the datasets to the outside world, ensuring that they can be found, and it is a means of contextualising qualitative datasets. To ensure FAIRness, data centres try to use international metadata standards as a basis. However, the complexity of qualitative research makes a structured description using metadata difficult. In addition to the heterogeneity of the elements to be described (e.g., methods or data types), metadata standards were developed along the lines of standardised research. Metadata models must therefore be designed that take into account the heterogeneity of the qualitative research process. This may also explain why data centres often find local solutions that take into account the workflows and procedures of the respective institution and are less oriented towards standard models - at the expense of findability and interoperability. However, if data records are linked exclusively on a website, the probability of broken links is very high (Mannheimer, 2019).

An example of a metadata schema for qualitative data that takes international standards into account and focusses on the FAIRness of the metadata is the [Qualiservice Metadata Schema](#) (Mozygemba & Betancort Cabrera, 2025) It was developed by Betancort Cabrera & Haake (2014) and takes into account the special needs of qualitative social scientists. The scheme is a detailed and complex model based on the DDI lifecycle specification. It takes into account the work of the DDI Alliance Qualitative Data Model Working Group (Hoyle et al., 2013) and considers other metadata schemas and initiatives such as Dublin Core and Datacite, DCAT and the REFI-QDA standard in order to optimise the interoperability of metadata. The associated metadata form suggests terms for the description and leaves room for individual entries (e.g., the description of methods used). When assigning metadata, it is important that all studies can be read and found internationally by interested parties on different platforms (FAIR Principle, F4 ‘(meta)data are registered or indexed in a searchable resource’, Wilkinson et al., 2016). Distributed archiving is one option for presenting mixed-methods studies well. Co-operation with repositories that hold quantitative data and linking the datasets belonging to a study in the metadata contributes to semantic interoperability (FAIR principle, I3 ‘(meta)data include qualified references to other (meta)data’, Wilkinson et al., 2016). To meet this, Qualiservice has implemented distributed archiving with GESIS Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences. Persistent identifiers enable the unambiguous allocation and citation of data records and contribute to findability. Clear access conditions, user agreements and documentation of the datasets complement the metadata schema and ensure accessibility and reusability of the data (FAIR Principles for Accessibility and Re-use).

Study or methodological reports are often published together with the metadata, some of which can also be searched in full text. If these are given a DOI, they can be counted as a project publication. The study report (Heuer et al., 2025) is a structured description of the contextual information that is important for understanding the research data. Here, researchers can also record possible ideas for

the subsequent use of their data (see Habermas (2022) as an example). Guidance to support researchers in documenting qualitative data are provided by several data centres (e.g., FSSDA; Heuer et al., 2025; UKDS) and can take discipline-specific requirements into account (Rizzolli et al., 2025). In addition to this non-sensitive published context material, RDC usually archive other materials such as project reports, codebooks, MAXQDA exports, memos, etc. as context material that can be made available for subsequent use depending on the defined access conditions.

Conclusion and Outlook

A culture of sharing qualitative research data is still establishing itself rather hesitantly (Medjedović, 2011, 2014; Mozersky et al., 2020). Researchers have little to no experience in sharing qualitative data or have even shared data themselves via a professionalised repository. They are interested in more information on how, what and where data can be shared (McCarthy, 2023). The reluctance and sometimes scepticism (Mozersky et al., 2020) has its origins in the special features of qualitative data – especially in their sensitivity with regard to data protection, research ethics and data security (Gebel et al., 2017; Medjedović, 2011; Mozersky et al., 2020; Opitz & Mauer, 2005). Reasons also include the time-consuming and resource-intensive preparation for data sharing or the lack of integration of the topic into the curricula for scientific training.

Alongside this reluctance to share and re-use qualitative data, however, there is also growing interest. Researchers are increasingly willing to make data available for further scientific use (Mannheimer, 2019), provided that adequate data protection and research ethics solutions are available. Researchers often point out that the material, which usually contains statements and information that go far beyond the main research interest, cannot be researched exhaustively in the (primary) project. Data sharing opens up the option of analysing existing research data from new perspectives. It can help to research fields that are difficult to access more intensively without overstressing the willingness to participate in research. Data sharing allows time comparisons and follow-up studies to be carried out, interesting contrasts to be considered and sensitisation to specific target groups and research fields (Fielding, 2004; Gebel et al., 2017; Medjedović, 2011; Sherif, 2018). It is also assumed that re-use of elaborately collected data can be more economical and that it strengthens public trust in science (DuBois et al., 2018). In scientific education, data sharing allows students to prepare for practical research activities and can be a valuable basis for qualification work. In addition, data sharing can also strengthen the ‘voice of research participants’ (DuBois et al., 2018).

