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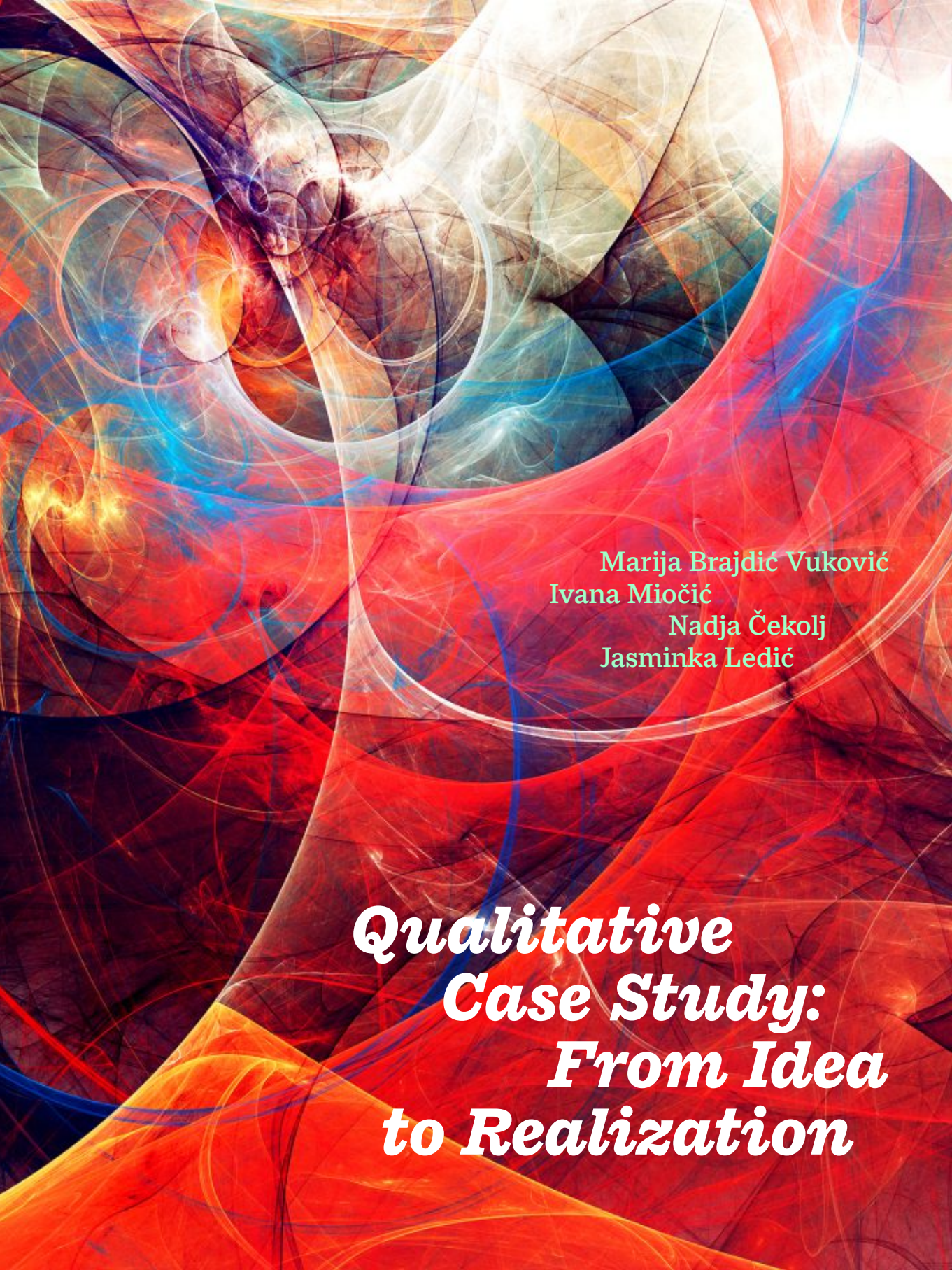

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Content

Preface

The Publication ***Qualitative Case Study: from Idea to Realization*** was written with the aim of contributing to the understanding of the qualitative case study whose implementation can be a tall order for any researcher using it for the first time regardless of whether they are otherwise experienced or novice. This handbook has been written by a fresh PhD graduate of social sciences, field of educational sciences (Ivana Miočić) and her mentor in the field of higher education research (Jasminka Ledić), their teacher in qualitative research methodology, sociologist (Marija Brajdić Vuković) who is also a (co) mentor to a PhD candidate in the field of educational sciences (Nadja Čekolj). More authors offer more perspectives in understanding this complex and very useful methodological strategy.

The idea to write this publication stems from our desire to share experiences and knowledge on conducting the qualitative case study with other researchers interested in this methodological strategy. Experiences and knowledge worth sharing came, as expected, at the very end of the process. Up until then the path of conducting the qualitative case study was often marked by challenges, doubts and re-examinations of decisions made in the research process by the doctoral students. The path of learning about the case study was marked by the mentored transition of the doctoral students from the role of quantitative researchers (where they have had some research experience) to the role of qualitative researchers, where they learned and discovered different research approaches. This transition was sometimes very challenging because it involved rejecting the quantitative way of thinking about social phenomena (whereby we strive for statistical generalization, speak and think in terms of numbers, standard deviations and arithmetic means, statistical significance and very strictly adhere to predetermined procedures, protocols and analysis) and adopting a qualitative way of thinking, which is completely different in terms of a starting point and development of the research idea. In qualitative research it is quite acceptable, even desirable, to think about the social phenomena intuitively and reflectively,

to explore them in different, sometimes very unstructured, creative and flexible ways, but at the same time not forgetting the principles of rigor, validity and ethics in scientific research. A case study is certainly one of the more interesting but also one of the more complex research strategies in the social sciences which allows creativity, interactivity and flexibility of the research process.

Many authors have written about the case study, trying to make their own contribution to its understanding and implementation in various research designs (qualitative, quantitative, mixed). Unfortunately, the diversity of definitions, sometimes written from completely different perspectives and paradigms, as well as the lack of clarity in determining what makes the case study so different than other strategies, have contributed to our lack of consensus today on what a case study is. That is, there is no one unambiguous definition of a case study. It is therefore not surprising that it is often described in terms of criticism, stigmatization, paradox, or misunderstanding in methodological discussions. Our experience has shown that the less experienced researchers who want to conduct a case study often have difficulty understanding its purpose and application and therefore often wander through the literature trying to find answers to their questions, unaware of the fact that there is no "recipe book" that guides us to a successfully designed and conducted case study. The intention of this publication is not to give researchers a "recipe book", but to offer them a reflection through which they can conduct their own research in an informed manner. In addition, this publication offers examples of concrete case studies through which we describe in a personal and reflective way our own research processes that we hope can serve other researchers when they want to understand how to transfer theoretical knowledge about when and how a case study is applied into a live research process.

Building on the idea that novice researchers should undertake their research in an informed manner, we have identified some of the key case study questions that need to be answered if we want to understand the nature of the qualitative case study. This publication therefore consists of five chapters, with the first four titled in the form of key questions (and answers) about the qualitative case study, while in the last chapter we present examples of two such studies.

The first chapter addresses the question: ***What a case study is and what it is not?*** The aim of this chapter is to offer the readers a basis for understanding the characteristics of the qualitative case study and to explain why it cannot be considered a method or an instrument of data collection. In the second chapter, the key question is ***What is a case?*** where we approach the definition of a case in terms of the object and subject of the case and give illustrative examples of cases from the field of social sciences. The third chapter answers the question ***How to choose the methods to research a case?*** where we address the purpose of using different research methods that can be used in a case study. In the fourth chapter, we deal with the question ***How to generalize the case study data?*** whereby we begin from the fundamental differences in the understanding generalization in quantitative and qualitative research. The last and most comprehensive fifth chapter is entitled ***Examples of case studies*** and includes a description of two qualitative case studies designed as a part of doctoral research. Research problems, aims and research

questions, case information, methods of data collection, decisions on data presentation and possibilities of generalization, as well as challenges of conducting the studies are presented in both examples.

Our intention is to present the starting points and understanding of the essence of the qualitative case study with the hope that our experiences will help you address your challenges or at least provide a perspective or direction to potential solutions to your research dilemmas.

The authors

1. What a case study is and what it is not?

The literature today, and by extension the existing definitions of a case study, are so rich and diverse that this can be both an advantage and a disadvantage as well as a cause of success or failure for a researcher conducting the case study (Elman, Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016).[1] The case study in the social sciences is in the domain of social research methodology. In social research, the key concepts are: methodology, method and related instruments. At its core, research is divided into qualitative and quantitative (methodology), within which there are different data collection methods, such as semi-structured interview and focus group in qualitative, and survey method and content analysis method through matrix (instrument) in quantitative social research. The main difference between the two methodologies are philosophical (ontological and epistemological) starting points in qualitative and quantitative approaches that affect the way the research problem is defined, research questions posed, data collection method chosen and type of data collected, and then, perhaps the most important question for science – the possibility of generalization.

