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Software Review: QDA MINER – The Mixed Method Solution for Qualitative Analysis by Provalis Research

Working on qualitative data is more and more connected with the use of some professional software designed for qualitative data analysis. Those researchers who employ software for qualitative analyses to conduct research agree that this is a useful tool that gives opportunity to deal with large amount of empirical data. The software *extends the researcher's mental capabilities to organize, to remember, and to be systematic* (Konopasek 2008: 1). Also my own experience lets me say that professional software for qualitative data analysis makes conceptual work much easier. In my research concerning a mobbing issue I used software for qualitative data analysis (Atlas TI) in the process of data collecting, coding and to make some conclusions on each stage of research practices (Chomczynski 2008). Properly designed software enables researcher to deal with large data and make operations that would be much more time consuming in “traditional” work. Professional program for qualitative data analysis should also help a researcher in his conceptual work. However, Konopasek emphasizes that even the most advanced software has no chance to replace researcher’s mental activity. *Humans, not machines, do the crucial work of coding and retrieving—i.e., decide what passages of data should be marked by what terms to be searched and browsed later on. The hope that the program would do more and be able to replace the analytic mind is foolish* (Konopasek 2008: 1). It is hard to disagree with words above but advantages of professional software for qualitative data analysis are convincing enough to attract little attention to this.

There are a few software types for qualitative data analysis available on the market. We should mention ATLAS TI, CAQDAS, NVIVO and of course QDA MINER. Despite of the fact that there are visible differences between them, they have much in common. Computer programs enable a researcher to work on different data (written documents, images, audio and visual data) gathered in some specific project or groups of projects in research.

According to my experience very important criterion of software assessment is the easiness of use. Those programs that base on intuitive way of operations made by researcher are often much more useful than sophisticated, hard to manage software.

The second important criterion is the number of possible operations that a computer program enables a user to make on data. The more operations a researcher is able to do using the software, the more it reflects his/her intentions and creativity. My assessment to large extent bases on comparison between QDA MINER with other software that I have ever tested, especially ATLAS TI on which I usually work.

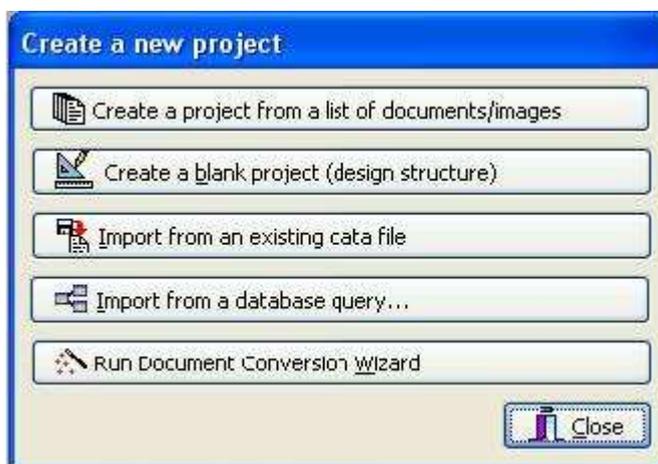
The first steps

When we launch the QDA MINER we have three options to choose: create a new project, open an existing project or open a project that we have recently opened. It is visible on a graphic below.



Graphic 1. First step options

When we use QDA MINER for the first time and we press button “Create a new project” the next window appears.