Researchers see a wide range of scenarios for using research data that has already been collected for content-related questions as well as for methodological research and, embedded in this, the examination of quality criteria for qualitative research. However, the prerequisite is that the collected data fulfil certain quality criteria (Sherif, 2018). These include aspects of data protection, research ethics and data security as well as the documentation of how the data was generated in order to counter the problem of ‘not having been there’ (Heaton, 2004) and to better assess the fit with certain research questions (Medjedović & Witzel, 2010).

With the infrastructure described in mind, it can be said that qualitative research data can be used sustainably in accordance with the FAIR criteria. There are solutions from specialised infrastructures that guarantee data protection, data security and scientific authenticity and contextualisation, which

are developed further together with researchers. The networking of various stakeholders creates a basis for a central access point to data, information and exchange for researchers and data centres. However, it is also clear that researchers still have little concrete experience with the data sharing of qualitative data and, like RDM staff, need more knowledge about the archiving and subsequent use of these kinds of data. To support this, QualidataNet is currently establishing a forum for the re-use of qualitative data on its website. Here, researchers can find best practices for secondary use, see how others approach secondary analysis, and exchange ideas with other researchers about secondary use. The forum for Secondary Research and re-use of qualitative data kicked off with an event at the German Sociology Congress 2025. At this event, researchers who work with secondary analysis and infrastructure providers addressed a wide range of issues, from contextualisation and the historicisation of narrative stories to the question of how to deal with any 'interviewer errors' that may have been identified as such in the secondary analysis.

When data centres and researchers work together on data preparation and also cooperate in the development of archiving solutions, services for research are created. Services that are tailored to the needs of different research communities. Trust is central to the cooperation between data centres, RDM and researchers. Trust that also fulfils the frequently perceived obligation towards the research participants. Answers are needed that meet the needs of researchers and take into account discipline-specific views, terminology and requirements as well as data type-specific ones and incorporate research cultures into the development of solutions and services. Tools and handouts must be flexible and contain added value for researchers. There is also a need for visible re-use of qualitative data, for researchers to experiment, develop approaches, share their experiences and results, and feed into an ongoing discourse on secondary use of qualitative data.

Data sharing does not have to be an option for all qualitative research projects, but it can be. If the archiving and sustainable provision of data is envisaged, it should be discussed and planned with the appropriate archiving partner as early as possible (preferably during the application process).

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Noemi Betancort Cabrera for her helpful advice and support on the information provided on the aspects concerning the metadata of qualitative data.

References

- Akademie für Soziologie, A. (2019). Richtlinien zum Umgang mit Forschungsdaten in der Soziologie. <https://www.dfg.de/resource/blob/174572/440f0736e5ee261b9c9e9a5df6f9ff67/richtlinien-forschungsdaten-soziologie-data.pdf>
- Betancort Cabrera, N., Bongartz, E. C., Dörrenbächer, N., Goebel, J., Kaluza, H., & Siegers, P. (2020). White Paper on implementing the FAIR principles for data in the Social, Behavioural, and Economic Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.17620/02671.60>

