Coming to grips with life-as-experienced: Piecing together research to study stakeholders' lived relational experiences in collaborative planning processes

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ABSTRACT

Lived experience remains a key concept in qualitative social science research. The study of life-as-experienced is, however, a project that is methodologically problematic due to the fact that researchers can only come to grips with people's lived experiences through their (re)constructed representations of it. Yet, during this process of (re)constructing, some of the complexity of life-as-experienced is inevitably lost. The methodological challenge is to find an approach that embraces, rather than reduces the complexity of life-as experienced. In qualitative research literature, methodological bricolage has been proposed as such an approach. In this article, we present a concrete example of a bricolaged research approach, provide insights into its potential value and reflect on the challenges we encountered. We discuss how our approach enabled a multi-layered exploration of lived experiences. By creatively blending methods, we were able to tap into different kinds of understanding. Our bricolaged research approach generated: 1. knowledge "from within" and "in-between" research subjects, 2. a kaleidoscopic view of lived experiences, and 3. a processual understanding that embraces the temporal dimension of life-as-experienced. Researchers can benefit from our discussion on this bricolaged approach as there are as of yet few concrete examples of how bricolage can be implemented in practice.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary qualitative social science research, "lived experience" remains a central methodological notion that aims to provide understandings of how people experience, interpret, and feel about certain phenomena in their everyday lives (Davies & Davies, 2007; van Manen, 2004). Lived experience/life-as experienced as a concept refers to both the experience of "living through" everyday, ordinary events and the meanings (reflectively) attached to that experience (Throop, 2003). A research interest in lived experiences embraces the idea that "in order to understand a phenomenon [...], it is not possible to ignore the experience of the person who lives the phenomenon" (Daher, Carre, Jaramillo, Olivares & Tomicic, 2017, §19).

While the importance and centrality of lived experience is evident throughout the social science disciplines, the actual methodology needed to study lived experience has received less critical attention (Daher et al., 2017; Throop, 2003). Researching lived experiences is, however, a fundamentally problematic project. Researchers face specific methodological challenges due to the fact that people's lived experiences and meanings cannot be grasped directly. Making an account of life-as-experienced always entails a transformation and reconstruction in which "both the researcher and research participant [...] are made captive to the story line, the expression, the images, the metaphors, the emotions that rise up in the telling, in the writing, and in the listening" (Davies & Davies, 2007, p.1141; see also Bruner, 1986, Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Greene & Hill, 2005; Josselson, 2004). This transformative and reconstructive act of expressing, so scholars argue, inevitably reduces some of the complexity of life-as-experienced (Bagnoli, 2009; Bruner, 1986; Eastmond, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007; Throop, 2003; van Manen, 1990).

A main methodological challenge then for researchers studying life-as-experienced is "to match up social science research methods to this complexity of multidimensional experience" (Mason, 2006, p.12). Most qualitative social science research, however, continues to rely on interviews as the standard— often only—method to do so (Bagnoli, 2009; Davies & Davies, 2007). Interviews, however, tap into only one type of data, i.e., linguistic/verbal descriptions, leaving other dimensions of experience out of the equation. Consequently, researchers' understandings of life-as-experienced are impoverished (Mason, 2006). In qualitative research literature, bricolage has been proposed as an approach that makes it possible to embrace the complexity of the lived world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2004; Rogers, 2012). Generally speaking, bricolage can be understood as a methodological practice based on "notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality" (Rogers, 2012, p.1). Bricoleurs "recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach" (Kincheloe, 2001, p.681). Rather than sticking

to methodological guidelines, they amalgamate different tools, methods and disciplines adapted to the specific demands of the inquiry at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In this article, we present a concrete bricolaged research approach and discuss its potential to increase understanding and appreciation of the complexity of life-as-experienced, in particular the multidimensional and dynamic nature of lived experiences. Whereas qualitative research literature has paid considerable attention to the conceptualization of bricolage, there are few examples of how it has been concretely implemented in research contexts (Rogers, 2012; Wibberley, 2012). Yet, sharing concrete examples of actual research practices, of "how the job is done," is an important aspect of assessing or demonstrating the adequacy (and validity) of a specific approach (Mishler, 1990). Hence, based on our concrete research experiences with using a bricolaged approach to study lived experiences of stakeholder relations, i.e., stakeholders' lived relational experiences in collaborative planning projects, we provide insights into its value for exploring lived experiences in all its complexity. We do so in three steps: first, we elaborate on the concept of lived experience and the methodological issues inherent to this object of inquiry. Here, we also discuss bricolage as a methodological approach that allows researchers to add "breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.5). In the second step, we introduce a concrete research project examining stakeholders' relating dynamics in collaborative planning processes. Here we discuss how we pieced together research to enable a rich and comprehensive exploration of stakeholders' lived experiences with their mutual relations that does justice to their complexity. In the third step, we show how the different methods we used made it possible to uncover different aspects or layers of life-as-experienced.

STUDYING LIVED EXPERIENCES: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Lived experience remains a key concept in social science theorizing, drawing attention to how people experience and make sense of everyday situations/life (Berglund, 2007; Daher et al., 2017). An emphasis on lived experiences has its roots in phenomenology, a philosophical movement that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Phenomenology, being critical of natural science for its objectification of the empirical world, drew attention back to the concrete, everyday lifeworld and the meaningful ways in which things are experienced, made sense of and enacted in everyday life (Berglund, 2007).

