

## Fieldwork introduction

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My name is Ralitsa Hiteva and I am PhD researcher at the University of Manchester. My research project involves 18 months fieldwork in several locations: three different countries (Bulgaria, UK and Belgium); in over 30 different cities and in 3 different languages (Bulgarian, English and French). Going on fieldwork requires months of preparation and starts with reading many academic articles; government and institutional reports; media articles; expert opinions; websites of various organisations; EU and national legislation; infrastructure reports; statistics for annual energy use, carbon emissions and funding (to name a few). This part of the research is called qualitative desk-based document analysis and it helps me understand how things actually work (who is responsible for energy regulation; why is energy regulation designed in such a way; what is it trying to achieve?) and who I need to talk to next (who are the key stakeholders I need to interview).

My fieldwork involves carrying out interviews with various energy experts. These may included but are not limited to: directors of divisions at Ministries for Energy, Environment and Regional Development; senior experts at state agencies; engineers at electricity and gas distribution companies; energy agencies experts; executive directors of energy service companies and municipal energy experts. I usually contact the experts in advance and introduce myself, I explain who I am and what my research is about, then I ask them for an interview. Sometimes, participants (interviewees) ask me to send them the questions I am going to ask them in advance. The interviews on average take between 45 min and 90 minutes and are carried out within the expert's work place

(office, meeting room or a lobby) or in a public place, such as a café. Sometimes participants agree for me to record the interview on my digital recorder, but sometimes I have to take notes in short hand during the conversation. After every interview I sit down in café and write down my impressions of the interview and highlight things I think might be important. In a face-to-face interview I watch carefully the participant's body language such as facial expressions for clues about whether they are feeling comfortable and happy with what they are saying and whether they are actually saying the truth. Sometimes, I notice differences between participant's body language and what they are saying. This helps me decide what kind of questions I should ask next.

I use semi-structured interviews, which allow me to make changes to the questions I ask, in comparison to questionnaires when all participants need to be asked exactly the same question in precisely the same way. Semi-structured interviews provide me with the flexibility to react to participants' body language and to what they are saying. They also allow me to find out what I want to know without necessarily asking about it directly. So instead of asking: what are the difficulties with implementing this energy efficiency requirement, I may tell the interviewee that I have spoken to other experts who have shared that there are struggling with implementing that particular requirement, or I might comment that the requirement seems to me to be rather complicated, or that it looks like it will necessitate a lot of changes within the organisation. This is a good interviewing practice because it feels more like a discussion/conversation between the participant and me rather than an exchange of questions and answers.

When I complete the interviews I need I go back to my desk and carefully transcribe every interview word for word and re-read my notes several times to make myself as familiar as possible with what the participants have said. One interview might be the source of a lot of different information and the next step is compiling all the collected data on a particular question in one place and cross-referencing it within the different participant's account and with written documents I have found. I look for confirmation of what has been said and for points of departure between two accounts. In case of the latter I ask myself why is that so and look for more information about the particular issue. This way a lot of hidden processes and struggles are uncovered. Often one's participant's response helps me understand the response of others and different interviews can add complimentary information, which piece by piece, just like the pieces of a puzzle, help me put together the bigger picture of what is going on. This is the process of analysing what the information collected through interviews (and supported by documents) tells me. It is important that through the process of analysis the researcher maintains neutrality about the information provided by participants (irrelevant how nice they were during the interview) and keeps questioning the validity of information that was given (was what they said a fact or an opinion?).

After the analysis of the fieldwork data is completed I write a report and sometimes an article about what I have found. Often fieldwork uncovers gaps between how things are and how they should have been (according to existing legislation or moral and economic convictions such as sustainable development) and in such cases the researcher can make recommendations about what could be done to

bridge that gap. Other times it is enough for the researcher to identify the gap and point towards it.