- Betancort Cabrera, N., & Haake, E. (2014). Das Qualiservice Metadatenschema. Qualiservice. <https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:gbv:46-00103643-13>
- Betancort Cabrera, N., & Mozygemba, K. (2024). Improving interdisciplinary research with cross-domain metadata for qualitative data objects. In: Helmholtz Metadata Collaboration (HMC) Conference 2024 online.
- DDI Alliance. (2025). Sampling Procedure (Version 2.0.0) [Controlled vocabulary]. CESSDA. urn:ddi:int.ddi.cv:SamplingProcedure:2.0.0.
- DDI Qualitative Data Subgroup. Retrieved November 2025 from <https://ddi-alliance.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/DDI4/pages/3083862017/Qualitative+Data+Subgroup>
- DuBois, J. M., Strait, M., & Walsh, H. (2018). Is It Time to Share Qualitative Research Data? *Qualitative Psychology*, 5(3), 380-393. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qap0000076>
- Eberhard, I. (2020). Der Kontext bestimmt alles. Kontextdaten und Containerobjekte als Lösungsmöglichkeit für den Umgang mit sozialwissenschaftlichen qualitativen Daten. Erfahrungen aus dem Pilotprojekt 'Ethnographische Datenarchivierung' an der Universitätsbibliothek Wien. *ABI Technik*, 40(2), 169-176. <https://doi.org/10.1515/abitech-2020-2007>
- Fielding, N. (2004). Getting the most from archived qualitative data: epistemological, practical and professional obstacles. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(1), 97-104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570310001640699>
- FSSDA. Anonymisation and Personal Data. Retrieved November 2025 from <https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/en/services/data-management-guidelines/anonymisation-and-identifiers/>
- FSSDA. Documenting background information. Finnish Social Science Data Archive. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/en/services/data-management-guidelines/processing-qualitative-data-files/#background>
- Gebel, T., Rosenbohm, S., & Hense, A. (2017). Sekundäranalyse qualitativer Interviewdaten. Neue Perspektiven in der Industrial Relations-Forschung. *Industrielle Beziehungen. Zeitschrift für Arbeit, Organisation und Management*, 24(1), 7-30. <https://doi.org/10.3224/indbez.v24i1.02>
- German Anthropological Association. (2019). Position paper on the handling of anthropological research data [Position paper]. https://www.dgska.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Positionspapier_Bearbeitet-fu%CC%88r-MV_EN_29.11.2019.pdf
- German Data Forum (RatSWD). Retrieved November 2025 from <https://www.konsortswd.de/en/about/ratswd/>
- German Research Foundation (2015). DFG Guidelines on the Handling of Research Data. German Research Foundation. <https://doi.org/10.2312/ALLIANZOA.019>

- Habermas, T. (2022). The longitudinal study of brief life narratives: Mainlife Study (2022-2019). Qualiservice & Gesis. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/1651>
- Heaton, J. (2004). *Reworking Qualitative Data*. Sage.
- Heuer, J.-O., Kretzer, S., Mozygamba, K., Huber, E., & Hollstein, B. (2025). Contextualizing qualitative research data for secondary re-use — a guide for researchers on the preparation of a study report. Translated and adapted version of the Qualiservice Working Paper QS-WP-1-2020, Bremen, Qualiservice. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3791>
- Hollstein, B., & Ullrich, C. G. (2003). Einheit trotz Vielfalt? Zum konstitutiven Kern qualitativer Sozialforschung. *Soziologie*, 32(4), 29-43.
- Hoyle, L., Corti, L., Gregory, A., Martinez, A., Wackerow, A., Alvar, E., Betancort Cabrera, N., Gallagher, D., Gebel, T., Hautamaki, J., Kuula-Luumi, A., McEachern, S., & Zuell, C. (2013). A Qualitative Data Model for DDI <https://doi.org/10.3886/DDIWORKINGPAPER05>
- Huber, E., Imeri, S. (2021). Informed consent in ethnographic research: A common practice facing new challenges (Vol. 4-2021). Qualiservice. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/1070>
- Imeri, S., Sterzer, W., & Harbeck, M. (2019). Forschungsdatenmanagement in den ethnologischen Fächern. Bericht aus dem Fachinformationsdienst Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie. *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 71-75. <https://doi.org/10.18452/21500>
- KonsortSWD - NFDI4Society. Retrieved November 2025 from <https://www.konsortswd.de/en/>
- Mannheimer, S., Pienta, A., Kirilova, D., Elman, C., Wutich, A. (2019). Qualitative Data Sharing: Data Repositories and Academic Libraries as Key Partners in Addressing Challenges. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(5), 643-664. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218784991>
- McCarthy, M., Gillies, K., Rousseau, N., Wade, J., Gamble, C., Toomey, E., Matvienko-Sikar, K., Sydes, M., Dowling, M., Bryant, V., Biesty, L., Houghton, C. (2023). Qualitative data sharing practices in clinical trials in the UK and Ireland: towards the production of good practice guidance. *HRB Open Research*, 6(10). <https://doi.org/10.12688/hrbopenres.13667.1>
- Medjedović, I. (2011). Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Interview Data: Objections and Experiences. Results of a German Feasibility Study. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 12, No 3 (2011): Qualitative Archives and Biographical Research Methods. <https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-12.3.1742>
- Medjedović, I. (2014). *Qualitative Sekundäranalyse: zum Potenzial einer neuen Forschungsstrategie in der empirischen Sozialforschung*. Springer VS.
- Medjedović, I. (2020). Forschungsdatenmanagement und Sekundärnutzung qualitativer Daten: Expertise im Rahmen der BMBF-Förderlinie 'Forschung zu sexualisierter Gewalt in pädagogischen Kontexten'. In M. Wazlawik & B. Christmann (Eds.),

