



The 'Timescapes' Study: Changing Relationships and Identities through the Life Course An ESRC Qualitative Longitudinal Initiative

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The development of Qualitative Longitudinal Research

In recent years there has been a growing appreciation of Qualitative Longitudinal (QLL, or Qualitudinal) research within the social science community. This has arisen out of two recent developments. Firstly, methods research in the UK has been given a boost through the ESRC Research Methods Programme and the recently established National Centre for Research Methods. This Centre has six 'nodes' sited at different universities around the country, including Leeds, where a prospective 10 year QLL study of Young Lives and Times has recently been established. These initiatives have done a great deal to push the boundaries of social scientific knowledge by encouraging researchers to reflect upon and refine their research practices.

Secondly, there is a growing awareness that, in our complex rapidly changing world, lives are not static but lived in and through time. Building a dynamic perspective into our research enquiries has become increasingly important, for it is only by looking across and through time that we can begin to grasp the nature of social change. Furthermore, it is only by looking qualitatively through time that we can begin to understand the micro-processes of social change and the complex relationship between biography and history as real lives unfold.

QLL research is not new; it is part of a rich ethnographic tradition, spanning fields as diverse as social anthropology, community and theatre studies. However, it has rarely been written about or given focused attention and the complex array of time sensitive methods for sampling, data collection and analysis are not well documented or understood.

Timescapes Archive

The empirical projects will generate a wealth of QLL data, which will be gathered together to establish the Leeds based Timescapes Archive. The central programme at Leeds involves setting up and promoting the Archive as an enduring national resource for secondary and historical use. Archiving and Secondary analysis projects have been built into the central streams of work to showcase and advance these activities. There is scope for separately funded QLL projects to be affiliated to the Timescapes study and form part of the archive, and for secondary analysis projects to be undertaken on the data resource. The archive is designed as a specialist satellite of ESDS Qualidata, offering an innovative devolved model for the archiving and re-use of QLL data and with the potential to move qualitative enquiry to new levels of significance beyond its 'cottage industry' roots.

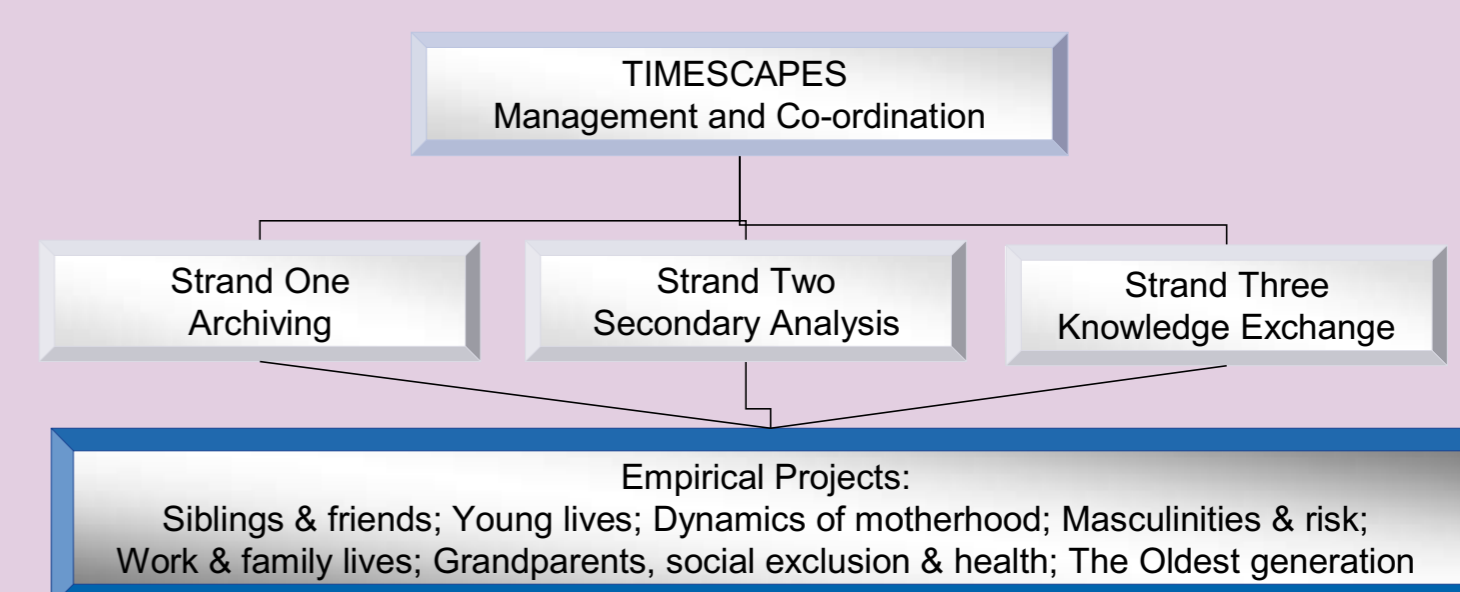


For more information about the Timescapes study, contact Bren Neale (b.neale@leeds.ac.uk)

The Timescapes Study

This state of affairs looks set to change. ESRC have recently announced funding of £4.5 million for the 'Timescapes' study, which will enrich the canon of longitudinal studies in the UK and establish a specialist archive of QLL data for secondary use. The five year study is due to commence in February 2007 and will explore the changing nature of personal and family relationships through the life course and from different generational perspectives. The study will be exploring these themes through three timescapes (biographical, generational and historical time) as a way of understanding the complexities of temporal experience. The research has strong policy dimensions, particularly in the areas of health and social care and the long term resourcing of families. The study will be carried out by a consortium of researchers from five universities (Leeds, South Bank, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Open) and from different disciplinary perspectives (Sociology, Psychology, Social Policy, Health studies, Childhood and Youth studies, Gerontology, Oral history and Cultural Studies). The FLaG research centre will provide a fitting intellectual home for the study, given that the core concerns of the study dovetail with those of the new centre.

The Timescapes Study



Seven empirical studies have been devised that will span the life course and track individuals or inter-generational groups over time to explore:

- how children work out their relationships with siblings and friends
- the dynamics of teenage social and familial relationships
- the dynamics of motherhood, fatherhood and work life balance across the generations
- the life experiences of grandparents and the oldest generation

