

## Qualitative Interviews

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### Short description

Ethnographic interviews are helpful to gain very in-depth data about a topic/concern in a relatively short time. They provide insightful knowledge about individuals, communities, their respective views and perspectives on specific subjects, and the embedded social dynamics. However, interviews should only be executed after researching secondary sources and grey literature.

Previous to the interviews, a preliminary set of open questions and sample of interview partners have to be (partially) defined, which should be guided by the research questions, while striving for an objective approach and aiming for a maximum diversity of groups. The data collected in the interviews should be regularly contrasted with the initially drawn underlying assumptions and hypotheses.

**Tags/ keywords:** Method, Qualitative methods, ethnographic research, social dynamics, interviews.

### Who can use this method/ be involved?

Any researcher interested in understanding social dynamics and processes from a qualitative approach. Also, co-researchers engaged in grassroots initiatives or mobilized groups, particular present in co-productive processes.

### Steps

#### Before the interview

- Secondary literature research, desktop research, and grey literature research to gain knowledge on the case study, gain contact with the communities and individuals, and understand the research gaps, thus, formulating more targeted questions and defining a more objective and varied sample. The interview should only contain aspects that can't be inquired through other sources.
- Sampling: Whose knowledge or experience is important for the research? Are we including all perspectives? Who is approachable and who isn't? Be aware of the researcher's

positionality (race, gender, class, etc.). Regardless of the researchers' position in the research, be it a co-produced knowledge, or participation in the co-production process, the researcher's positionality is fundamental in the understanding of places as social realities, for researchers' own involvement might configure the social dynamics inhabited in space and influence the perception of reality.

- Preparation of a guideline: Should be used as an indicative golden thread and be divided into systematic thematic clusters. There should be logical and smooth transitions between the thematic clusters. The first question needs to be open and inviting and easy to be answered in order to stimulate a conversation and drive your interview partner into the conversation.
- The questions included in the guideline should be simply structured, unbiased, easy to follow, and composed of a language that fits the targeted group. Make sure to keep a balance of questions, only ask for one aspect per question, and always include both positive and negative directions to the questions (good/bad, positive/negative, etc.). The interview should be kept short and concise.

### During the interview

- Form of consent? Ensure your interview partners about their anonymity and data protection.
- Introduce yourself, the research project, and your particular interest in the research project. Briefly outline your knowledge of the topic.
- Create a relaxed atmosphere and demonstrate trust and understanding of the interviewer's narration.
- Give room and time for the interviewee to expatiate their answers, yet be wise to politely steer the conversation back into your proposed guideline.
- Position the recorder at a strategic position between you and the interview partner, preferably at the corner of a table, if possible. Avoid background noises and disturbances.

### After the interview

- Express gratitude to your interviewee for the time and information provided.
- Ask your interview partner if they want to have access to final(s) product(s) you're going to use the interview in
- Always take notes of the interview partner, interview, and the interview situation.
- Keep an interview protocol (interviewer, interviewee, project name, length, place, time, etc.)
- Transcription of the interview
- According to the sensibility of the informations or experience expressed by the interviewee ask for a proofreading of the retranscription as consent to use all part of the interview
- Interpretation and analysis

## Resources and materials required

- Recording device, when possible (including batteries etc.)
- A form of consent
- A questionnaire or an indicative guideline, which should be kept to the side to ensure the flow of the conversation. The researcher should be very familiar with the questions, learn them by heart in order to maintain eye contact.
- A notebook and a pen
- Any documents you want feedback or precisions on.

## Tips/ What to pay attention to

The way you approach your interview partners determines the entire course of the interview. Make eye contact, appear supportive, nod, and be diplomatic yet persistent enough to steer the conversation back to your guideline questions.

At the end of the interview you can ask for other contacts to interview and don't forget to thank the interview partner for their precious time and information.

## Examples of use

- <https://transformingsolidarities.net/en/>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09654313.2018.1465896>

## Further reading/ (re)sources

- Dingwall, R. (1997). "Accounts, interviews and observations". In: Miller G and Dingwall R (eds) *Context and Method in Qualitative Research*. Sage, pp. 51–65.
- Whyte, W. F. (1993). Appendix A, *Street corner society: The social structure of an Italian slum*. 4th ed. Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press.