Forschungsdatenmanagement und Sekundärnutzung qualitativer Forschungsdaten (Vol. 6, pp. 9-43). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.

- Medjedović, I., & Witzel, A. (2010). Wiederverwendung qualitativer Daten. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Minion, J. (2023). Managing Qualitative Research Data. In K. Thompson, E. Hill, E. Carlisle-Johnston, D. Dennie, & É. Fortin (Eds.), *Research Data Management in the Canadian Context: A Guide for Practitioners and Learners* (English ed.). Western University, Western Libraries.
- Mothersky, J., Parsons, M., Walsh, H., Baldwin, K., McIntosh, T., & DuBois, J. M. (2020). Research Participant Views regarding Qualitative Data Sharing. *Ethics & Human Research*, 42(2), 13-27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eahr.500044>
- Mothersky, J., Walsh, H., Parsons, M., McIntosh, T., Baldwin, K., & DuBois, J. M. (2020). Are we ready to share qualitative research data? Knowledge and preparedness among qualitative researchers, IRB Members, and data repositories curators. *IASSIST Quarterly*, 43(4). <https://doi.org/doi:10.29173/iq952>
- Mozygemba, K., Betancort Cabrera, N. (2025). Specifics of metadata development for qualitative social research. *IASSIST 2025*, Bristol, UK. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15855651>
- Mozygemba, K., Hollstein, B. (2025). Guidance on the anonymization and pseudonymization of qualitative text-based research data. Translated and adapted version of the Qualiservice-Working Paper QS-WP-5-2023, Bremen.
- Mozygemba, K., Gebel, T., Hanekop, H., Köchling, S., Lösch, T., Reineke, S., Schierbaum, K. (2025): Forschungsdatenmanagement und Data Sharing qualitativer Daten - Eine Handreichung von QualidataNet. KonsortSWD Working Paper 14/2025. Konsortium für die Sozial-, Verhaltens-, Bildungs- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften (KonsortSWD-NFDI4Society). <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/4334>
- National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI). Retrieved November 2025 from <https://www.nfdi.de/?lang=en>
- Nicolai, T., Mozygemba, K., Kretzer, S., Hollstein, B., & Gordeev, E. (2025). QualiAnon - Qualiservice tool for anonymising text data. Qualiservice. <https://github.com/pangaea-data-publisher/qualianon>
- OECD. (2025). Declaration on Access to Research Data from Public Funding (OECD/LEGAL/0321, Ed.), retrieved November 2025 from <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/157/157.en.pdf>
- Opitz, D., & Mauer, R. (2005). Erfahrungen mit der Sekundärnutzung von qualitativem Datenmaterial – Erste Ergebnisse einer schriftlichen Befragung im Rahmen der Machbarkeitsstudie zur Archivierung und Sekundärnutzung qualitativer Interviewdaten. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0501431>