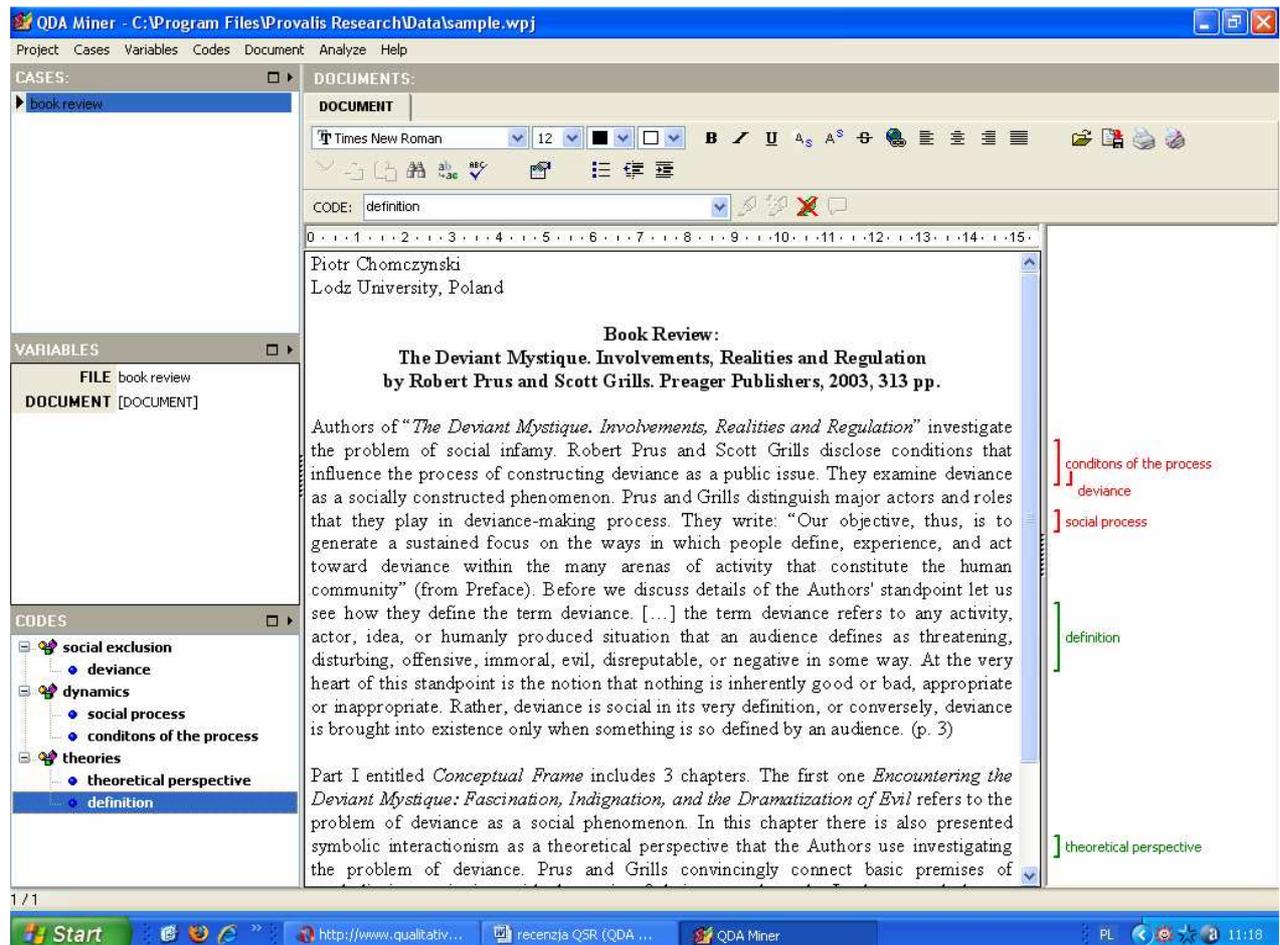
Graphic 2. Second step options

The next step is to choose the option that fits our plans. When we choose the first button “Create a project from a list of documents/images” there appears the next window with documents and images available on our hard disc or other types of memory. Despite of the information that a user can choose PDF documents, my attempt to open some PDF document gave a rather poor result. A document that opened in QDA MINER had little in common with the original version. Document had no title and first paragraphs, some parts of text were mixed and changed. The same problem occurred when some HTML file was opened. There was no such problems

with assigning word documents and graphics. Generally the procedure of loading following documents to project is rather complicated and not easy in comparison to ATLAS TI.

Front view and some basic functions

QDA MINER bases on the similar ideas and solutions like other software for qualitative data analysis. In my opinion it can be treated as its strength because of similarity with other programs which lets us save our time and energy in looking for proper functions. Some of them we can see below.



Graphic 3. Front view

In the central part is located a view on an assigned document. On the left margin there is a space for codes that a user can create working on a document. The procedure of coding is less comfortable in comparison to ATLAS TI. To make a code a user has to mark some part of text and press a proper button on the top window. It could be much more convenient if there was a function of pop up window initiated by click of right mouse button. There is also no possibility to create codes not connected with categories. A user is forced to make connections from the very beginning of a coding process while he/she may have no conception what is relation between a code and a proper category. The good idea is the possibility to choose a color for codes visible on the left margin. This makes easier segregating codes of some specific type.

Procedures of operations on codes are not impressive in comparison to ATLAS TI tools. We can add, delete and edit (edit means rename or link with other category) a code but not link it with another one. In result there is no possibility to make a map that could graphically reflect mutual connections between specific codes. It is the serious disadvantage that influences progress especially on the conceptual level of work. The software also does not enable us to effectively investigate connections between codes and quotations they relate to. In ATLAS by double clicking on selected code there appears a pop up window with quotations that relate the chosen code. We have also no clear information about the number of connections between codes and quotations. What seems to be the major disadvantage there is no possibility to make the same named code for different quotations within specific category...

Moreover there is no sufficient integration between different documents within a project that is necessary for effective work. It makes operations on codes that come from different documents difficult.

The final assessment

In my opinion QDA MINER requires some necessary improvements that will enable a user managing his data in a more comfortable way. It will let shorten time consumed on uploading and using documents during research work. Also the operations should be more intuitive what is an important condition especially for those who work on QDA MINER for the first time.

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