Philosophically speaking, it is important to understand that we are talking about the so-called paradigms. A paradigm is a point of view we take when considering a phenomenon.[2] Every piece of knowledge that we can get, and not only in the social sciences, inherently carries a part of the so-called "epistemic subject", i.e., the researcher who dealt with it (Evnine and Evnine, 2008). Consequently, there are numerous ways in which we can observe reality, in which we can approach it exploratively, and the decision on how to approach reality is up to the researcher. For example, let's say that we are interested in the research problem of third country immigrant assimilation in Croatia over the last decade. From the paradigm level, this research problem can be observed in a way that we are interested in how many immigrants there are in Croatia, what is their demographic

[1] The first known author and father of the case study as a research method was Frederic Le Play (1806-1882), a French sociologist who conducted the first case study by living with a family for some time, collecting the data on attitudes and interactions of the family members. their income, expenses and assets. The later development of the case study is mostly related to the American "Chicago School" and especially to Robert E. Park, who became head of the sociology department at the University of Chicago in the early 20th century and dealt with the so-called "urban ecology". Park taught students that case studies should describe how the lives of people and communities are affected by general social processes and structures. For example, Park analysed how the expansion of cities affects the cohesion and the development of neighbourhoods and what affects the lifestyle and quality of life of the citizens (this is the so-called concentric zone theory). He called the communities within zones "ecological / natural areas" and based on the research of this described phenomenon during 1920-1950, numerous well-known case studies were conducted. Perhaps the most famous one is the *Street Corner Society*, conducted by William Whyte (1943), which is about the use of participatory observations (within a case study) in a poor Italian-American community. Whyte used observation in this study to identify and explain some of the key sociological problems related to social relations and social control in small groups.

[2] A paradigm is a set of ideas and beliefs that make up a conceptual framework or model that is a starting point for any action of those who agree with the paradigm. This notion is most closely related to Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) in which he described a paradigm as universally recognized scientific achievements that, at a given time, provide a framework for problems and solutions to those acting within a given paradigm. In our work, we opted for the sociologist Robert K. Merton's definition of a paradigm whereby paradigms are examples of codified and often implicit assumptions, problem sets, key concepts, procedural logics, and selectively accumulated knowledge that (theoretically and empirically) guide the research in scientific fields (Merton and Merton, 1968).

structure, educational structure, from which countries they came, what are the processes of assimilation of these immigrants, what are the attitudes of the locals towards the immigrants and what are the attitudes of immigrants about assimilation to Croatia and about Croatia in general. We have listed a number of different possibilities of research questions and views, however, all of the above belong to the so-called quantitative research paradigm.

They belong to this paradigm because in the ontological sense (when we ask ourselves what society is, what it consists of) we assume that it consists of objective facts that in the epistemological sense (when we ask ourselves how we generate knowledge about society) can be rationally measured by some indicators. However, tackling the same problem, we can also ask ourselves what the experiences of immigrants with the process of assimilation are and how the experiences from their countries and culture affect the possibilities of assimilation in Croatia. What were their expectations and what is their understanding of the situation they are in and how it affects their perception and plans for the future. In this case, we would opt for a qualitative research paradigm because when talking about what society is made of, we take the position that the social world is constructed mainly by human thought and reflection on the world. In this context, the human world is what we as humans think it is. In terms of what we can know about society, what kind of knowledge is available to us, we understand that we can learn most about society through the experience that people have with the phenomenon and through observation. In doing so, we take the position that knowledge is related to culture and is relative because it depends on the perspective; we see the world as socially constructed, it appears in individual or collective variants, we focus on the individual or collective construction of the social world. These are, of course, simplifications (Bates and Jenkins, 2007) or ideal-type[3] views on underlying philosophical principles of social research. What researchers of the social phenomena intuitively understand is that, depending on the social problem they are interested in, and what they specifically focus on regarding the problem, they will opt for either qualitative or quantitative research paradigm. That is, if they are interested in opinions, experiences and understandings of the actors in the process and they believe that the social phenomenon is composed of a number of different possible views, then we are talking about the qualitative paradigm. On the other hand, if the phenomenon is viewed as composed of objectively measurable indicators that can be enumerated, whether they are properties or attitudes and opinions, we are talking about the quantitative paradigm.

[3] The concept of the ideal type was coined by the German sociologist Max Weber. In the social sciences it signifies a common mental construct based on perceived reality, although it does not have to be in complete accord with it since it is a deliberate simplification and exaggeration. It is not ideal in the sense that it is "excellent", nor that it is average, but it is a constructed ideal that approximates reality by selecting and emphasizing individual elements of reality. Weber used the ideal type as an analytical tool in historical studies, using the ideal type to look for bureaucracy in different socio-historical periods. Detailed descriptions of the concept of ideal types can be found in his essay *On Objectivity* (1949) and in his book *Economy and Society* (1978).

Consequently, the possibilities of generalizing our data will also depend on the paradigmatic approach we have chosen. Generalization in social research refers to making broader general conclusions about reality based on observations (Polit and Beck, 2010). In quantitative research, in some ways it represents research quality, but in qualitative research it is a completely different type of "quality". It is worth recalling the essential differences in the underlying principles of quantitative and qualitative research and the possibilities of data generalization. Simply put, we are talking about apples and oranges.

Due to their philosophical views which entail the idea that social reality exists objectively and can therefore be measured objectively, quantitative research uses numerical data in its instruments which is then statistically analysed, with the aim of finding trends or facts on a (representative) population sample that can be statistically generalized to the entire population, in which ever way that population may be defined (the general population of a country or the population of women aged 30 to 60 living in Petrinja).

Qualitative research in its paradigm holds a view that social facts are a social construct, and that they can be understood through the interpretations of people who have experienced them. Therefore, qualitative studies do not aim at populations in their generalizations, but phenomena. Their generalization aims to describe the social phenomena so thoroughly and deeply that people who have encountered the phenomenon, when they read these descriptions, have the impression that they are true, and that they (at least in part, because the experiences of a phenomenon never overlap completely) describe well their own understanding of that particular social reality. This is called analytic generalization and transferability (Polit and Tatano Beck, 2010) which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 when we consider how to approach generalization in the case study.

From the 1960s onwards, the exceptional influence of the quantitative paradigm and the predominance of favouring statistical generalization to the detriment of all other approaches and possibilities of generalizations has been noticeable (Brajdić Vuković, Vignjević Korotaj and Ćulum Ilić, 2020). Having that in mind, it does not come as a surprise that the case study has been a neglected methodological strategy in the social sciences, often used half-heartedly and commonly underestimated. This is of course completely wrong, because the case study, as we will argue, in terms of applicability of research results, is an extremely valuable strategy, and its ability to understand a social phenomenon (social phenomenon or situation that exists or takes place and can be empirically investigated) is in many ways superior.

The diversity of case study interpretations is influenced by the aforementioned different philosophical views on the basis of which experts from different disciplines understand the purpose of the case study. For example, experts from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and educational sciences most often place case studies within the qualitative research paradigm, whereas business and politics experts prefer the quantitative paradigm in case studies. We understand and place the case study within the qualitative paradigm that emphasizes the role and responsibility of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Nevertheless, we believe that one of the "superpowers" of the case study is

that, although we dominantly place it in the qualitative paradigm, it easily overcomes the strict boundaries of paradigmatic views.

Our understanding of the case study has its philosophical and paradigmatic roots in the ontological idealism (interpretivism) and epistemological constructivism. We also see it as a different viewpoint (especially in relation to the quantitative paradigm) of what we can know and convey about the social phenomena as researchers, so that it is useful and meaningful to those encountering that social phenomena and act within it. We therefore rely on the idea of those authors (e.g., Flyvbjerg, 2012) who, as a result of the case study, described phronesis, which is according to Aristotle (Nicomachean ethics), the art of moral action in a given a situation based on knowledge, experience and virtue. This would mean that a case study must describe a situation (case) so well and thoroughly that it can provide the researcher with "experience and knowledge" but also "morality and ethics" related to a particular social phenomenon it describes.

A case study must be detailed, comprehensive, made up of a series of descriptions of internal mechanisms and overall existence, and it is because of all of the procedures we employ that it is considered a *strategy*. When we say strategy, we mean the methodological way of approaching the phenomenon and social reality in order to gain the most knowledge about it. The case study determines our attitude towards the research problem as well as the research questions, the selection of data type, the selection of appropriate methods (one or more of them, which can be from qualitative and / or quantitative research methods), instrument construction, field research, approach to data analysis and the method of describing the researched social phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Additionally, the role of the researcher is emphasized when conducting a case study, which further supports the understanding of the case study as a research strategy. Originally, the word strategy (Greek strategia) meant the science of waging war while a strategist was a skilled military leader; author of books on the art of warfare (Anić, Klaić and Domović, 2002). If we translate this definition into the context of case study discussions, then we can say that researchers conducting a case study should be good strategists as well as a connoisseurs of skills necessary to apply various research methods. They must also be able to describe meanings and interpret the human reality they are researching. Such researchers have the demanding task of trying to access other people's interpretations of reality, then filter them through their own conceptual apparatus, and finally show others what has been discovered. Above all, it is important to be aware of their own role in this complex interpersonal process (Walsham, 1995).