- Qualitative Data Repository (QDR). De-identification. Retrieved November 2025 from <https://qdr.syr.edu/guidance/human-participants/deidentification>
- Qualitative Data Repository (QDR). Preparing a data project: Organization and Documentation. Retrieved November 2025 from <https://qdr.syr.edu/guidance/managing/preparing-data>
- Pels, P., Boog, I., Florusbosch, J. H., Kripe, Z., Minter, T., Postma, M., Sleeboom-Faulkner, M., Simpson, B., Dilger, H., Schönhuth, M., Poser, A., Castillo, R. C. A., Lederman, R., & Richards-Rissetto, H. (2018). Data management in anthropology. The next phase in ethics governance? *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie sociale*, 26(3), 391-413. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12526>
- Pyo, J., Lee, W., Choi, E. Y., Jang, S. G., & Ock, M. (2023). Qualitative Research in Healthcare: Necessity and Characteristics. *J Prev Med Public Health*, 56, 12-20. <https://doi.org/10.3961/jpmph.22.451>
- QualidataNet. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://www.qualidatanet.com/en/>
- Qualiservice. (2025a). Template for the study information and informed consent in scientific research projects. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3790>
- Qualiservice. (2025b). Template for the study information and the informed consent form for the transmission, archiving and further scientific use of personal data. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3789>
- Qualiservice Metadata Schema. Retrieved April 2025 from https://wiki.pangaea.de/wiki/Qualiservice_Data_Model
- Research Data Center Archive for Spoken German. Retrieved April 2025 from https://agd.ids-mannheim.de/index_en.shtml
- Research Data Center eLabour. Retrieved April 2025 from <http://elabour.de/>
- Research Data Center for Business and Organizational Data (RDC-BO). Retrieved April 2025 from https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.670982.en/pages/research_data_center_for_business_and_organizational_data_rdc-bo.html
- Research Data Center for Education. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://www.fdz-bildung.de/home?la=en>
- Research Data Center for Higher Education. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://fdz.dzhw.eu/en>
- Research Data Center Qualiservice. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://www.qualiservice.org/en/>
- Rizzoli, M., Imeri, S., & Huber, E. (2025). Preparing and documenting ethnographic data for archiving and subsequent use — an overview for researchers. Translated and adapted version of the Qualiservice Working Paper QS-WP-6-2024, Bremen. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3800>

- Schönbrodt, F., Gollwitzer, M., Abele-Brehm, & Board, o. b. o. t. D. E. (2016). Data Management in Psychological Science: Specification of the DFG Guidelines.
<https://www.dfg.de/resource/blob/172820/ac1f45756a20cdb2b69ba443d6f73e58/empfehlungen-forschungsdaten-psychologie-en-data.pdf>
- Sherif, V. (2018). Evaluating Preexisting Qualitative Research Data for Secondary Analysis. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, Vol 19, No 2 (2018).
<https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-19.2.2821>
- UKDS. Anonymising qualitative data. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/learning-hub/research-data-management/anonymisation/anonymising-qualitative-data/>
- UKDS. Best practice for documenting data collections. UK data service. Retrieved April 2025 from https://trainingmodules.ukdataservice.ac.uk/documenting_collections/#/
- UNESCO (2003). Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage. Retrieved April 2025 from <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/charter-preservation-digital-heritage>
- von der Dunk, A., & Gille, T. (2020). Ohne Fundament geht nichts. Forschungsdatenmanagement in der Praxis. *Forschung & Lehre*, 27(11), 922-923.
- von Unger, H. (2018). Ethische Reflexivität in der Fluchtforschung. Erfahrungen aus einem soziologischen Lehrforschungsprojekt. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 19, No 3 (2018): Research Ethics in Qualitative Research.
<https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-19.3.3151>
- von Unger, H. (2020). Management, Archivierung und Sekundärnutzung qualitativer Forschungsdaten zu sexueller Gewalt. Eine Einschätzung aus forschungsethischer Perspektive. In M. Wazlawik & B. Christmann (Eds.), *Forschungsdatenmanagement und Sekundärnutzung qualitativer Forschungsdaten. Perspektiven für die Forschung zu sexualisierter Gewalt* (pp. 45-74). Springer.
- Wilkinson, M. D., Dumontier, M., Aalbersberg, I. J., & et al. (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Scientific Data*, 3(1), 160018.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18>

¹ Kati Mozygamba, University of Bremen, can be reached at kati.mozygamba@uni-bremen.de

² Regardless of the organisational and structural differences between data centres, in this article we use this term synonymously for professional infrastructure solutions (such as research data centres, repositories, archives, etc.) that process and provide data for scientific reuse.

³ The author of this article is a postdoctoral fellow at the [RDC Qualiservice at the University of Bremen](#) in Germany and coordinates the network [QualidataNet](#). Even though I have tried to describe practices across several actors, I am particularly familiar with these programmes.

⁴ QualidataNet's guidance document on RDM and data sharing is currently available in German (Mozygamba et al. 2025) and will be available translated into English soon (pre-registered DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3799>).

⁵ An introduction to the structure of the QualiAnon tool and its underlying concept can be found in the IASSIST webinar 'De-Identifying data', which was held in 2022 and recorded, and which can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbKw3LR2rVo> (QualiAnon starts at min 18:52)