Content

In-depth interviewing is a widely used method for data collection in the social and human sciences. It is the method of choice for research projects that aim to explore people's experiences, motives, opinions and perspectives in their depth and richness and without constraining the respondents' answers by a priori categories or pre-set reply options. In political science in particular, it is often also used for the purpose of reconstructing processes and events. A yet less frequent, but equally interesting use of interviews is to use them as tools for accessing collective and cultural discourses. Although generally structured by a topic guide, in-depth interviews allow for flexibility and openness throughout the interview interaction and are based on open and non-leading questions that are designed to get the interviewee to talk freely and at length, and to explore the width and depth of his or her views and experiences.

Despite its wide use, in-depth interviewing as a method is often under-reflected, and consequently used too "naively" or with an insufficient understanding of its limitations, specificities and difficulties. This workshops aims to introduce the participants to this method and provide them with a number of tools – practical and theoretical – to help them go about (and think about) their own research. We will go through the key stages of interviewing studies (before, during and after the interview) and discuss the key practical, methodological and ethical tasks to be handled at each of them (for example negotiating access or handling the interview interaction).
Structure and audience

The workshop will for the most part consist of a mixture of lectures and practical exercises. If there are participants who are already engaged in a research requiring qualitative interviews, we can also make space for some presentations of these projects. Participants who would be interested in giving a 10-15' oral presentation on their research would please contact the instructor by 1st May.

Audience

The workshop is mainly intended for graduate students with little or no prior knowledge and experience of research interviewing, who either plan to use interviews at some stage of their own research, or who are simply curious to be introduced to this method.

Participants who already have experience with this method are very welcome to attend as well though, in particular if they feel the need to reflect on their own practices. There will be space in the workshop for discussing questions related to the participants' own (past or present) work.

Aims

By the end of the workshop, the participants should have a general overview of interviewing as a social science data collection method, its uses, typical stages, and limitations. They should also have a concrete understanding of how to go about setting up research interviews, how to prepare for them, what to expect when going into an interview interaction, what to do with the data once they are collected, and how to think about interviewing data.

The workshop is not a complete training in interviewing and interviewing techniques; it simply intends to equip the participants with a set of basic skills and some tools for critical thinking in the context of research interviewing.

Preparatory work

The participants are advised to read a few texts (see list and DropBox link below) ahead of the workshop.
Those who have concrete plans to use interviews in their own research are kindly invited to send along a short description of their research (1-2 pages), as well as a first draft topic guide (e.g. a very first list of questions they intend to ask in their interviews) (topic guides can be in English, German, French or Italian). Please send these documents by 1st May to Lea.Sgier@unige.ch.

Outline

Thursday 16th May
10:00-13:00 and 14:00-17:00

- Introduction to qualitative research interviewing: types of research interviewing, uses and pitfalls of the method, phases of an interview study, typical difficulties with interviewing
- What makes a "good" interview, and how does it (or not) come about?
- Interviewer and interviewee roles and interview constellations
- Interviewing techniques
- Research ethics

Friday 17th May
10:00-13:00 and 14:00-16:00

- Interviewing techniques (ctd)
- Interviewing "up", "down" and "across"
- Elaborating a topic guide: the conceptual and the interactional logic
- "Difficult" interviewees and research contexts
- Selecting respondents and negotiating access
- Recording and transcription
- Specific issues in the analysis of interview data
Preparatory readings

The readings can be accessed under the Dropbox link.

Strongly recommended readings:


Whyte, William Foote (1943). Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum. Chicago: Chicago University Press ("Appendix: on the Evolution of Street Corner Society". [this is a long text not only/mainly about interviewing; please read it through, it is one of the most useful texts to read before undertaking any sort of fieldwork; German speakers might find a German translation, it’s a classic]


Additional readings:

Clark, Tom (2008). "'We're Over-Researched Here!' Exploring Accounts of Research Fatigue within Qualitative Research Engagements". Sociology 42 (5): 953-970.


About the lecturer

Lea Sgier is a senior researcher at the University of Applied Arts and Sciences (Social Work) and a senior lecturer at the Political Science Department of the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She currently works for a National Science Foundation project on dementia policy in Switzerland (PNR74, 2017-2021). She also co-directs a project on elder people’s political citizenship in nursing homes in French speaking Switzerland (Leenaards Foundation, 2017-19) as well as a smaller project on dementia related trainings (for the Canton of Geneva). A political scientists by training, she was an assistant professor in qualitative methodology at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest from 2010-2017. During this time, she also acted as methodological advisor for two large scientific cooperation projects with the Western Balkans (RRPP Western Balkans) and the South Caucasus (ASCN). She also in an instructor on various methodology summer/winter schools and doctoral programmes (Essex Summer School UK, ECPR Winter School, WSSR Montreal, SSRM Hong Kong University, CUSO Switzerland). Finally, she has been a member of the Steering Committee of the ECPR Standing Group on Political Methodology since 2013 (www.ecpr-methods.org).

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