

Interviews

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COLUMN A

The interview as one of the methods of empirical urban research is hardly used in the practice of project management. In the course of the project, there are often opportunities for bilateral discussions to coordinate principles and motives or very concrete aspects of implementation. However, it should be clear to the project manager that an interview, unlike a discussion, must be methodical. This repository entry offers a first introduction. Further aspects can be found in handbooks and scientific journals. A selection of these can be found in the references below and other articles.

ABOUT COLUMN A

Every interview is an opportunity to collect information and an impro-drama with an unfolding plot (Hermanns 2000). This impro-drama is actively and relationally produced by all participants; however, the interviewer is confronted with a special design task in relation to the project's general interplay, the project's motive and its past and future.

Pitfalls are most likely to appear because, ...

- the conduct of doing interviews is vague; in particular so in urban design projects, which can be described as liminary organisations operating in, across and beyond established practices. The interviewer/project manager does not own a Babel Fish.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2ccm1GajfSujz7T18d7cKA>

Babel Fish - The Oddest Thing In The Universe - The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy - BBC

- This vagueness is problematic, because the expectations of the interview to make a substantial contribution to the research project are high

- The dilemma ubiquitous in project management in Urban Design, of course, also plays a role in the process of conducting interviews: (self-)representation. The interviewer may not be able to represent him/herself as informed as s/he considers himself about the knowing-how and knowing-why of the project in order to conduct the interview. The task to collect information and the crucial thematic interest of the interview may even be in opposition to a fair process of conducting the interview with the interviewee.

Interviews as action: research-practical aspects

In projects in Urban Design interviewees are often project partners and thus will appreciate your professional approach to gain, prolong or rebuild their trust during particular project phases.

Before the interview – Access to the field and selection of interviews

- Specify issues and research interests, and use/translate methods, tools and theories relationally
- “Acquire” interviewees

The project *Begegnungshaus Poppenbüttel* is a model project funded by the Hamburg Parliament. Active stakeholders of the different operative and decision-making levels may secretly seek or even openly articulate the wish for return of investment of resources such as attention, money, labor, knowledge etc. from interviews and a positive representation of the interview in the project's documentation/evaluation. A clearly organized, communicated and approved research concept will support, but not guarantee a fair and sound process of conducting interviews. The professional project manager in Urban Design must be able to operate in a setting in which all active stakeholders are experts in their own right and field and may not refrain from transgressing fields of competence.

- Arrange times, spaces and topics for the series of interviews
- Design productive interview settings. Semi-structured questions and a well-functioning infrastructure can be very conducive once the impro-drama unfolds as well as in post-production

- Agree on the use of a recording device (audio and/or video) including all pertinent declarations and information about archiving capacities
- Ethics is key

All work done before the interview must offer the interviewee a crystal-clear understanding of his/her role to enable the production of knowledge. We recommend doing this in the form of a briefing, which typically answers the following questions:

- What is at issue? Clearly explain your interest and rationale of the interview, outline themes
- How is the production process organized and what happens with the produced material?
- What is the (spatial) setting? Where is the interview conducted?
- Who conducts the interview?
- Who is present during the interview?

Qualitative interviews are typically conducted in an everyday space of the interviewee with the intention to best represent his/her situation. However, if a particular setting or plot – a walk around a construction site, looking at media – might appear more reasonable, the interviewer should feel free to arrange for alternative settings.

- How long is the interview going to be?

Time capacities in late capitalism are notoriously scarce. Interviews can last from 30 minutes up to an afternoon. Issues around transcription, translation, varying capacities for articulation, willingness to communicate, preparation etc. may have effects on the duration of the interview, so it is helpful to mock interview a friend or colleague to gain a sense of how the questions work and how long the interview approximately takes.

During the interview

- Set the stage

- Make room for not one, but multiple roles enacted by the interviewer and the interviewee. Someone who works for an employer acts in the interests of the employer, but also "the cause", his career, according to what the media or his social environment says and so on. These are partly overlapping and not always converging roles. Of interest here is a difference between what the interviewees say they have done and what they have actually done.
- Develop and maintain a professional position in the setting. Sharing specific positions must not be complicit, disagreement must not be hostile. Put yourself in a position to hear and bear any statement.
- Empathy and naivety are a slight control you may employ to illustrate matters of course and their respective meanings in relation to the process of the interview

After the interview

Project Management in Urban Design operationalizes analyzing techniques from grounded theory.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOShdD_-XfQ

Research Methods. Qualitative analysis of interview data

We are documenting interviews using a video camera operated by a camera man or woman. He or she is not only responsible for the proper operation of his/her gear and the production of the material, but, in order to do so, must manage the interviewee's position in and relation to the setting or spatial display. If this is not managed properly it might affect the interviewee's disposition to talk and thus could render the interviews useless in relation to the project's motive. Here the interviewer and/or the camera man or woman can make use of capacities entailed in the videos production processes. Videos are typically produced in takes and put together in the editing room following the interview. The interviewer and/or the cameraman can indicate that the interviewee can speak with ease and use colloquial spoken language. The initially agreed briefing must entail a statement about ethics as a matter of postproduction.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGMlzb171g>

Werner Herzog interviews Hank Skinner - Death Row Conversations

Werner Herzog is aware of the numerous intermediaries of an interview. The videos of his portraits of prison inmates reveal the situation of the interviewees and the related circumstances of the interviews. In this series, Herzog works along the question of whether the prison inmates should be executed. The content of this question is far removed from project management, but it is meant to represent the display and understanding of ethical aspects in projects. For example, interviews on the accommodation and housing practices of refugees may very well deal with deportation, terror or similar issues. Herzog's interview series is meant to stand for the fact that through interviews we can learn about aspects of how individual actors' worldview is related to others.

The above outlined aspects and more render the knowing-how of conducting interviews as part of an urban design project and thus as part of the repertoire required to produce spatial displays of knowledge production that communicate the intended modes of representation as being 'in the air'.

REFERENCES

Hermanns, Harry. 2000. „Interviewen als Tätigkeit“. In *Qualitative Forschung: Ein Handbuch*, edited by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, 360–67. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.