Overall, when we talk about what a case study is and what it is not then we can say that **it is not a data collection method** (such as a survey method, or a semi-structured interview method) and **is not an instrument** (like a questionnaire in a survey method, or protocol in a semi-structured interview). The authors who dealt with the "definition" of the case study agree that it implies an in-depth and holistic approach to researching a specific and limited social phenomenon (case) by using different research methods and data sources that will contribute to a comprehensive and thorough description and understanding of the case (Miočić, 2018).

The key words in a case study as a strategy are **singleness and wholeness.** Although a case study involves an open design, i.e. incites the researcher to constantly revise the number of open questions in the research and add methods that allow data collection to answer these questions, it should in some sense be understood as a closed world, a system in itself. A case study is the investigation and analysis of a single phenomenon. It is important to understand that singleness in a case study does not refer to particularity in the sense that there is only one of something. That single phenomenon can be a person, a group of people, an institution, a state, an event or a period of time. But what is important for the case study is that it is a unique phenomenon that can be described in its entirety, that is, it has a wholeness that can be clearly limited and fully explored. It should be said here that the case study is a strategy that allows "close access to reality" by asking "small or detailed questions" and gains "deep descriptions" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 132).

When conducting a case study is not a good research decision? When we want to learn something about the attitudes and values in the form of tendencies in a population (for example, how many women in Croatia support father's leave). Or when we are interested in how a subgroup in the society perceives and what meaning it attaches to a certain reality and we want to describe it by entailing all categories of individuals within a subgroup (for example, what kind of experiences students from economically disadvantaged families have during their college education in the social and natural sciences). The principle of purposefulness should be adhered to when choosing the case study as a strategy. If the purpose of your research is to describe a problem in its entirety, in a way that allows a detailed focus on the problem that has its own singleness and wholeness and when it is possible to define clear boundaries within which the problem can be described, then the case study is a great strategy to use. This implies a situation in which the main research question is complex and requires a general understanding of a social phenomenon and when the researcher estimates that they will get the best insight into this phenomenon if they study a particular case of that phenomenon (Stake, 1995). It is important to remember that the purpose of this research strategy always falls under the category of understanding something in its entirety and at the same time limits the research to a certain wholeness on some of its levels.

2 What is a case?

In each case study, there are two methodological issues that need to be addressed in order to be able to choose a case well (Thomas and Myers, 2015). The first is related to the *class* of the phenomena (a set or category of things that have a common feature or attribute that distinguishes them from others either by manner, type or quality) we will analyse, or to *the object* or *analytical framework of our study* which answers the question a case study of what, that is, which phenomenon. It refers to the explanation of why that class of phenomena is an important object for research, that is, what is the scientific and theoretical basis of that case (Wieviorka, 1992).

The second methodological question is related to the example from the mentioned class of phenomena, i.e., *the subject* of the case study, the answer to the question: *which case* of the mentioned phenomenon we will investigate. The case we are going to explore must be unique in practical and historical terms in a way that it represents the phenomenon in a holistic way (Wieviorka, 1992). A case study refers to the analysis of a phenomenon, but we are interested in the uniqueness of the phenomenon and the phenomenon in its entirety, and we want to understand how and why something happened and why it is a case of something (Thomas and Myers, 2015). These methodological choices in a case study should be understood as *basic sampling* within the study, and we will offer you a few examples of that below. This means that we will often have separate sampling within a case study and different methods we will use to answer the posed research questions.

For example, imagine that we are interested in the case of activism on feminist portals (internet portals dealing with the promotion of awareness and advocacy of women's human rights) in Croatia in the last ten years (*a case of what*). Pay attention to the fact that we are first and foremost always interested in the case – the appearance of a phenomenon that we have noticed. When we have defined this case as a class of phenomena that is limited in the way that we are taking into account the Croatian Internet portals, exclusively dealing with a particular topic and have published in the last ten years, then we can approach the question: which case? That is, we need to think about which portals we are going to choose. In order to do that we need to conduct a mini pre-study: we need to find out how many such portals there are and what their characteristics are (how much they publish). Then we can decide on one or several of them that will describe the case of activism on feminist portals in the last ten years in Croatia well. Notice what happened here: we said that it is one case - yes, but one *case of what*. And when we talk about *which case*, it can contain many, that is, more examples or that one case. Let's say that we have chosen five internet portals. It is only then that we start thinking about *what kinds of data* we need and can get in order to describe the case as a whole. We can then conclude that it would be good to a) do semi-structured interviews with journalists and editors of these portals, b) analyse the portal content c) analyse the audience of these portals, or something else. For each of these methods, we need a kind of subsample, which we more often call the entire population on which we are conducting research. E.g., on the population of all journalists and editors of these portals, the population of the entire content, and finally, perhaps, on the sample (not necessarily representative) of the audience.

It is important to remember that there is only one *case of something* (a case of what), while *which case* can be one, a group or a multitude, depending on what helps us to

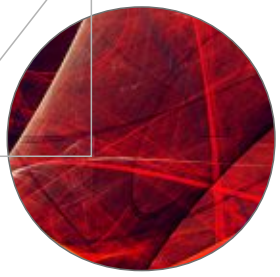
describe *the case of something* in its entirety. Therefore, the first and foremost it is important to limit the case of something so that it is a class of a phenomenon that has its clear limitations. Here are a few ways we can approach to determining a case. First, the case should be limited, which would mean that it must be located and observed within some predefined spatial and temporal, but also some other boundaries (e.g., methodological, or theoretical). These boundaries are set by the researcher, whereby it is important to be able to clearly determine where the case under investigation begins and ends. Second, the case needs to be viewed from a number of different perspectives. If we know that the goal of a case study is to thoroughly describe and understand the case, then it is logical to conclude that we can achieve this only if we look at the case in great detail, from different angles and in different ways, i.e., if we apply the principles of triangulation (of methods, data etc). This is followed by a third requirement, which is that the case should be viewed in a real environment, which means that the researcher should make sure that the context in which the case is viewed is authentic. The case should be investigated and observed in a way that we do not interfere with its daily life or usual activities. Fourth, the case should be carefully selected, and what kind of case it will be (e.g., very rare, extreme, average, etc.) depends on the main research question.

Now that we have determined the case of what, we need to find an example of that case which will help us to describe the case in its entirety. Sometimes this second step, choosing an example of the case, is difficult because it can be approached in different ways. However, let's just get it out of the way right now, it is possible that more than one approach is correct. What you need to do is just to choose one approach and explain it well. In choosing a case example, we need to ask ourselves a few very practical questions: What examples of our case exist and are available to us for research? What are the characteristics of these examples and how are they arranged among the examples? Which examples contain the most characteristics that can help us to describe the case well? What are these characteristics and how can they be explored? Once we have selected the case examples, it is the responsibility of the researcher to, with the help of different sampling techniques, come up with those cases from which they will best be able to learn more about the phenomenon they are investigating. Cases need to be selected in a way that we choose those we can learn most from.

Let's take a look at another example. Say we are interested in the phenomenon of academic achievement of students with disabilities at universities in Croatia. According to the definition that "a case can be anyone" we could conclude that a case can be any student with a disability in any discipline in Croatia. However, we want to limit our case so that we can describe it in its entirety. Therefore, in order not to get lost in the diversity influenced by different types of disabilities and different disciplines, our research will focus only on students with excellent academic achievement studying in the field humanities and especially students with speech impairment. We are interested in students in their final year because they have the most study experience. We then move on to the question of which examples of this case would be representative for the case, and we study the population on which we focused our research. In accordance with the research design, we need to consider whether we want to include both male and female students in the research, or we want our sample to vary with regard to some other categories (e.g., students of different

socioeconomic status, students from different regions). Or is meeting such criteria not crucial for us to achieve our research goals, and therefore a group of students from a single university, regardless of other characteristics, sufficiently exemplifies the case. Only after we have selected examples of this case do we think about the types of data we will analyse to describe the case. In order to investigate the case in depth, we need to look at it from several perspectives, so let's assume that in this study, in addition to the experience of students with a disability, we will include the data that others can tell us about the case. We can then include their teachers (as assessors of student achievement), staff from the Office for Students with Disabilities or other close colleagues (as persons we estimate to provide support in achieving academic achievement) or students' personal assistants. Suppose we use interviewing to gather a variety of data from different stakeholders that interest us, and we will also attend a teaching situation (such as an exam situation) in which we can observe some elements of academic achievement. Often in a case study, decisions about who will be involved in the research and which units of research analysis will ultimately be entailed are made flexibly and intuitively, in the interaction of the researcher and the data collected and based on the conclusions made during the research. This is why, although it is desirable to follow a defined structure, study focus, and research questions, one should not strictly insist that this defined structure be followed (Simons, 2012). Some new and significant research questions that we did not anticipate in advance may arise only during the research itself, when we go deeper into the content and issues of the phenomenon under investigation.

3 How to choose the methods to research a case?



As has been mentioned, there is one case and there are one or several examples of that case, but when exploring the case, given the different angles from which it is possible to observe the case and the types of data we want to collect to study the case in its entirety, we will pose additional research questions from which the selection of different (quantitative, qualitative or mixed) research methods will follow.