Lived experience—life-as-experienced—is not merely about the immediate and pre-reflective experience of events, but about an experience, that which has been "lived through."

Lived experiences are "not passive, sensuous expressions, but perceptions which [are] as a rule already furnished with interpretation in the shape of objectives, values, meanings and the like" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p.36). Hence, lived experience pertains to how a person perceives and attaches meaning to what has happened, informed by past experiences and cultural repertoires (Eastmond, 2007; Throop, 2003). Following Throop (2003), we adhere to a complemental model of lived experience, which holds that lived experiences can be articulated in a variety of forms across a spectrum ranging from coherent and unified experiences to fragmentary and disjunctive experiences. Thus, lived experiences are not always characterized by ordered coherence; they may also have a fragmentary structure (ibid.).

Life-as-experienced is complex by nature (Bagnoli, 2009; Davies & Davies, 2007; Mason, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2007). For one thing, lived experiences are multidimensional: experiences and the meanings attached to them are "not a surface phenomenon, it permeates through body and psyche of participants" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.481). People experience life on many "dimensions": bodily, sensory, emotional, aesthetically and they make sense of these experiences not only in words, but also in feelings and images (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Mason, 2006). Adding to the complexity, lived experiences also have a temporal structure as there is a flux and fluidity to lived experience. As Josselson (2004, p.2) puts it: "Meanings of past events change over the lifespan as the beginnings of the story are reshaped and lead to endings that are mutable and in process." Josselson here touches upon the "in-process," ever-changing nature of the lived world and the dynamism of life-as-experienced.

Despite the centrality of lived experiences throughout the social science disciplines, there has been little critical engagement with what it methodologically involves to study lived experiences (Daher et al., 2017). Yet, the study of lived experience is fundamentally problematic due to the fact that actual life-as-experienced and its meanings cannot be grasped directly (Josselson, 2004; Polkinghorne, 2007). Researchers can only come to know something about lived experiences through "people's articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experiences" (Bruner, 1986, p.7). Consequently, our possibilities to explore lived experience are limited. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p.39) point out: "Experience [...] is always more than we can know and represent in a single statement, paragraph, or book. Every representation of it, therefore, no matter how faithful to that what it tries to depict, involves selective emphasis." This elusiveness of people's experiences, so Greene and Hill (2005) argue, should be a fundamental premise for researchers taking lived experiences as their object of inquiry.

There are at least two aspects to this methodological challenge. First, each expression inevitably entails a transformation and (re)construction of the actual lived experience (Gemignani, 2014; van Manen, 1990). In telling about their experiences, people establish limits and frame experiences in a specific way, thereby constructing a possible and provisional interpretation of a certain human experience (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As Davies and Davies (2007, p.1139) point out: "There are multiple possible trajectories in the tales that we, and our research participants, tell in the process of 'generating data'." Another part of the dilemma is the involvement of the researcher in this (re)constructive process. Many social scientists now accept that the objective researcher is a myth and have become alert towards their own involvement in the creation of data (Greene & Hill, 2005). As Eastmond (2007, p.249) argues: "What is remembered and told is also situational, shaped not least through the contingencies of the encounter between narrator and listener and the power relationship between them." This indicates how researchers are active co-constructors rather than simple collectors of data (Gemignani, 2014).

Together these insights demonstrate that the study of lived experiences is a continuous process of construction and reconstruction by both researcher and research participant (ibid.). Different scholars however, argue how some of the complexity, i.e., multidimensionality and dynamism, of life-as-experienced is inevitably reduced in the (re)constructive act of recounting an experience. The methodological challenge is to actively cultivate a methodology and methods that enable the exploration of lived experience in a way that appreciates its complexity; i.e., its multidimensional and dynamic nature (Berglund, 2007; Ellingson, 2012; Mason, 2006). Currently, interviews remain the standard method for generating accounts of experience (Atkinson, 2005; Bagnoli, 2009). Interviews, however, generally focus on verbalizations at the expense of other modes of expression (Bruner, 1986). As Bagnoli (2009, p.547) describes:

> The use of interviews relies on language as the privileged medium for the creation and communication of knowledge. However, our daily experience is made of a multiplicity of dimensions, which include the visual and the sensory, and which are worthy of investigation but cannot always be easily expressed in words, since not all knowledge is reducible to language [Eisner, 2008]. The inclusion of non-linguistic dimensions in research, which rely on other expressive possibilities, may allow us to access and represent different levels of experience.

Bagnoli subsequently suggests that to enable a more comprehensive exploration of lived experiences, one that appreciates their complexity, researchers need to go "beyond the standard interview and expand the domain of investigation by adopting a variety of methods" (ibid.). This idea of employing and blending multiple methods across disciplinary

boundaries is congruent with the concept of "bricolage" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 2-3; Kincheloe, 2001, p.680).

In qualitative research literature, bricolage is put forward as an approach to research that appreciates the complexity of the lived world (Berry, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2004; Rogers, 2012). The concept of methodological bricolage was first introduced in a qualitative methodological context by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, pp.2-3) to describe the emergence of "eclectic multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approaches to meaning-making in research" (Rogers, 2012, p.3). At the core of the bricolage concept lies the idea of interdisciplinarity. By not confining research to a monological method/path or to prescribed formats within a given "disciplinary drawer" but instead actively seeking new ways of seeing and constructing research methods from the tools at hand across disciplinary boundaries, the researcher-as-bricoleur avoids reductionism and envisions addressing the complexity of the lived world (Berry, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2001, 2004). The core principles of methodological bricolage can be summarized as follows:

- creatively combining and creating multiple data-gathering and analytical techniques and methods, crossing disciplinary boundaries if necessary (Kincheloe, 2001);
- using the tools and means "at hand" to accomplish knowledge work (Kincheloe, 2004);
- contextual/situational contingencies guide method (Rogers, 2012; Kincheloe, 2004);
- adopting a flexible/emergent construction and readjustment of research design: "if new tools or techniques have to be invented or pieced together, then the researcher will do this" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.4).

