

# The Role of Grounded Theory in Understanding Urban Society and Design: A Review Based on Creswell and Poth

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## Abstract

John W. Creswell is a distinguished professor in the fields of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. He has authored numerous internationally recognized methodology books, including *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, which discusses five major approaches to qualitative research. Creswell is known for his ability to clearly and practically explain research concepts, as well as for his contributions to developing frameworks for mixed methods approaches. Throughout his academic career, he taught and conducted research at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln before later joining the University of Michigan. His works have been widely used across various disciplines, such as education, health, psychology, and the social sciences. Cheryl N. Poth is an academic and researcher specializing in education and qualitative research methods. She teaches at the University of Alberta in Canada. Poth is recognized for her work in educational evaluation, field-based research, and the development of research methodologies. As Creswell's collaborator on the fourth edition of *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Poth brought a fresh perspective to the practice of qualitative research, particularly within the contexts of education and evaluation. Her experience as both a researcher and an education practitioner enriches the discussions in this book, making qualitative research approaches more contextual and applicable.

Kata kunci: Grounded Theory, Qualitative Inquiry, Research Design.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research has become a crucial approach in understanding social phenomena and human behavior in depth. One of the widely used qualitative approaches is Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is a method that aims to build theories based on data obtained from the field, rather than relying on pre-existing theories. In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Creswell and Poth place Grounded Theory as one of the five main approaches in qualitative research. This approach is chosen when researchers aim to develop new theories to explain a complex process, action, or interaction. By using Grounded Theory, researchers do not merely confirm existing theories but instead create new theories grounded in the real experiences of participants, see cover book in Figure 1 (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth emphasize the importance of understanding Grounded Theory in the context of social research, as many social phenomena are dynamic, complex, and not yet fully understood. Therefore, this approach provides researchers the opportunity to deeply explore these dynamics without the limitations of pre-established theoretical frameworks. The use of Grounded Theory is particularly relevant in research aiming to understand social change, identity formation, group interactions, or professional practices in various fields such as education, health, and management. Thus, Grounded Theory makes a significant contribution to the broader development of social sciences and the humanities.

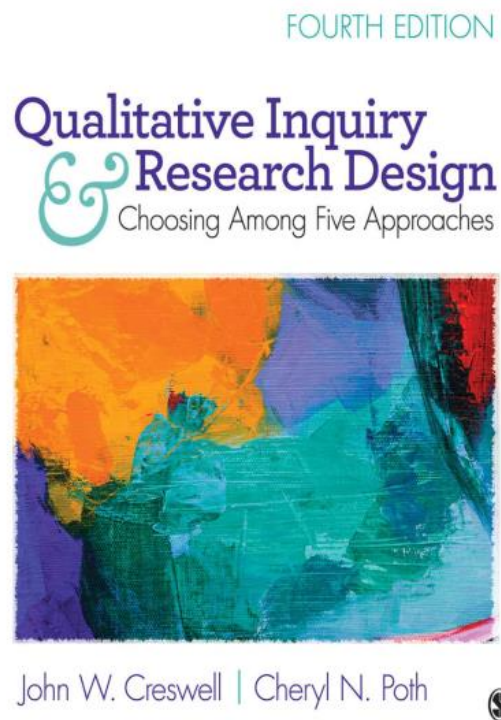


Figure 1. Book cover

## 2. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 2.1. Definition and Origins Of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory, according to Creswell and Poth, is a qualitative research approach that generates theories directly from field data. This definition distinguishes Grounded Theory from other research

approaches that typically begin with an established theoretical framework. In Grounded Theory, researchers collect data, analyze it systematically, and develop theories based on patterns that emerge from the data. In other words, theory does not precede the research but rather emerges iteratively throughout the research process.

The origins of Grounded Theory can be traced back to the seminal work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, titled *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. At that time, social research was largely dominated by quantitative and verification-based approaches. Glaser and Strauss criticized this dominance and proposed Grounded Theory as an alternative, emphasizing the importance of building theories from rich and complex qualitative data. They introduced the concept of the constant comparative method, which involves continuously comparing data during the collection and analysis process to develop categories and concepts.

As Grounded Theory developed, it was adopted in various fields such as education, nursing, management, and psychology. Creswell and Poth also highlight that Grounded Theory now has several variants, including the constructivist approach, which emphasizes the researcher's subjective interpretation of social reality. As the dynamics of the social world continue to evolve, Grounded Theory remains relevant and provides a flexible framework for understanding contemporary social phenomena.

## 2.2. Key Features Of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory has several distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other qualitative research approaches. One of its key features, as explained by Creswell and Poth, is its focus on processes, interactions, or social actions. This approach does not merely describe phenomena but aims to understand how these phenomena develop, change, and interconnect within a specific social context.

Additionally, Grounded Theory adopts an inductive approach. This means that theories develop gradually based on the data collected in the field. Researchers do not begin with rigid hypotheses but instead allow patterns and categories to emerge naturally from the data. This approach enables researchers to remain open to the complexities of phenomena and avoid biases from pre-existing theories.

Creswell also emphasizes the importance of the constant comparative method in Grounded Theory, which involves continuously comparing data to identify similarities and differences, allowing the theory to develop systematically. Furthermore, Grounded Theory stresses the achievement of

theoretical saturation, which occurs when the categories developed from the data are sufficiently mature and no new data contributes to further understanding of those categories.

Grounded Theory also includes the use of memos, which are reflective notes that help researchers develop connections between categories and deepen data interpretation. All these features make Grounded Theory a robust approach for generating valid theories based on the real-life experiences of participants.

