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Challenges and best practices**

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Publication date

2021

Document Version

Final published version

Citation (APA)

Intriago Zambrano, J. C., Diehl, J. C., & Ertsen, M. W. (2021). *Q methodology in low-resource settings: Challenges and best practices*. 24-24. Abstract from 37th annual conference of the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity, Nantes, France.

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Q methodology in low-resource settings: Challenges and best practices

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Reduction of poverty is a main goal in the global development agenda. The most extreme forms of poverty are mainly rooted in the Global South, and even more engrained in its rurality. Such poverty is not only characterized by infimum incomes, but also by the lack of access to many resources and services: health, sanitation, drinking water, education, etc. Eradication of deep poverty therefore demands a holistic understanding of its causes, as well as the wicked interaction of its many variables. International definitions of (deep) poverty, however, keep resorting to income thresholds (e.g. World Bank’s International Poverty Line) to measure it. In consequence, such definitions may overshadow underlying context-dependent complexities: gender dimensions, urban/rural divide, societal power relationships, local economic dynamics. Q methodology is a potentially powerful tool to understand better the different nuances of poverty, thus to enable a more effective tackling of its roots. First, as a participatory method, it offers voices to grassroots participants to express their own priorities and concerns. Second, it encompasses rich qualitative data that go beyond oversimplified quantitative thresholds and analyses. Third, as a reductionist technique, it condenses (virtually) infinite positions into clearly identifiable poverty discourses.

At the same time, methodological deployment of Q methodology in low-resource settings, and particularly in rural areas, poses several (underreported) challenges worth to be considered and discussed. These challenges may be exacerbated in light of big shocks, like the current COVID-19 pandemic. Whether related to the concourse development, sorting grid design, P-set sampling, administration, data recording or validation, researchers may encounter a number of concerns/restrictions.

In our work, we analyze these challenges along with proposed corresponding best practices. This analysis is the result of both literature review and first-hand Q methodology administration with smallholders in Nepal, Indonesia and Malawi. Best practices notwithstanding, we advocate for the empowerment of local researchers regarding this technique that remains ‘property’ of the western world. By democratizing the knowledge on its application, we expect local stakeholders to explore and prioritize their needs-and its potential solutions-in a more precise manner.

Keywords: low, resource settings, poverty, methodological challenges, smallholder farming

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