In general, methodological bricolage thus signifies approaches that actively use, construct and modify methods: research then involves an ongoing tinkering "with our research methods in field-based and interpretive contexts" rather than following pre-defined methodological guidelines (Kincheloe, Mclaren & Steinberg 2011, p.168). In this article, we present and discuss an example of methodological bricolage and provide insights into the potential value of this approach in the study of lived experiences in all their complexity.

PIECING TOGETHER RESEARCH TO STUDY LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS IN COLLABORATIVE PLANNING PROCESSES

The research project

In this article, we draw on our research experiences with a research project set up to develop understandings of stakeholders' lived relational experiences, i.e., of how stakeholders

involved in collaborative planning projects "live through" and make sense of their mutual relations, and of how (and why) these lived relational experiences and meanings change over time. Stakeholder relations are a crucial factor in collaborative processes and key to the success of collaborative efforts (Innes & Booher, 2004; Nowell, 2009). Our research focus on stakeholders' lived relational experiences entails a longitudinal perspective since it involves capturing how these experiences change and evolve over time (Vandenbussche, 2018; Vandenbussche, Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2018).

The research project features two case studies involving ongoing collaboratively approached urban regeneration projects: one in Vreewijk, the other in Katendrecht, both areas in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. While the substantive approach differs in each project, they both have a similar collaborative set-up. In both projects, the following stakeholders (organizations, agencies or groups with a stake in the issue of concern) were actively involved: the municipality of Rotterdam, the borough, the main housing corporation in the area, and the residents and/or tenants. A private developer was also actively involved in Katendrecht. In both projects, the stakeholders interacted face-to-face on a regular basis, with the aim of jointly developing spatial and social policies to bring about urban regeneration in the area. Furthermore, both projects involved longterm collaborations over a period of at least ten years. Case study research on stakeholders' relating dynamics was conducted between 2010 and 2016. Our research focus on stakeholders' lived relational experiences and developments therein throughout the collaborative planning process contained both a retrospective element, i.e., gathering data on past experiences, and a real time element, i.e., gathering data on experiences as they emerged.

To study how stakeholders live through their mutual relations in collaborative planning processes and how these lived relational experiences evolve over time, we employed a bricolaged research approach. In the following section, we discuss the design as it "emerged" throughout our research.

Piecing together research: Multiple routes and multiple tellings

In our study, we combined multiple, cross-disciplinary methodological practices as we needed them in the "unfolding context of the research situation" (Kincheloe et al, 2011, p.168). Due to the complex nature of our object of inquiry (lived relational experiences), the idea of researching it as a (re)constructive process and the specificities of our study (longitudinal perspective), we adhered to the idea of facilitating multiple routes x multiple tellings to design our research. The first refers to a search to provide different routes, i.e., expressive modes, in order to appreciate the multidimensional nature of stakeholders' lived relational experiences, whereas the latter refers to appreciating the dynamic nature of

stakeholders' lived relational experiences. Although the methods and tools in our research emerged in a rather fragmented way throughout our study, for the purpose of description, we will present them as three separate and coherent routes, each involving a specific set of methods, tools and techniques, drawing on different methodological principles.

Route I: Ethnographic fieldwork

We started our inquiry into stakeholders' lived relational experiences with an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research indicates a general research orientation that aims to obtain a rich and holistic understanding of social actors in their natural setting, their emic views and the meanings of their actions (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011; Gobo, 2011). A crucial methodological principle in ethnographic approaches is that "being there"/"having been there" is required if one is to describe and understand social life[1] (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Kramer & Adams, 2017; Lewis & Russell, 2011). By immersing oneself in a chosen field setting, ethnographic research "holds the possibility of a way of knowing that is more valid to the [...] contingent flow of lived experience than reductionistic forms of knowing" (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991, p.278). Advantages of doing fieldwork include: "deeper levels of understanding [...]; closer and more regular contact with the field; more detailed consideration of social actors at the centre of the [...] phenomenon making access to; [...]; quicker establishment of rapport and trust between researcher and participants" (Taylor, 2011, p.6).

On the methodological side, ethnographic research relies heavily on participant observation (as well as informal talks and archival documents) of people's actions and accounts in everyday contexts (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Emerson et al., 2011; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Data are accumulatively collected in field notes that document in descriptive terms the researcher's observations, experiences and reflections with the social group that is being studied (Emerson et al.; 2011; Kramer & Adams, 2017).