We have already tackled this topic in the previous chapter by giving two examples. But in this chapter, we want to take a closer look at the process of researching a case, and its "principles" if we can call them that. Our goal in this seemingly "soft" terrain of numerous possibilities is to offer some sort of security in the form of practical guidelines. At this point, we need to understand that the research process is largely cyclical, and that reflexivity is the most important characteristic of a researcher.

What do we mean when we say that the research process is cyclical? First of all, this means that we are trying to transform what we have been taught so far about research, and it refers to the usual methodological instruction whereby the research sequence goes something like this: a research problem is selected; a research question(s) is(are) posed (and a hypothesis in the quantitative research); the research method is selected as well as the population and sample; an instrument is constructed, ethical frameworks are set; field research is conducted; the results are analysed and answers to research questions (hypotheses) are given. This sequence also works when researching a case, however it is neither linear nor necessarily successive, but cyclical and much less in a strict order. Reality teaches us that sometimes when we know what types of data we can collect about a problem, we first choose a method and then pose or revise the research question in more detail. However, when we see the field research reality, the experience of data collection can further open some questions and the need to explore other things in different ways within the reality. In "strict" research frameworks, this is difficult and almost never happens. In "softer" ones, such as the case study, this is desirable and represents the way the researcher should think. This is where reflexivity comes in handy. Reflexivity is the quality of an actor who uses reflection, and reflection is a serious, detailed consideration of a problem and, at the same time, the product of a serious consideration of the problem. Reflexivity is a term which is used in different ways in the social sciences, especially sociology. It roughly implies the awareness of actors about their place in the social structure, in a given situation, in the life context, as well as the role of the actor in society and the consequences of that role (Merton, 1973). It also denotes the ability of a society to reflect on its own development and to manage it (Beck, 1996), as well as the ability of individuals to develop their own identity and influence their own future (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2001; Castells, 2001) and the ability of scientists to understand their place in scientific cognition and the scientific field (Bourdieu, 2004).

In research, reflexivity implies the continuous awareness of researchers about the decisions they have made and those they have yet to make, the attitudes they bring to the research and how they develop during the research. We say that there is reflection on the action and reflection during the action, that is, reflecting on the research procedures that we have employed and reflecting on the way we have employed them. Furthermore, as we have learned from this experience, we are able to plan further activities. The case study as a research strategy is an ideal example of reflection in research. At this point, let us quote the

brilliantly described approach to research: "(during research) we embody intellectual curiosity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and attunement to the research processes, allowing room for deliberation, intuition, and anticipation. To be playful and serious is the ideal mental condition where there is no dogmatism but intellectual curiosity and flexibility." (Kim, 2015: 47).

Now that we have described how to approach the case study research strategy, let us move on to the question how, after we have determined the case of what and examples of that case, we choose the methods.

In the manner of qualitative researchers, we will quote extracts from a case study consultation between the two authors of this handbook verbatim. The methodologists' goal was to convey to the doctoral student what we are guided by when thinking about how to thoroughly research the case. We need to be guided by the boundaries of our case as well as the depth of our case. We ask ourselves: what data can shed light on our case? And in doing so we reject the data which only remotely concerns the case and is partly important to it and take into account only the data that is central to it.

> *Remember the main principle. What are you dealing with in a case study? You must use all the data that helps you understand the case, not all the data in the world. Not all data which is in any way related to the case. No. The goal of using data in a case study is to understand the case, you only use that data. (MBV)*

Given the types of data in question, we choose the research method. If, for example, we want to study the content of Internet portals, as important for the case of feminist activism on portals in Croatia, then we will use the method of content analysis, and a matrix as an instrument. If we also want to understand how the portals were created and who creates the content on them, then a narrative interview with the editors of the portal will serve us well, and we will create a protocol for that purpose. One should, however, understand and be guided by the following. We said that there is one case of something, but that there can be more examples that will shed light on it. In this case, it is possible to use different methods in each of the examples depending on the types of data the example can offer us and the methods we can best explore it to understand the case.

> *The case guides you. The case guides you through what matters here. It will provide you with abundance of data. You can't cram all your cases (case examples) together. Each case will deal with something else, that is the goal. (MBV)*

So, to summarize: in the case study research strategy one should be open, flexible, playful, concentrated on the boundaries and depth of the case, as well as on studying the case in its entirety as much as possible. Therefore, in researching case examples you should be guided by all types of data that are relevant to the case, and the methods which can best help you collect that data. In doing so, if there are multiple case examples, it is possible (but not necessary) to employ different methods in different case examples.

How to generalize the case study data?

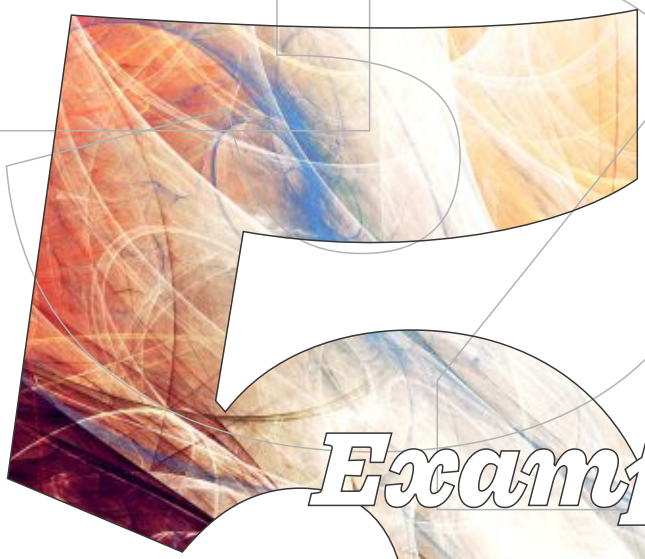
The aim of a case study is to describe exhaustively and thoroughly the case of what, so that this exemplary, experiential reality of the case could serve well all who encounter the case or experience it in some way, so that they can fully understand it and act accordingly. This is in line with the objectives of generalization in qualitative research and refers to the so-called analytical generalization as well as transferability. Analytical generalization can also be applied in quantitative research, but its true meaning is better conveyed in qualitative research because it becomes an integral part of the insight of the research. Analytical generalization is a theoretical generalization, i.e., the development of a theory of the social phenomenon we are researching, or one of its aspects. This kind of generalization is possible because the qualitative research methods provide us with a deep enough insight into the research phenomenon. Through each qualitative research we try to understand the processes that take place within a phenomenon, we try to see how the research is "in relation to the world" (Kim, 2015: 86), or we want our research to tell its story of "harmony, balance, consistency and integrity" within a particular social phenomenon (Kim, 2015: 86). This means that we need space for intuition and understanding, but also greater connected insights, which we can have based on deep insights into the reality we are studying, but also our knowledge of the research field and previous research experiences. However, we reach the analytical generalization by a rigorous inductive thought process from gaining data to conclusions and insights. Through the process of reflection and abstraction from data to higher forms of insight, researchers distinguish between particular and group information and forming, in a way, a collage, a whole that well represents everything covered by the research (Ayres, Kvanagh and Krafl, 2003). Therefore, in order to develop a theory from concepts, it is necessary to identify evidence that supports conceptualization, through a thoughtful inductive process that gives credibility to the research, and thus provide the reader of the study with sufficient richness and depth of data to guarantee a degree of generalization in relation to the research field (Polit and Tatano Beck, 2010). In simple terms, our research data analysis must be such that we are able to bring forward sufficiently deep and rich descriptions that can serve the reader to theoretically understand what is happening within this researched phenomenon.

The second type of generalization in qualitative research is the so-called transfer generalization or transferability, i.e., the transferability of insights from research to other contexts, situations. This generalization is close to the concept of *proximal similarity* - deep descriptions of reality and individual cases allow the author and readers to apply the case to other cases, given the possibility of comparing the extent to which situations and contexts overlap or differ (Firestone, 1993; Campbell, 1986). The reader participates in this generalization. The simplest way to explain it is that everyone who has encountered the phenomenon we have researched, when reading our insights, feels as if they have experienced it, at least partly, and that what we have described is relatable.

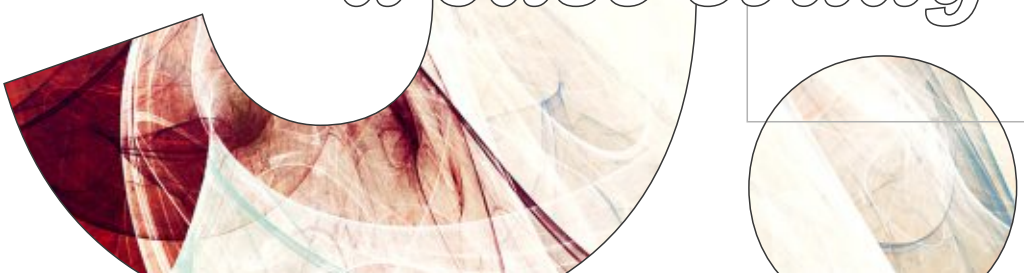
However, in addition to these types of generalizations, the goal of a case study is to offer the reader the already mentioned fronesis, which means that the case study must describe a situation (case) so well and thoroughly that it can give us "experience and knowledge" as well as "morals and ethics" associated with a particular social phenomenon it describes. Overall, it is important: to study the case in detail and thoroughly from all angles, to use rigorous inductive methods that pay attention to the particular and the general, to

develop one's own intuitive case theory, while describing the case richly and thoroughly enough to enable those who have encountered the case to recognize themselves in it, and to provide others with a case so rich that they understand the important processes within it.

