The Ethics of Doing Research with Political Elites

dr Olga Mausch-Dębowska
Research topic: ‘Local government and civil society in a post-socialist Polish city: a case study of Poznań’

- quantitative research approach – questionnaires (120)
- qualitative research approach – interviews (45)
Interviews – 45 (1h-1.30h)

- Qualitative research was conducted in the form of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.

- The objective was to learn what pre-selected individuals think about or how they interpret events and developments relevant to democratisation.

- Face-to-face interviews facilitate asking supplementary questions (probes) to clarify or extend the response if needed. Equally it is possible to remind respondents of points that they have not mentioned (prompts).
Political ‘elites’

- ‘Elite’ refers here not only to the rank of an interviewee but also, if not primarily, to the interviewee’s knowledge/competence.

- Elites in a particular institution are subjected to the same interview protocol composed of structured or semi-structured questions (*cf.* Gillham 2000:81)

Political, local elite in my research

- Local government experts,
- Researchers from the Local Government Research Group of AMU Faculty of Sociology,
- Administration officials at the poviat and voivodship level,
- Official in the Ministry of Interior and Administration,
- 6 Poznań based MPs and Senators elected in the Poznań ward in 2007,
- Mayor of Poznań,
- 16 out of 37 City Councillors,
- Several Estate councillors,
- Local City Hall Officials and representatives of two NGOs,
- Journalists from Gazeta Wyborcza, Poznań Region Supplement
### Example: List of interviewees including their functions and experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Name and Surname</th>
<th>Function/Expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Local government expert</td>
<td>Kulesza, Michał</td>
<td>Former Government Plenipotentiary for the Reform of Public Administration; Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local government expert</td>
<td>Regulski, Jerzy</td>
<td>President of the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy ‘Chief architect’ of local government reform in Poland, Former cabinet minister, Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MP (PO) Civic Platform</td>
<td>Dzikowski, Waldy</td>
<td>Former Mayor (Wójt) of Tarnowo Podgórze Commune Member of parliamentary Commission for Local Government and Regional Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>City Council, Antoninek – Zieliniec-Kobylepole Estate Council</td>
<td>Bielerzewski, Andrzej</td>
<td>Independent, Councillor Deputy Chairman, Municipal Utilities and Housing Policy Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>City Council, Winiary Estate Council</td>
<td>Chudobiecki, Jan</td>
<td>Independent, Councillor Deputy Chairman, Education Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The role of the researcher and Ethics

• The ethical implications to make sure that the reputation of academic research and of the University of Glasgow would be treated with respect equally with the good name of the individuals and communities researched.

• “The interviewer should seem professional and generally knowledgeable, but less knowledgeable than the respondent on the particular topic of the interview.” (Leech 2002:665)

• good rapport ← trust ← responsibility