We implemented ethnographic fieldwork by attending and participating in a large share of the meetings and events organized by the collaboratives under study between 2010 and 2016. Furthermore, as part of our fieldwork, we also engaged in various commitment acts. Commitment acts entail a particularized investment of time and energy in activities

1 In its traditional conception, this meant: "spending a lengthy period in the field; long enough, ideally, to observe a full cycle of activity" (Lewis & Russell, 2011, p.400). However, contemporary ethnographic approaches no longer consider the amount of time spent at a research site as the core indicator of thorough ethnographic work. Rather the constant of ethnographic practice lies, as Lewis and Russell indicate, in "an attitude toward 'being there' sufficient to experience the mundane and sacred, brash and nuanced aspects of socio-cultural life and, through observations, encounters and conversations, to come to an understanding of it" (ibid.).

with research participants with an unpredictable pay-off to the study. They are primarily a way of "showing the commitment to learning the culture and people one is studying" (Feldman, Bell & Berger, 2003, p.36). In our research project, this included activities such as joining someone for lunch, biking home together after meetings and visiting participants in their homes or offices.

Route II: Narrative interviewing and graphic elicitation/diagram

We also adopted a narrative approach with the aim of opening up additional routes to gain insight into stakeholders' lived relational experiences. The central tenet in narrative inquiry is that "humans experience their lives in emplotted forms resembling stories or at least communicate about their experiences in this way" (Josselson, 2010, p.870). Hence, in narrative research, stories are considered "one, if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.4). Stories, so narrative inquirers argue, potentially provide for deeper, more complex and valuable understandings of experience (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Stories embody the storyteller's interpretations of phenomena and, as such, give access to subjectivity, as stories are perspective-ridden and rooted in time, place and personal experience (Bevir, 2006). Hence, they provide a window into how people experience and make sense of their lives. An essential element of stories is that they "structure events in such a way that they demonstrate, first, a connectedness or coherence, and second, a sense of movement or direction through time" (Gergen & Gergen, 1986, p.25). In other words, when telling a story, people create a plausible, coherent version of events (Wagenaar, 2011).

Methodologically, most narrative projects depend on oral accounts gathered through narrative interviews (Josselson, 2010; Kohler Riessmann, 2008). Typically, narrative interviews are unstructured qua form, in order to follow "participants' trails, as they work through their stories" (Pederson, 2013, p.415).

Narrative interviewing offers a valuable approach to exploring lived relational experiences; however, as argued above, it tends to favor verbalizations/linguistic descriptions as the main source of data. To "allow access to different levels of experience" (Bagnoli, 2009, p.547), we also wanted to go "beyond the standard interview" (Bagnoli, 2009). Hence, we used a graphic elicitation tool, more specifically a diagram, to extend the data generated through narrative interviewing. Graphic elicitation is a form of visual research that considers visualizations and images, such as drawings, timelines, photographs, paintings, etc. as an important source of knowledge (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). The evocative/imaginative power of visualizations is considered to have the potential to enrich social inquiry and representation. Graphic elicitation tools make it possible to conduct a diversified and

multidimensional exploration and may provide a richer and more nuanced picture of the phenomenon under study (Crilly, Blackwell & Clarkson, 2006; Prosser & Loxley, 2008).

In our study, we conducted narrative interviews with the key stakeholders in both collaborative planning projects. During the first half of the interview, we focused on encouraging participants "to tell their story" in their own way about how they had experienced stakeholder relations throughout their involvement in the collaborative planning project. We avoided imposing too much structure on the interview (Pederson, 2013). In the second half of the interview, we introduced a diagram in which the X-axis plotted time and the Y-axis represented a dimension ranging from negative to positive experiences with stakeholder relations (see Figure 3.1). We then invited participants to visualize/draw how they had experienced stakeholder relations throughout their involvement.

Route III: Graphic elicitation/timelines and follow-up interviews

As a next step, we depicted the information obtained in the narrative interviews on a timeline. Timelines offer the possibility of visually organizing rich, narrative data in a clear way (Patterson, Markey & Somers, 2012). Timelines are a type of graphic elicitation that visualize important experiences and events in a person's life in chronological order (Kolar, Ahmad, Chan & Erickson, 2015). As such, timelines provide "a means to lay out for a participant a comprehensive, multi-textual (re)presentation of her life. [...]. It is a particularly effective means of highlighting turning points and epiphanies in people's lives" (Sheridan, Chamberlain & Dupuis, 2011, p.565). Timelines draw explicit attention to the temporal dimension of life, reflecting the dynamic nature of experiences and making it possible to explore change and continuity in a participant's experiences (Sheridan et al., 2011). These researcher-produced timelines were used as a graphic elicitation tool during a follow-up interview.

Whereas narrative approaches most often rely on one-time interviews, we organized follow-up interviews about 1 to 1.5 years after the initial interview. In qualitative research literature, the main rationale for conducting multiple interviews is that initial accounts can be spun out and details and nuances can be added. Also, during follow-up interviews, participants may feel more confident to discuss and reflect upon their feelings and understanding, thereby generating more profound accounts (Polkinghorne, 2007). Furthermore, "going back" gives participants the opportunity to "edit and alter earlier versions of personal experience" (Miller, 2015, p.300). As McLeod (2000, p.49) argues, follow-up interviews:

> can illuminate, confirm or unsettle initial and tentative interpretations, alert us to [...] shifts and changes [in participants' narratives], suggest continuities or disruptions in emotional investments [...] and provide a strong sense of how particular [experiences] are taking shape or developing.

Hence, conducting multiple interviews allows participants to continue to unfold their stories throughout the research. Weaving together old and new accounts can provide for more richly layered and textured accounts of people's lived experiences (Miller, 2015).

We used the timeline as a "girder" for the follow-up interview. About one week prior to the interview, we sent the timeline to the participant. This allowed her/him to evaluate and reflect upon our representation of her/his initial account. A follow-up interview was then organized to discuss the timeline.