In conclusion, when someone tells you that a weakness of the case study is an inability to generalize its insights to a population, feel free to say that a case study aims to generalize its insights to a social phenomenon, and that there is another purpose and numerous other methods for statistical generalization to a population.



Examples of a case study



In order to further support the information on conducting a case study given in the previous chapters with examples, in this chapter we present two qualitative case studies carried out as doctoral research.

The first case study, by Ivana Miočić, is entitled: ***Features of Professional Socialisation and their Contribution to the Development of a Positive Attitude amongst Junior Researchers towards the Teaching Process,*** and the doctoral dissertation presenting this case study was defended in February 2021. The case study explores the processes, mechanisms and events that contributed to the development of a positive attitude of junior researchers towards teaching in the course of their professional socialization into the academic profession. It should be noted that this case study is related to three research projects. The first project was *Academic Profession Competencies Profile: Between new Requirements and Possibilities (APROFRAME)* which was funded by the Croatian Science Foundation from 2013 to 2016. The project produced several research papers which significantly contribute to the understanding of the academic profession and professional socialization of junior researchers in the Croatian higher education system. The results of this project served as a source of new research questions that this case study seeks to answer, and the author also made use of the research participants database. In order to continue the research, two new research projects have been carried out: *Young researchers' career development project – training new doctoral students* funded by the Croatian Science Foundation from 2016 to 2019 and lastly, from 2019, the project *Professional socialization of junior researchers in teaching* supported by the University of Rijeka (number: uniri-drustv-18-19). The project leader on all mentioned project as well as the mentor on the doctoral dissertation was prof. Jasminka Ledić, PhD.

The second case study, by Nadja Čekolj, is entitled ***The Role of School Volunteer Programmes in Cultivating Sustainability Citizens,*** and the PhD research proposal was defended in December 2019, which means that research is still ongoing. The study explores different experiences, processes and events that take place in school volunteer programs, which in different ways encourage the development of characteristics of sustainable citizenship in high school pupils. This study is conducted within the research project *Formal Education in Service of Sustainable Development* (forOR, UIP-05-2017-2031), funded by the Croatian Science Foundation from 2018 to 2023 and led by Assoc. prof. Bojana Ćulum Ilić, PhD, who is at the same time, along with Assoc.prof. Marija Brajdić Vuković, PhD a mentor on this doctoral dissertation.

Due to different completion stages of these two studies, our goal was not to focus on the results of the research (you will be able to find out more about that in the papers we have published or intend to publish), but on different personal research experiences and planned as well as unforeseen methodological decision-making processes. Both presentations contain the same elements, so we begin by presenting the research problem as well as research aims and questions in order to present the readers with general knowledge about the phenomena that the studies deal with and explain why the case study is the optimal strategy for researching such phenomena. We then present case information and ways we have defined the object and subject of the study as well as the boundaries of the case. After

that, we show what methods of data collection were used or are planned to be used, and we reflect on how decisions are made about reporting the data and generalisability. Last but not least, we present the selected research challenges that have proven to be significant and the ways in which we arrived at their solution.

Features of professional socialisation and their contribution to the development of a positive attitude amongst junior researchers towards the teaching process

Research problem

The first case study we would like to present deals with higher education pedagogy, more precisely – teaching in higher education. Although in the last ten years there have been trends at Croatian universities that indicate an increase in care for teaching and raising the quality of teaching (mostly under the influence of quality assurance policies), the research results continuously point to numerous challenges in teaching. For example, the need for in-service training programs in higher education is often highlighted, while the lack of opportunities for this type of training is criticized.

Teaching overload as well as professional burnout are one of the main problems higher education teachers face along with the problem of valuing research over teaching, especially in the context of academic advancement. In addition, the challenges junior researchers, i.e. academics at the beginning of their careers deal with are especially emphasized as they are recognized as a vulnerable group of workers in the higher education system due to the challenges they face in the process of professional socialization. These challenges primarily relate to the frequent overload of various aspects of work (teaching, research, administration), lack of structured guidance and support, and especially lack of previous experience, but also education and training in teaching. The results of previous research successfully detect numerous challenges in higher education, while at the same time in Croatia there are no studies that seek to understand the positive experiences of teaching in higher education. This study is based on the belief that perceiving and understanding positive experiences in teaching in higher education contributes to the support system of junior researchers in their professional socialization in terms of developing their positive attitude towards teaching.

Therefore, the subject of this research is the *positive attitude of junior researchers towards teaching* that is built and developed in the *process of professional socialization.*[4] We are interested in what the process of professional socialization looks like for those teachers / junior researchers who have a positive attitude towards teaching and what is going on in that process (at the micro – personal, meso – institutional and macro – disciplinary level), that contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards teaching.

This is a complex and hitherto unexplored social phenomenon, and the complexity is manifested in the fact that weather or not junior researchers will develop a positive attitude towards teaching will depend on different professional environments they work in. Therefore, in order to study this phenomenon, we chose the qualitative case study because it allows us to study in great depth and detail those cases that are in the focus of this study, namely junior researchers in whose professional experience we see the dimensions of a positive attitude towards teaching. The case study enables flexible decision-making, which means that it allows the "case to guide the study" that is, it allows the possibility to flexibly use various research methods that enable the case to be explored. This allows cases to be viewed from different perspectives and angles, so that we can fully understand them.

Research aims and questions

In line with the research problem, and the selected research methodology, the main research question is:

> *What processes, mechanisms and events i**n the process of professional socialization of junior researchers** have contributed to the development of their **positive attitude towards teaching?***

[4] In order to better understand the previously defined main research question, it is necessary to briefly explain what the key concepts mentioned in the question refer to. ***The process of professional socialization of junior researchers is observed on three levels:*** (1) micro level – personal level within which personal characteristics are observed; ethnic, gender, social and economic characteristics; educational experience; predispositions (values, attitudes and expectations); perception of one's own professional identity; (2) meso level – refers to the organizational level, and includes the characteristics of the institution / organization of work, education, research projects; organizational culture, interpersonal relationships and interactions; "significant others". and (3) macro level – refers to the disciplinary level, more precisely, the peculiarities of disciplinary culture and the development of disciplinary identity. ***A positive attitude towards teaching*** is observed through four dimensions: (1) *The emotional dimension* that is recognized through positive emotional experiences that the teacher experiences through their teaching (e.g., enthusiasm, passion, fulfilment, etc.). (2) *The professional development dimension* which is manifested in the positive attitude and participation of teachers in professional development programs for teaching in higher education and the need for continuous development of teacher competencies; (3) *The dimension of the constructivist approach to learning and teaching,* which implies the tendency of teachers to apply these teaching principles in their work, putting the students and their needs at the centre of the teaching process; and (4) *Dimension of the teaching and research nexus,* which is recognized through successful intertwining, connecting and complementing of research and teaching.

The aim of this study is to recognize, describe and understand the **features of the process of professional socialization** that have a positive effect on the **development of a positive attitude of junior researchers towards teaching in the higher education system** in Croatia. The broader social goal of the study is to make recommendations for the improvement of the support system for junior researchers in their professional socialization in terms of developing their positive attitude towards teaching.

In line with the mentioned aims, four specific research questions arise:

1) What are the personal predispositions of junior researchers (personal characteristics, experiences, attitudes, values) that affect the development of a positive attitude towards teaching?

2) How do the institutional context and the significant socialization processes (mentoring, collaborative relationships) that occur at the level of the institution affect the junior researchers' positive attitude towards teaching?

3) How does the context of the scientific discipline in which the junior researchers work affect the development of a positive attitude towards teaching?

4) How can understanding the features of professional socialization that contribute to the development of a positive attitude of junior researchers towards teaching help us improve the support system for junior researchers in their professional socialization into teaching?

It should be noted that the aim of this study was not to determine the appropriateness of the concept of a positive attitude towards teaching in higher education or to determine whether and to what extent this conceptual framework is a successful predictor of quality and excellence of teaching (although this could certainly be the aim of future quantitative research). The aim was to take a closer look and describe the professional socialization of junior researchers in order to understand how a positive attitude towards teaching is built and developed through that process.

About the case

Subject and object of the case

In this study, a case of (what?) ***positive attitude towards teaching (object of the case)*** is explored, which is "embodied" in (whom?) ***junior researchers (the subject of the case).*** The case defined in this way suggests that the study includes *intensive cases* of junior researchers who are "abundant" in information, i.e., have experienced a positive attitude towards teaching, which allows the researcher to learn about the phenomenon she is exploring.