## 2.3. Grounded Theory Research Procedure

The Grounded Theory procedure, as outlined by Creswell and Poth, is both systematic and flexible. The process typically begins with the collection of initial data, often through in-depth interviews, observations, or document analysis. Researchers aim to obtain rich data about the processes or social interactions that are the focus of the study.

Once the data is collected, the first stage of analysis is open coding. In this stage, the researcher breaks the data into small units and assigns labels or codes to each unit. These codes are then grouped into larger categories. Following this, axial coding is conducted, which involves identifying relationships between categories and subcategories to build a conceptual structure.

The next stage is selective coding, which involves developing a core category that becomes the central theory being developed. This category will integrate all other categories into a theoretical narrative. During this process, researchers write memos to document ideas, questions, and relationships between categories that emerge throughout the analysis.

Creswell and Poth also emphasize the importance of the iterative process between data collection and analysis. Researchers continuously collect new data to fill gaps in existing categories until theoretical saturation is reached. Thus, the Grounded Theory procedure is dynamic, allowing researchers to adjust the direction of the study in accordance with the emerging findings from the field.

## 2.4. Types of Grounded Theory

Creswell and Poth distinguish two main approaches in Grounded Theory: Traditional Grounded Theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory. Traditional Grounded Theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss, emphasizes that theory should emerge purely from the data, without being influenced by pre-existing theories. In this approach, researchers strive to be as objective as possible, maintaining distance from prior theoretical assumptions.

In contrast, Constructivist Grounded Theory, developed by Kathy Charmaz, acknowledges that researchers cannot be entirely neutral. Charmaz emphasizes that theory is the result of a social construction between the researcher and the participants. In this approach, the researcher's experiences, values, and interpretations are considered integral parts of the research process. This approach is more suitable in contexts where reflexivity of the researcher and the subjective experiences of participants are central.

Both of these approaches offer flexible methodological choices according to the research objectives. If researchers want to maintain distance from theory and truly build from the ground up, Traditional Grounded Theory may be the choice. However, if researchers wish to acknowledge their active involvement in shaping meaning, the constructivist approach would be more appropriate. Understanding these two approaches is crucial for researchers to choose the method that best fits the nature of the phenomenon being studied.

### 2.5. Challenges in Grounded Theory

Although Grounded Theory offers many advantages, its application also faces several challenges. Creswell and Poth note that one of the biggest challenges is maintaining a balance between data collection and data analysis. Since these two processes occur simultaneously, researchers must have strong organizational skills to ensure that the large amount of data does not overwhelm the analysis process.

Another challenge is determining when theoretical saturation has been reached. There is a risk that researchers may stop collecting data too early or too late, which could undermine the validity of the theory being developed. Additionally, qualitative data analysis in Grounded Theory requires intensive coding skills and the ability to build categories and relationships between categories with strong logic.

Researchers must also deal with the high workload involved in managing large volumes of narrative data, which can be a challenge in itself. Difficulties in maintaining reflexivity and avoiding personal bias while interpreting data are also concerns. To address these challenges, Creswell recommends the use of memos, careful planning of the analysis, and openness in documenting the entire research process.

### 2.6. Evaluating the Quality of Grounded Theory

Evaluating the quality of Grounded Theory is crucial to ensure that the theory developed is genuinely grounded in the data. Creswell and Poth offer several criteria that can be used to assess the quality

of Grounded Theory. First, the alignment between theory and data must be examined. This means that the theory developed should clearly arise from empirical data, rather than being imposed based on theoretical assumptions.

Second, the coding and analysis process must be well-documented, so that readers can trace how the theory is constructed from the data. This documentation includes the use of codes, categories, memos, and diagrams showing the relationships between concepts. Third, the theory produced should be generative, meaning it should trigger further research and be applicable to similar contexts.

Additionally, Creswell emphasizes the importance of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as indicators of qualitative validity. By using validation strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and audit trails, researchers can strengthen the quality of the Grounded Theory produced. This rigorous evaluation is essential for maintaining scientific integrity and ensuring the research's contribution to the development of social theory.

## 3. CONCLUSION

Grounded Theory has high relevance in research within the fields of Urban Studies, Urban Architecture, and Urban Design. These three areas are closely related to an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of city life, human experiences in urban spaces, and the social changes occurring in urban environments. The Grounded Theory approach, which focuses on developing theories based on empirical data, is particularly suitable for exploring this complexity.

In Urban Studies, Grounded Theory enables researchers to develop new theories about patterns of social mobility, community interactions, social segregation, or the transformation of public spaces. Since Urban Studies often involves dynamic social phenomena that have not been fully mapped, Grounded Theory helps generate theories based on the real-life experiences of city dwellers, rather than relying solely on theoretical assumptions.

In the context of Urban Architecture, Grounded Theory is useful for understanding how city users interact with physical spaces. By collecting direct data from user experiences, architects can develop theories about spatial needs, perceptions of comfort, or aesthetic preferences within urban landscapes. This encourages designs that are more responsive to the needs of urban communities.

In Urban Design, Grounded Theory plays a key role in developing design principles rooted in the actual experiences of the community. Designers can

understand patterns of space use, the social meanings of specific design elements, and the impact of design on social behavior. The theories generated from Grounded Theory research help urban designers create environments that are more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable.

Grounded Theory also has an important contribution in understanding the dynamics of Urban Society. Urban societies are complex entities, filled with ongoing social, cultural, economic, and political changes. Given its dynamic and multidimensional nature, the Grounded Theory approach is highly relevant for examining city life in depth.

Thus, Grounded Theory makes a valuable contribution to the development of theory, planning practices, and design innovations across urban fields. This approach allows for the generation of new insights that are contextual, practical, and based on the real experiences of urban actors, while also providing an empirical foundation for more just and sustainable social changes in modern cities.

## REFERENCE

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