A MULTI-LAYERED EXPLORATION OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

To provide concrete insights into the value of our bricolaged approach, in this section, we reflect upon how each of the practices used contributed to the development of a multidimensional and dynamic understanding of stakeholders' lived experiences. We draw on empirical material from our research on the collaborative planning process in Vreewijk. The selected materials cover data generated between mid-2010 and 2014.

Knowledge from "within" and "in-between"

Ethnographic fieldwork, i.e., observing and participating in the activities of both collaboratives, such as the project group meetings, enabled us to become familiar with the research context: its protagonists, the collaborative set-up and atmosphere, and the issues and sensitivities in the collaborative process. Our prolonged engagement also enabled us to track how these aspects evolved throughout time.

Below are two excerpts from our field journal, which report[2] on observations, experiences and reflections on two project group meetings. Both excerpts reflect discussions about working on joint/co-authored documents.

2 Field notes are written in first person singular since observations were conducted by the principal researcher—first author of the article—in this research project

Excerpt from field notes on project group meeting, September 2010

At previous project group meetings, there had been discussions about the publication of the first jointly-authored newsletter. At this particular project group meeting, which was chaired by Elmo (project manager of the municipality), the newsletter was once more on the agenda. There was a discussion about both the title and the sort of content the newsletter should include. At some point, the conversation moved towards discussing the content of the Vreewijker, the community newspaper published by the residents' association. The following exchange arose:

Monique (borough)	I've read the Vreewijker a few times now. I mean, we all work together in this project group, but I found the mood of some of the articles about the Groene Vlieger (part of the area), and about what will happen with the million (Euros) from Plasterk (minister), to be rather biased.
Sam (housing corporation)	It's not really the article about the Groene Vlieger, we agree about that, but the tone that we take towards each other. I think: this is not how we (should) sit around the table. And I just feel that this is a boot in the patoot.
Carl (resident)	If we, as residents of Vreewijk, cannot express our opinions, if that is the case, then we're no longer in.
Monique (borough)	That's not the point.
Carl (resident)	There will always be bad examples in the Vreewijker since it's written by different people. I am one of them. Sometimes it's rather blunt, I know that, but I mean, we hold back, and we have to agree with each other that we try to have a common line, but then it needs to be clear for everyone that there is a common line and up until now, it has been difficult to find it.
Elmo (project manager municipality)	If someone feels that way, like, well, what an article, then I think we should be able to say this, and that people can react. Maybe people should just discuss it face-to-face, you could say, for example: "I wrote that piece, just tell me what you didn't like." I think that it is very important that we can express these things, and sometimes I think or I feel that there is something in the way … but you should realize [turning to the residents], that I and the others, the housing corporation and the city, do not always notice that there are tensions, or certain feelings, or dissatisfaction.

Excerpt from field notes on project group meeting, September 2014

This meeting was chaired by Esther (project manager of the municipality and Elmo's successor). That day's agenda mainly revolved around giving feedback on information discussed within the various working groups. When discussing feedback on information

from the working group for "housing," there was a short exchange about the social plan (the social plan is part of the agreements between the different parties on the conditions for urban regeneration and stipulates the conditions for rehousing, rent increases, etc.). The following conversation took place:

Helen (housing corporation)	I've adjusted the social plan, I will send it to all of you. I've followed the formal requirements of the tenants' association. Concerning the renovation-in-one approach [one of the approaches in the urban regeneration project]: we have done property surveys. There's still five houses to go. We want to start with the renovation activities at the end of October. We will develop a questionnaire to get more information from the people where we have done property surveys.
Tom (resident)	That's smart.
Ruth (housing corporation)	And we also want to develop a satisfaction survey, in which residents can share their opinions about the renovation afterwards.
Tom (resident)	What about the KiB?[3] You have put a lot of energy in this, but in practice it seems to be failing.
Helen (housing corporation)	We just started to use it for the property surveys. We haven't used it before.
Carl (resident)	Four or five years ago, this would have been the kind of stuff we would have disagreed about.

This project group meeting was finished in about 45 minutes. After Esther completed the "any other business" round, Tom said: "well, we managed to do all this in less than an hour. You see, this is how it works when you're well prepared." Helen added: "and we see each other a lot lately, so that makes it easier."

Being embedded in the research setting and placing ourselves in-between research participants enabled us to develop knowledge from "within" (see Bergson in Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p.571). First and foremost, as the excerpts illustrate, fieldwork allowed us to gain information on and develop an understanding of the collaborative context, its people and its concerns and how this had changed over time. It enabled us to become "empirically literate" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, being there, "in-between" field participants and the repeated interaction and sharing of experiences that this entailed, allowed us to truly get to know the people involved in the process. This, in turn, helped us to identify and intuitively sympathize with each of them (Lewis & Russell, 2011). This knowledge from "within" and "in-between" facilitated a more profound understanding of the context and

3 KiB (*Kwaliteit in Balans*, in English: quality in balance) refers to a method used to translate quality criteria for building(s) into functional demands concerning energy efficiency, safety, health, etc

background against which stakeholders' lived relational experiences are shaped. Finally, prolonged engagement and sustained contact with field participants enabled us to establish empathic relationships. These field relationships proved to be important assets (on all routes) in the research project: they allowed us to create a setting in which participants felt safe and confident enough to tell us about their experiences in detail (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007). As Spradley (1979, p.78) points out: "a basic sense of trust [...] allows for the free flow of information." In other words: ethnographic fieldwork enabled us to develop empathic field relationships, which made it possible to gain access to rich and detailed accounts of stakeholders' lived relational experiences (Feldman et al., 2003).