Choosing the subjects of the case

In this study, the subjects of the case are five women – junior researchers (assistant professors) who are employed in the higher education system in the Republic of Croatia. They work in different disciplines and at different higher education institutions. Participants in this study have been selected from the research participant database of the research project *"Academic Profession Competencies Profile: Between new Requirements and Possibilities "* (APROFRAME). A total of 35 participants participated in this study, which was conducted by the method of semi-structured phenomenological and narrative interviews. The study dealt with the topic of the academic profession in a broader sense. Each of the 35 interviews was analysed individually by searching for features of a positive attitude towards teaching. In other words, the pre-defined four dimensions of a positive attitudes towards teaching (emotional dimension; dimension of professional development; dimension of constructivist approach to learning and teaching; dimension of teaching and research nexus) served as categories of topics to be detected in interviews. The cases in which all four dimensions of a positive attitude towards teaching could be recognized to the greatest extent were included in the study.

The case selection process resulted in only women entering the case study, although the original research design assumed a maximum variation sample with respect to the discipline the participants came from, the institution they were employed at (criteria ultimately met), and gender. At that time, a new research decision was made whereby the study entailed only the female perspective which is one of the limitations of the research that should be clearly pointed out. Although there was a tendency to include the male participants in the study, it was estimated that it was much more important to include a sample rich in experience than to insist on gender representation, to the detriment of the quality of data needed to better understand the studied phenomenon.

It should also be noted that the process of selecting final cases did not go without difficulties, which is to be expected in this type of research. For example, some participants refused to participate in the study, while some participants that were selected, included and interviewed did not enter the final sample due to various reasons (for example, the interview was conducted with major technical difficulties which unfortunately compromised further course of the research or the interview showed that the case is not abundant in experience of a positive attitude towards teaching, as was originally assessed).

All the final participants were eager to participate in the study, and all ethical standards were met (the participants were provided with an informed consent in which information about the study, information on maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of data and the possibility of withdrawing from the research were presented). Participants also expressed willingness to cooperate during the later stages of the research process (e.g., provided contacts of their mentors and significant others, answered some additional questions that needed to be clarified, etc.).

Case limits

As suggested by a number of authors dealing with the case study strategy (e.g., Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2012; Simons, 2012), the case is a limited phenomenon, meaning that it is viewed in the context of some pre-set, most often temporal and spatial limits. This study observes the period of professional socialization of junior researchers, more precisely, the period from the moment of their employment at the institution to the moment of conducting the interview (time limit), and the cases are observed within higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia where junior researchers are employed (spatial limit).

Research methods

An important step in designing the case study was the selection of research methods whereby some methods were pre-defined by the research design, while the decision to apply some methods was made during the study itself, as required by the nature of each studied case. For example, the study did not originally predict the importance and significance that the junior researchers attach to student evaluations. The intuitive research decision was to include the student evaluations as another unit of analysis in the study. Once again, this is where advantages of the case study over some other less flexible research strategies can be seen. The case guides the researcher through the study, i.e., the researcher flexibly adapts to the case and intuitively observes and explores it using different research methods. The first method that was selected and conducted was *interviewing the junior researchers* – subjects of this research. Their perspective is closest to experience, and we were therefore interested in how they personally understand the contribution of each level of professional socialization in the development of their positive attitude towards teaching. Based on the conducted interviews, a code tree was created for each individual case with key topics and sub-topics that reveal the key findings for each individual case. At this time, it is important to mention that the principles of research credibility were taken into account, i.e., ensuring that the research findings represent credible information generated from the participants' original data and that the interpretation of the participants' original views is correct (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). In other words, research participants had the opportunity to hear the basic conclusions of the study that followed the interview phase (they were provided with the researcher feedback), assess whether the conclusions were drawn correctly (reflection of the participants on the research conclusions) and assess whether further research of their case is well thought through. After the interviewing phase of the junior researchers, other research methods were applied in parallel with each other and flexibly, depending on the specifics of the study of each individual case.

Where possible, *significant others were interviewed* to gain insight into how the positive attitude of junior researchers developed at the micro, meso and macro level from the perspective of a person who observed the process closely but was not the subject of the process. For example, in some cases, mentors proved to be important because junior researchers detected them as significant people who contributed to their professional development, while in some cases, the significant others were colleagues. Once more, a code

tree with key topics and subtopics was created for each interview conducted with a "significant other".

In some cases, students turned out to play an important part in the development of a positive attitude towards teaching, the relationships they build with the junior researchers and the feedback they give them about their work. Therefore, again where possible and necessary, the student perspective was included in the study either through a *thematic analysis of the student evaluations* or through *focus groups* conducted with the students. It did not seem appropriate to explore someone's attitude towards teaching, and not to take into account the opinions of the final "users" (i.e., the students themselves).

In addition, for each of the five cases, content analysis of the institutional policies was made (e.g., institution's statute, reports on the work of the institution, quality committee reports, re-accreditation reports, etc.). This was done because it showed how the institution, at least declaratively, deals with the issues of junior researchers teaching. An initial description of the institution (e.g., number of employees, students, organization, etc.) was made, being careful that the description of the institution was sufficiently precise and at the same time general enough so as not to indicate the identity of the research participants in any way.

Summaries of professional biographies and key achievements in the junior researchers' careers and their significant others were also made, so that all elements important for the professional path of a case could be followed chronologically and easily compared.

All research methods were selected bearing in mind how to best capture the specifics of each level of professional socialization and its contribution to the development of a positive attitude towards teaching. Each applied method required the preparation of instruments (interview and focus groups protocols, matrices for the document content analysis, etc.), and qualitative data analysis was conducted with the help of MAXQDA software. The application of various methods has contributed to the description of cases in detail, i.e. enabled the descriptions of professional socialization at different levels to be looked at from different perspectives.

Decisions on reporting the data and generalizability

The cases were first presented individually, i.e., the data collected and analysed using different methods and through different research phases was shown (e.g., *Case 1 – (A) – Summary of professional biography and key achievements in the junior researcher's career; (B) – Analysis of the institutional context (C) thematic analysis of the interview conducted with the junior researcher (D) – Thematic analysis of the interview conducted with "significant others" (e.g. mentor, colleague) (E) – Analysis of the student perspective (e.g., student evaluations, focus groups with students) and at the very end (F) – Conclusions of the case study 1).*

After that, a cross-case analysis was made, which includes a cross-comparison of the case study analysis unit, i.e., an analysis of similarities and differences in the events, activities and processes that the case study deals with (Khan and Van Wynsberghe, 2008). In this study, the cross-case analysis was made by presenting and comparing the findings of individual research phases (A to F), which enabled the next step – answering the main research question and discussing the collected results.

The conclusions of the case study are formulated so that they go beyond the experiences of individual cases and show the observed features of professional socialization that within each level of analysis (micro level, meso level and macro level) proved to be most significant or common to all research participants. The application of various data collection methods has made it possible to meet the transferability criterion, which implies a comprehensive description of the research results so that these results can be transferred to another context or circumstances in which other research participants are engaged (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).

Research challenges

In addition to pondering the principles of the research validity, one of the biggest challenges in this study was certainly the problem of ensuring the anonymity of all the research participants which (to some extent) contradicts the aforementioned principle of a comprehensive description of data required by the case study.

Namely, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all participants in the study via informed consent, therefore, they were given pseudonyms. This also meant omitting some key information from their professional biography and concealing information about the institution and the discipline in which they are employed. The Croatian academic community is a relatively small community and by revealing some details, such as discipline, in some cases meant jeopardizing the guaranteed agreement on maintaining anonymity. On the other hand, the omission of data that, for example, could very well serve to describe the disciplinary contribution to the development of a positive attitude towards teaching, was also a limitation in terms of the scope of the answers to research questions. In other words, both scenarios in some way limited the possibilities of a comprehensive data description. However, in such dubious situations, the protection of anonymity of the research participants has always been paramount as the primary ethical principle.

All other similar doubts and other reflections of the researcher were recorded in the researcher's reflective diary. When a researcher writes about the results of their case study, they find out a lot about the research participants' personal life. In addition to knowing what the person looks like, the researcher also knows what their living room or office looks like and what their favourite cafe is. It is almost impossible to detach oneself from these impressions, and therefore it is extremely important to raise awareness that the research process as well as the conclusions that emerge from it must not be contaminated by personal impressions. Keeping a reflective diary enables recording and becoming aware of such

insights and makes one think about their own influence on the research process and how not to introduce one's own assumptions, prejudices and other personal impressions in the process of data interpretation.

The role of school volunteer programmes in cultivating sustainability citizens

Research problem

The other example of a case study aims to describe and understand the role of school volunteer programs in developing characteristics of sustainability citizenship in secondary school pupils. This study deals with very complex concepts such as sustainable development, education for sustainable development, citizenship sustainability, volunteering and school volunteering, while the task of the researcher is to establish whether and how they are interconnected.