A kaleidoscopic view of lived relational experiences

Narrative interviewing aims at generating detailed and vivid stories of experience (Kohler Riessmann, 2006). In our study, the first part of the narrative interview focused on inviting participants to simply tell their story about how they experienced stakeholder relations within the collaborative. To do so, we used a "grand tour" approach (Spradley, 1979, p.86), simply asking participants: could you describe how you experienced stakeholder relations throughout your involvement in the collaborative? This encouraged participants to open up and talk at length about their experiences. Thanks to this approach, we were able to elicit descriptive accounts of participants' "experiential" trajectories concerning stakeholder relations. Below is an example – provided by Helen – of an account elicited through this grand tour approach.

> Interviewer: Can you tell me about the mutual relations throughout your involvement? How you experienced them?
>
> Helen: Well, I started in July 2012. Of course I already knew that I would become involved in this project. Rob (the incumbent project manager) introduced me to a few individuals as a first introduction to the key players in the project, but also to the more complicated issues. [...] I knew there was some baggage, but, as I feel it, I started off fresh. I remember my first project group meeting, it was at the Witte Paard [a restaurant and meeting location in the area], it was also the moment we said goodbye to Rob. There was a meeting table and behind it there was the audience. It all felt very heavy and very business-like to me. It was distant, people were not really together around the table. Everyone spoke out, but I didn't have the feeling that this was a collaboration. I thought that Elmo was doing his best to build bridges and keep things light. But still there was this distance. That was my experience with the first project group meeting: words being thrown around here and there, no trust. [...]. Now that has completely disappeared and there is a huge difference. Now I generally go home with a good feeling after meetings. In the beginning [of my involvement], meetings sometimes left me unsettled and I sometimes went home with a troubled feeling.

When we felt that participants had finished their "grand tour," we introduced a graphic elicitation tool. We presented the participants with a diagram (see above) and asked them to visualize their experiences. As such, we encouraged participants to make contributions that are more difficult to put into words (also see Bagnoli, 2009; Crilly et al., 2006). Below is Helen's diagram (see Figure 3.1.), together with explanatory comments she made while drawing it.

> Interviewer: I want to introduce a tool now, which is actually a diagram. And I want to ask you to draw how you've experienced stakeholder relations throughout your involvement. If you look back to the moment you got involved, up until now, how would you visualize your experiences, just following your intuition?
>
> Helen: I do not think that relations were ever below zero, there was also some connectedness back then, but it has grown much stronger now. It has never been negative. The question is if it developed in a straight line [towards more], or whether it goes like this [draws the diagram]. What I do know is that moving to the Vreewijkhuis has meant a lot to me. That was in January 2013. I intuitively feel that the distance has decreased. What also helped was the meeting about the Improvement Program in June 2013. So, relations improved a lot in 2013, but there are still ups and downs.

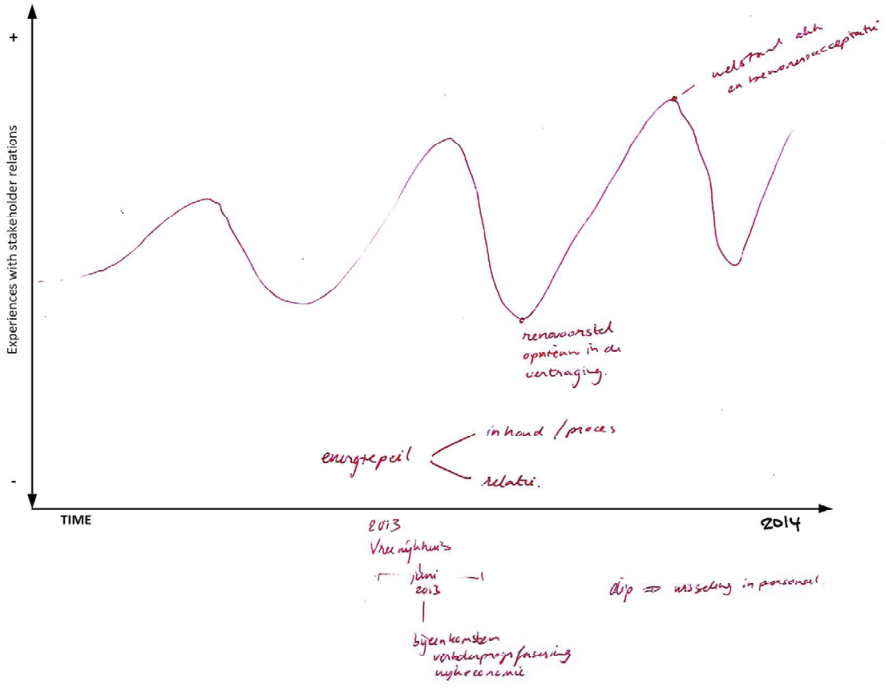

Figure 3.1. Graphic elicitation: Diagram

> Interviewer: Where there any other important moments?
>
> Helen: An up is the approval of the Planning Authority [of the first proposals] and that residents accepted our proposal. What is a down? Sometimes Tom [representative of the tenants' association] can make negative remarks, mean remarks about us. That feels personal. We also make mistakes, and we can learn from them. But the way he makes remarks does something to our relations, to how I experience the relational atmosphere. So, not only the substance of the project is turbulent, but also our relations.

Whereas Helen's initial narration depicted her experiences more as a coherent sequence of relational experiences leading to more connectedness and trust without giving much consideration to the struggles throughout that period, the diagram shows a more fragmented and diffuse picture of her experiences, one that disrupts the linearity suggested in her initial account. The diagram thus served as an opener in the interview: it facilitated a more profound and multidimensional exploration of lived relational experiences, reflecting its complex nature in greater detail. Both methodological practices thus tapped into different dimensions of experiencing: the first part of the narrative interview elicited a constructed story about experiences, characterized by coherence and direction, whereas drawing the diagram was more intuitive and invited participants to reflect on the (experienced) specificities of the relational trajectory. Hence, combining, in sequence, a narrative interview approach with graphic elicitation as an alternative way to express experiences gave a more diversified and kaleidoscopic view of lived experiences.

Processual understanding of lived experiences

Timelines can be used for accumulating and organizing rich narrative data (Patterson et al., 2012). We organized participants' initial accounts into a timeline, chronologically ordering the information obtained during the narrative interviews across five themes: 1. events and occurrences concerning their (professional) role and involvement in the planning process; 2. urban planning developments (substantive); 3. experiences with stakeholder relations; 4. collaborative set-up (in terms of stakeholders involved) throughout involvement; 5. contextual events.

Using the timelines in tandem with the follow-up interview allowed participants to go into more detail and add nuance, and in so doing, to deepen and enrich their accounts (Sheridan et al., 2011). However, discussing the researcher-produced timeline with participants also prompted them to reflect upon their previous story and to expand and modify their version on the basis of their new insights (Crilly et al., 2006). As such, it elicited the dynamic and ongoing nature of lived experiences. Discussing the timeline also contributed to

reflexivity, both for us as researchers and for the participants. We, as researchers, provided insight into how participants' stories were processed, allowing participants to compare this representation of their story with their own ideas. If necessary, they were able to expand, modify or refute the researcher's interpretations (ibid.). The timeline prompted the participants to question and reflect upon some aspects of their initial account. In Appendix A, we present Helen's timeline. Below we present her reflections and reactions to it during the follow-up interview.

> Helen: I didn't mention anything about the role of the district. In July 2014, there were some personnel changes. I experienced it as if we were stuck in a kind of vacuum. The city and district were far away—and expertise and history, also a sparring partner, kind of disappeared. We lost some of the history, and also the organization changed [...]. Now that we have changed direction in terms of our urban regeneration approach, I can see that we lost something back then. Previously, we could discuss these matters in a regular meeting, now it needs to be scaled up and we need to get to know these people, and it's important to find out what they think... So, it is a kind of lack of transmission.

During her follow-up interview, Helen introduced a new element to her story—an event (personnel changes at the district) that had happened previous to the first interview. Whereas she had not discussed this event and the importance of sharing history with each other in detail in her initial account, she now revised her story and added this event as an important one that had impacted her relational experiences. More specifically: it became an important event in light of the current developments in the project. This example illustrates how discussing the timeline during the follow-up interview invited participants to continue, edit and/or revise their account of their lived experiences, thereby highlighting the "in-process," unfolding character of lived experiences (Kincheloe, 2004; Thomson & Holland, 2003). The follow-up interview, together with the timeline, showed how experiences develop and enabled us to account for the temporal dimension of lived experiences.

Challenges

Whereas the bricolaged research approach described above and the blending of methods it entailed allowed us to develop a multi-layered understanding of lived experiences, we also encountered challenges both in terms of using specific methods/tools, and in terms of employing specific combinations of methods.

First, in most cases the diagrams were valuable tools for uncovering different aspects than are usually uncovered by interviews alone. However, not all participants were willing to draw a diagram. Some participants asked the researcher to do the drawing, and one

participant said that the diagram was too open-ended for her and it was not clear exactly what was expected from her. Thus, some participants were reluctant to draw. In such cases, the diagram as a graphic elicitation tool did not serve its purpose, which was to provide a deeper, multidimensional exploration of lived experience. Instead, it stood in the way of it. It is therefore advisable to provide clear guidelines or "'scaffolding' instructions to give respondents confidence yet avoiding being overly prescriptive" (Prosser & Loxley, 2008, n.p.). Providing different graphic elicitation tools in addition to the diagram may be a potential solution to this challenge (Crilly et al., 2006; Patterson et al., 2012).

Second, whilst ethnographic fieldwork during group meetings enabled us to develop empathic relationships with participants-as-group members, the one-on-one narrative interviews allowed us to further deepen our relationships with participants on an individual level. During these interviews, the focus was on grasping individual experiences with stakeholder relations. The combination of establishing and maintaining relationships with participants on both a group and an individual level, however, proved to be challenging. During group meetings, participants sometimes expected us to express explicit support or to side with one particular party, especially in more conflictual situations. However, we aimed to refrain from allying with a specific vantage point as we wanted to give each perspective due consideration. We tried to tackle this issue by trying to adhere to the principle of multilateral directed partiality. This principle has its roots in contextual therapy and refers to a therapist's attitude within the therapeutic context (Birch & Miller, 2000; Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2000). Central to the idea of multilateral directed partiality is that a therapist/researcher does not act as a neutral observer (Birch & Miller, 2000). Rather, the principle of multilateral directed partiality refers to an attitude in which the researcher sides with each participant's story or voice, while being prepared to point out a participant's personal accountability and responsibility in that story (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2000). This implies that a researcher treats each participant as someone important, someone whose story and experiences matter and who the researcher is trying to understand, while at the same time letting each participant know that the stories and experiences of all the other participants also matter.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Researching lived experiences confronts researchers with methodological challenges pertaining to the fact that researchers can only come to understand people's lived experiences through their constructed expressions of how they lived through a specific situation. The researcher's involvement in creating this construction adds an extra layer to this methodological challenge. Scholars argue that, in this (re)constructive process, some of the complexity, the "quiver" (van Manen, 1990, p.54) of life-as-experienced, is inevitably