The concept of sustainability citizenship is in itself very complex as it builds on and merges several already known concepts such as socially responsible and active citizenship and environmental citizenship. Namely, sustainability citizenship encompasses all dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, social, economic and political), and is not, as ecological citizenship, predominantly focused on the environmental dimension. In a world that is becoming more complex it is necessary to revise the existing concepts since citizens today face many global challenges such as increasing social diversity, economic inequality and ecosystem degradation. Even though education is recognized as a key resource for ensuring all dimensions of sustainable development, it has also been noticed that formal education does not give significant results in the context of developing the characteristics of sustainability citizenship. In addition, there has been a decline in young people's interest in social engagement and active participation in the community. Therefore, it is necessary to consider alternative educational platforms within formal education that have the potential to develop characteristics of sustainability citizenship in pupils, such as school volunteer programs.

School volunteer programs are rapidly developing in the national context, and previous research has shown that pupils engaged in such programs have the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills, better understand their own role as citizens and are ready to act actively and responsibly in the community. By engaging in different activities within the school volunteer programs, pupils can become aware of their role in influencing social change and hence feel as useful members of their community.

This social phenomenon has so far been insufficiently researched and is quite complex in nature, which is why, due to its open design and flexibility in research, the case study has been chosen as a research strategy. Namely, the case study "allows" research decisions to be made at all stages of research, such as, for example, readdressing the research questions and adapting the research methods and instruments. Given the complexity of the concepts dealt with in this study, a holistic approach to research is needed that allows studying the role and potential of school volunteer programs in developing sustainability citizenship using detailed and in-depth data collected from different sources and by different methods. In this study, it is important to understand the mechanisms that take place within the programs and the experiences of the actors involved (pupil volunteers and program coordinators), and in order to understand them it is important to thoroughly describe all the mechanisms, events and situations occurring within the school volunteer programs.

Research aims and questions

In accordance with the conceptual framework and the chosen methodology, the main research question is:

> *What experiences, processes and events that take place within school volunteer programs encourage the development of the characteristics of sustainable citizenship in secondary school pupils and in what way?*

The aim of this study is to describe and understand the phenomenon of school volunteer programs and their role in the development of sustainability citizenship characteristics among the secondary school pupils in the Republic of Croatia. The broader social aim is to make recommendations for the improvement of school volunteer programs in terms of strengthening them for the development of sustainability citizenship characteristics. The design of this study is emerging and is approached from the paradigm of social constructivism, so the aim is to examine and understand the meaning that the participants attach to the phenomenon of school volunteer programs and their role in developing the characteristics of sustainability citizenship.

In line with the mentioned aims, the following specific research questions arise, which are divided into three categories: 1) institutional and non-institutional environment, 2) pupil volunteers, 3) coordinators of school volunteer programs.

1. Institutional and non-institutional environment
    - 1.1. Curriculum
        - 1.1.1. How did the process of implementing volunteering in the school curriculum occur?
        - 1.1.2. In what form is volunteering implemented in the school curriculum?

1.2. Content and activities
    1.2.1. How are aims and outcomes defined in the school volunteer programs?
    1.2.2. What events and activities occur within the school volunteer programs?
    1.2.3. What topics are represented in the school volunteer programs?
    1.2.4. In which activities of the school volunteer programs are topics about sustainable development represented?
    1.2.5. For whom are the activities within the school volunteer programs meant?
1.3. Context features
    1.3.1. Who do schools cooperate with in the school volunteer programs and in what way?
    1.3.2. What are the features of the organisational context within which school volunteer programs are conducted?

2. Pupils who volunteer
2.1. Experiences
    2.1.1. What is the motivation of pupils to be included in the school volunteer programs?
    2.1.2. How do pupils participate in the activities within school volunteer programs?
    2.1.3. What are the experiences of pupils who participate in school volunteer programs?
    2.1.4. How do pupils perceive their lived experiences in the context of their future behaviour?
2.2. Meanings and comprehension
    2.2.1. How do the pupils see their role in the school volunteer programs?
    2.2.2. What meanings do pupils assign to their experiences of participating in the school volunteer programs?
    2.2.3. Do pupils transfer their experiences from the school volunteer programs to their activities outside school and in what way?
    2.2.4. How do pupils see their community engagement within the school volunteer programs?

3. Coordinators of the school volunteer programs
3.1. Experiences
    3.1.1. How did the teachers / expert associates become school volunteer programs coordinators?
    3.1.2. What are their experiences in running the school volunteer programs?
3.2. Meanings and comprehension
    3.2.1. What meanings do the coordinators assign to their work in the school volunteer programs?
    3.2.2. How do coordinators see their role in the school volunteer programs?

3.2.3. What advantages and what obstacles do the coordinators see in their work in the school volunteer programs?

3.2.4. How do the coordinators assess the impact of experiences and activities in the school volunteer programs on future behaviour of the pupils?

The aim of this study is to comprehensively describe school volunteer programs and understand what their role is in developing sustainability citizenship. Specific research questions have the task of exhausting the main research question, and given the complexity of the key concepts, school volunteer programs and citizenship sustainability, it is necessary to approach the topic holistically and understand the broader context of the phenomenon, rather than a priori make assumptions about experiences, processes and events that occur within school volunteer programs.

About the case

Subject and object of the case

The case study is defined through the subject and object of the case. The analytical framework that answers the question "a case of what", i.e., the object of the case in this study is the development of the features of sustainability citizenship, and the subject of the case are the school volunteer programs.

The case study is defined in this way because the goal is to select the cases, i.e., those school volunteer programs that can best answer the posed research question. It is crucial to include those programs whose volunteer activities are rich in content and which cover, wherever possible, all dimensions of sustainable development in order to be able to gather comprehensive information and that the case can be understood and described in its entirety.

Choosing the subjects of the case

In order to answer the posed research question, cases - school volunteer programs – were selected according to predetermined criteria. In accordance with the literature review, five selection criteria were determined: 1) integration of the program into the school curriculum, 2) minimum duration of the program of one school year, 3) openness and accessibility of the program to all pupils, 4) cooperation with external associates, 5) content connection with dimensions of sustainable development. Due to the possibility that too many school volunteer programs meet the above selection criteria, five additional criteria have been defined: 1) organization and structure of the program, 2) clearly defined needs and problems of the school or the community, depending on where volunteer actions are conducted, 3) educated coordinators, 4) concrete, measurable and positive contribution, i.e., it is necessary that the volunteer activities carried out result in significant contribution that

pupils can recognize immediately after the end of the activity, 5) coverage of organizational costs and the costs of implementing the volunteer activities.

The planned number of cases in this study is six school volunteer programs, but there is a possibility that due to certain circumstances, such as refusal to participate in the study or the epidemiological measures that may change the course of research, it will be necessary to select more cases. In order to check which school volunteer programs meet the selection and additional criteria, a mapping of school volunteer programs in secondary schools in Croatia has been conducted. A survey questionnaire was constructed and sent to the electronic addresses of all secondary schools in Croatia (N = 427), and instructions were given for the coordinators of school volunteer programs to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was accessed by a total of 123 schools, of which 76 implement school volunteer programs that are integrated into the school curriculum. After analysing the mapping results, programs that meet the above criteria were selected.

Since no research is conducted in a vacuum, this one is not an exception, before the data collection process, due to various emerging circumstances (pandemic and earthquakes), it was necessary to revise the list of the selected cases. Namely, some of the initially selected programs were forced to reduce the activities of the school volunteer program due to the above circumstances, or they simply no longer had the necessary conditions to carry out volunteer activities in their school. Taking into account the new situations, the case selection process was re-conducted. In addition to all the above selection steps, the official school websites were further studied to determine if the potential cases were able to conduct the school volunteer programs. Based on all analyses and reflections, six primary and eleven cases in reserve were selected.

The point is to examine experiences, processes and events as well as the meanings that participants assign to their experience, therefore, it was important to select the cases that continued to carry out volunteer activities despite adversity. Although the final selection of cases took special care of their current activity and engagement, it was decided to send the topics of discussion to the participants beforehand so that they could recall their own experiences and not lose or miss the information important for understanding the school volunteer programs and their roles in developing sustainability citizenship characteristics.

In addition to all the above selection criteria, the type of secondary school (grammar school, polyvalent and vocational) as well as the attempt to balance between urban and rural areas were taken into account. These additional “criteria” are important in this study because some areas have limited opportunities to launch school volunteer programs, as well as to collaborate with external stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, which are very important actors in establishing and developing school volunteer clubs.

Case limits

As can be seen from the established selection criteria for the cases, the boundaries of the case, time and space constraint have also been also set. Namely, when selecting the cases, it was important that the school volunteer program was active for at least one school year so that the research participants could talk about their experiences and the meanings they assign to that experience. School volunteer programs were selected within the secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia.

Research methods

In order for the school volunteer programs to be understood and described as comprehensively as possible, it was important to involve all stakeholders in these programs in the research process. The methods decided upon are: 1) a semi-structured interview with the school volunteer program coordinators, 2) focus groups with pupils who volunteer (4 to 7 students per case) and 3) qualitative content analysis of the school curriculum. All the data supporting the case should be used when conducting a case study with the aim of getting a holistic description and understanding of the researched phenomenon. Instruments were prepared for each method – an interview and focus groups protocols and a matrix for the content analysis of the school curricula.