diminished. The methodological challenge then is to gear research so that it is possible to appreciate and embrace the complexity of life-as-experienced. In qualitative research literature, a bricolaged research approach is considered to have that potential.

In this article, we presented and discussed a concrete bricolaged research approach as applied in a research project focused on developing understandings of stakeholders' lived experiences with mutual relations within a collaborative planning process. In so doing, we have contributed to the methodological literature/debate in two ways. First, whilst the literature on bricolage has paid considerable attention to its conceptualization, there are few concrete examples of how bricolage has been implemented in practice (Rogers, 2012; Wibberley, 2012). In this article, we have addressed this lacuna by providing and reflecting upon a concrete exemplar of a bricolaged research approach. In turn, by providing a concrete exemplar, we are contributing to the academic task "of articulating and clarifying the features and methods of our studies, of showing how the work is done and what problems become accessible to study" (Mishler, 1990, p.423).

Second, whilst lived experiences are a central notion in social science research, careful analyses of what it methodologically involves to study them are few and far between (Daher et al., 2017). Hence, by explicitly discussing the methodological challenges inherent to the study of lived experiences and subsequently presenting and carefully analyzing how (from a methodological perspective) a bricolaged approach may enable a rich exploration of these experiences, we have expanded the methodological horizon of the study of lived experiences and advanced a way in which to increase our understanding of life-as-experienced. Concretely, we provide insights into how a bricolaged research approach enables a multi-layered exploration of lived experiences that does justice to their complex nature. First of all, ethnographic fieldwork, i.e., immersing ourselves in the collaborative process and the web of stakeholder relations, allowed us to develop knowledge "from within" and "in-between." Ethnographic fieldwork also enabled us to establish empathic relationships with field participants. These relationships proved to be crucial assets for generating data as they affected the kind of access we achieved (see also Mason, 2002). Next, conducting narrative interviews, combined with a graphic elicitation tool (drawing a diagram) gave a kaleidoscopic view of stakeholders' lived relational experiences. Whereas the narrative interview uncovered a coherent picture of stakeholders' experiential trajectories, drawing the diagram brought out a richer and more complex picture. Finally, the timelines and the follow-up interviews enabled us to come to grips with the dynamic nature of lived experiences and thus to develop a processual understanding of them.

We conclude our article with three final reflections. First, for some bricoleurs, the bricolaged research approach presented in this article might be considered as a naïve implementation

of the concept. Indeed, authors such as Kincheloe (2001, 2004), Berry (2006) and Rogers (2012) emphasize how a bricoleur not only breaks down methodological barriers (as we did), but also addresses the political dimensions of knowledge work and, in so doing, aims to disrupt social structures, discourses and institutions—or as Kincheloe (2004, p.12) puts it: "the criticality of bricolage is dedicated to engaging political action." In this article, we have not paid attention to this dimension of bricolage. Yet, adopting a more critical stance to research (towards power, oppression) and conceiving of bricolage as a "critical research praxis" (Rogers, 2012, p.8) could have added another layer of reflexivity to our methodology, problematizing how knowledge is produced and by whom. On the other hand, the infusion of "doing politics" in bricolage projects also carries risks that may stand in the way of scholarly commitments. As Patai (1994, p.68) argues: "Putting scholarship at the explicit service of politics carries many (and rather obvious) risks and should not be greeted with the facile assumption that of course it is what 'we' should do." In our view, the relationship between scholarly and political commitments in bricolage projects is one that deserves critical attention—reflecting on this relation could be an interesting avenue for future academic discussion.

Second, fundamental to a bricolaged research approach is to take research as an open-ended, creative craft that is guided by the specificities of the object of inquiry and/or contextual/situational exigencies, rather than by methodological guidelines. Bricoleurs enter the research act as "methodological negotiators" who start off with the question: "who said research has to be done this way?" (Kincheloe, 2004, p.4). Throughout our research project, we have come to consider the concept of bricolage not only as a specific way of approaching research, but also as an attitude towards doing research: one that avoids any unheeding adherence to the well-trodden methodological paths, whether they concern gathering or analyzing data. Developing and learning such an attitude is, as Kincheloe argues, a "lifelong process" (p.32).

Finally, this article discusses how a bricolaged research approach enables a multi-layered exploration of lived experiences. It focuses attention on generating data, rather than on analytical aspects. The challenge ahead in our research project is to preserve this multi-layered understanding throughout the analytical phases of our research. But danger lurks around the corner, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p.416) observe: "One of the common laments of those who focus on [lived] experiences in all its messy complexity is that they lose track of the forest for the trees and find it hard to draw closure on a study." Hence, for future discussion, we believe there is still much to gain in terms of thinking about how to retain/do justice to a multi-layered understanding of lived experiences throughout the analytical and reporting phases in research.