The first two methods were conducted in parallel, and we used them to explore the experiences and role of pupils and coordinators in their active engagement in the volunteer program as well as the processes that take place within the program, which can encourage the development of sustainability citizenship. In addition, we wanted to find out what significance pupils and coordinators attach to their work within the school volunteer programs. It is also important to note that the skills of the researcher in terms of facilitating group discussion and recognising group dynamics is extremely important when conducting a focus group.

We decided to conduct a semi-structured interview with the coordinators as it was important to explore the same topics with all participants, while at the same time this method allows researchers a certain flexibility and the ability to add new topics during interviews if needed (Miriam and Tisdell, 2016). The focus group was chosen because of the expected discussion among the pupils about their experiences and the meanings they assign to them.

Prior to the actual field research, a pilot case study was conducted to verify the effectiveness of the prepared protocols for the semi-structured interview and focus group. The pilot study was also to answer the question of whether all possible topics of the protocol have been exhausted, and whether the researcher is ready for all possible scenarios. Based on the pilot study, no intervention was needed in the interview protocol, it turned out that the topics within the protocol were very well prepared and thought out. However, it was necessary to intervene in the focus group protocol. Namely, the original idea was to prepare a protocol for the pupils that will not only consist of topics, but also of some focusing

exercises[5] that have various functions, such as directing the attention of group members and their interaction to a particular topic and ensuring less digressions in the discussion. In doing so, it is important to carefully structure the focusing activities to be successful and not to interfere with the natural course of group interaction (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). Unfortunately, the prepared activities did not work as expected. At the end of the focus group of the pilot study, the participants referred to the protocol and unanimously agreed that there is no need to carry out these activities and that it is more pleasant for them just to talk and discuss with each other. There is also a possibility that the focusing activities were well prepared, but not executed well enough and therefore did not achieve the desired effect. The "failure" to carry out these activities within the focus group was a valuable lesson for future research, the lesson being that nothing should be assumed and that situations in the field rarely go as planned.

In addition to testing the protocol, the pilot study further encouraged thinking about conducting the research and making some key decisions, such as access to the research participants, adherence to institutional policies, reflection on the anonymity of the participants, institutions and the like.

Aside from intervening in the protocols after the pilot study, additional changes were made taking into account the broader social context, in this case, the situation with Covid-19 disease. Although the research proposal did not entail the topic of Covid-19, it was simply impossible to ignore it, so the topic of carrying out volunteer activities with the added challenges of the measures and restrictions caused by the pandemic was subsequently included.

Also, as a "consequence" of the pilot research, it was decided that before conducting the focus groups, pupils will be given the task to fill out a short questionnaire about their socio-demographic characteristics, in order to focus only on the content and topics of the protocol when conducting the focus group. Namely, since the focus groups were conducted during classes, it was very important to precisely time the duration of the focus group so that the pupils would not be absent from their classes for too long.

Although the protocol for the interview did not change after the pilot, one important decision was made, and that is that only one coordinator of school volunteer programs will be interviewed. Namely, most school volunteer programs are led by more than one coordinator and it would be desirable to include them all in the study. However, it was concluded that conducting group interviews would mean a number of challenges, such as difficulties in arranging the interview dates, the possibility that some of the coordinators will refuse to participate in the study, while some school volunteer programs are run by only one coordinator. Therefore, it was decided that only one coordinator per program would be

[5] Activities intended for the focus group protocol included retelling an individual volunteer story (volunteer actions in which they participated, description of the first / most significant / most challenging volunteer action, specific events within the school volunteer program), reflection on changes in knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviours as a consequence of volunteering. For each activity, a few minutes were intended for individual preparation.

involved in the study. In this way, equal conditions for data collection were ensured for all cases.

The conclusion is that it is worthwhile to conduct a pilot study before the main one, because in addition to improving the protocols and instruments, it gives the researcher considerable self-confidence in further course of the study.

Decisions on reporting the data and generalizability

As this is an example of a fluid case study that is still ongoing, final decisions on the manner of reporting data have not yet been made. However, it is assumed that the data will be presented in a similar way as in the previously described example of the case study – first presented individually and then cross-case i.e., the units of the case study analysis will be compared. We will also strive to meet the criteria for transferring the results of the analysis to another context.[6]

Research challenges

This study has so far encountered two major challenges, the challenge of ensuring the anonymity of all research participants and the Covid-19 "situation" and the epidemiological measures.

Namely, since this is a case study and it deals with a very specific social phenomenon – school volunteer programs that are at their beginnings in Croatian schools, it is actually very challenging to ensure complete anonymity for all participants. Therefore, we made a decision that anonymity will be provided to the pupils, and that the anonymity of the coordinators and the institution that implements the school volunteer program will be discussed with the coordinators and principals. For now, all coordinators agreed that it is not necessary to preserve their identity and the identity of the institution, in fact, they expressed a desire to promote them in some way as they are proud of their work and the effort they invest in the programs. However, the main research is still ongoing and there is a possibility that some institutions will ask to be guaranteed anonymity, in which case it is important to guarantee anonymity to all programs, so that the data is always presented in the same way.

Before agreeing on the date of data collection and contacting the coordinators, it was necessary to mind the institutional hierarchy and first contact the principals to ask for approval to conduct research in that institution. During the conversation with the principals, the researcher was told that there is a ban on the entry of outsiders into schools due to the epidemiological measures. The collection of live data was of great importance for the quality of the research so the requirements that the institution placed before the researcher had to be taken into account. Therefore, weather forecast also needed to be taken

[6] Described in the chapter *How to generalize the case study data?*

into consideration when arranging the interviews and focus groups since they were conducted in the open. Additionally, conducting an outdoor focus group while being mindful of the necessary distance between the participants required the provision of several dictaphones to ensure that the voice of each participant was recorded.

These situations happening in the field do not sound like a serious threat to the research process, but they show that conducting research is a living process and it is very difficult to predict what it will look like once you are actually in the midst of it after months spent in front of your computer writing the research proposal.

During the data collection, it was noticed that almost all participants (for now) are female. It was indeed expected that there would be more female volunteers, but not to this extent. This situation does not however pose a research challenge, but it just goes to show that the case study is the right choice for this study as it allows the flexibility to make new decisions during the research process. The final decision on focusing this study on "the female stories" has not yet been made because the research is still ongoing, but it has, for now, proven to be the standard.

One of the challenges was to ensure an equal standard of data collection. Namely, one of the conditions for conducting the interview was that one coordinator was interviewed, but the situation in the field was somewhat different than expected, since two coordinators were interviewed in one of the cases. The decision to conduct a group interview in that one case was made on the spot given that the opposite decision could have contaminated the interview process. Also, one of the conditions was that the focus groups be attended by volunteers who have been active in the school volunteer program for at least one school year. However, due to certain circumstances, such as organizing a focus group during classes and collecting data before the end of the school year, which for some students meant the obligation to take exams and the inevitable Covid-19 "situation", i.e., the obligation to be in isolation, this was not possible. In such situations, it was decided that the focus group would be repeated with the older students, but through an online platform as it was not possible to re-organize the trip on location.

What is especially important to emphasize is the commitment, will and desire of the coordinators and pupils to participate in the study and tell their "story" and the pride they felt because someone recognized their work and effort. One of the special moments when conducting a case study is that the researchers grow with their research, constantly change and improve. They also sometimes, of course, fail and make the "wrong" decision, but this is just an opportunity to become aware of these mistakes and make better decisions in the future. Conducting qualitative research, a case study, is a process that requires constant reflection and living with the stories of the participants, with the data collected, constantly making decisions and going back to the beginning. The researcher has had the privilege to enter the world of the research participants, to experience their passion, enthusiasm and commitment, and it is precisely because of this privilege that researchers have the obligation to authentically convey the stories of their participants. Due to all the above, it is extremely important to keep a reflective diary. It is necessary to record all impressions and experiences from the field in order to raise awareness of one's own prejudices so that the analysis of the results can be credible.

Closing remarks

This publication was created with the purpose of opening a methodological dialogue with other researchers interested in the case study and conducting qualitative research in the field of social sciences. We hope that we have succeeded in our intention to present you with our understanding of the case study and concrete examples of research so as to provide you with a useful source of information in solving some of your research challenges when using this demanding but at the same time very stimulating, creative and even playful research strategy. We also hope that we have helped breaking down prejudices and myths about the case study (and qualitative research in general) and contributed to a better understanding and informed use of the case study as a relevant and valuable research strategy.

Our experience in applying the case study primarily indicates that this is a demanding strategy which, precisely because of its "openness" and its "winding" path can bring many challenges and difficulties to the novice researcher. However, at the same time, for the same reasons, it makes research stimulating, creative and brings about outcomes that we did not initially count on, or, on the other hand, makes us realize less than initially planned. Researchers are often expected to firmly and rigorously chart their path and not deviate from the research design, so in this context the application of flexible research strategies (such as the case study) can be interpreted as a weakness in the research design and not fulfilling all of the set aims as a research deficiency. That is why it is important to show the principles of this complex strategy in which the research process is cyclical and reflective to both less and more experienced researchers who have not yet dealt with the case study. We hope that, in addition to our knowledge and experience, we managed to translate into the text of this publication our research curiosity and personal motivation to conduct the qualitative case study and that we were able to interest and encourage researchers to apply this strategy.

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