

# Guide to Qualitative Research in Parliaments: Experiences and Practice

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The book „*A Practical Guide on Conducting Qualitative Research in Parliaments*“ written by Berthet, Gaweda, Kantola, Miller, Ahrens, and Elomäki in 2023, is open access and contributes to the diversity of approaches and methods for studying Parliaments. Indeed, it provides a step-by-step account of how the authors have conducted their research in the European Parliament (EP), thereby offering a ‚practical guide‘ for other researchers intending to do qualitative research on parliaments. This approach enables the authors to provide practical insights on interviewing MEPs and their staff, as well as on ethnographic research. Finally, the book’s gendered outlook brings in a broader perspective, focusing on the “nexus of gender, institutions, power and discourse in legislatures” (p. 114).

This book contains seven chapters, which can be organized into groups of two, with the conclusion ending the project. In the first section, the authors introduce their research project and approach, and locate it in the broader literature of methodological research on Parliaments. The second chapter (pp. 13–29) then sets the stage by introducing the European Parliament and its working mechanisms. The EP is acknowledged both as a Committee-based parliament and as an equality-parliament (p. 19), a concept built on different dimensions such as the high number of women MEPs or well-established feminist governance structures (p. 20). In this introduction to the European Parliament, the authors note the different issues specific to doing qualitative interviews and ethnography in the EP, ranging from its multilingualism to the different locations in which it convenes. This first section is useful in presenting the authors’ perspectives

and understandings not only of their own research but also the larger context in which it takes place.

Second, the authors detail their approach to data gathering in the third chapter (pp. 31–50), outlining how their pilot study allowed them to refine their working methods for the main study. For example, the use of Post-Interview Notes helped the authors not only to deal with more complex situations that sometimes arose during interviews, but also to not miss potential follow-up interviews (p. 39). This chapter also gives an overview of both the interviewing and ethnographic data gathering process and the data associated with it, as well as the manner in which it was stored and archived. The fourth chapter (pp. 51–78) focuses on the more practical aspects of doing interviews and ethnographic research in the EP, outlining the authors’ preparatory work and hurdles. For example, the authors outline the process they underwent with the ethical review necessary to conduct such a project, noting in particular the difficulty of ensuring informed consent when conducting ethnographic research (pp. 52–57). The step-by-step approach chosen by the authors to make this book a practical guide shines in this section, as the concrete retelling of the different hurdles faced at this stage and solutions developed by the authors to remedy them provide interesting insights for those researchers using similar methods.

Finally, the fifth chapter (pp. 79–105) outlines the authors’ manual coding strategy, presenting the main qualitative text analysis tool used in this research in ATLAS.ti. It also touches upon the practical difficulties related to coding as a collaborative process, such as how

to ensure intercoder reliability through clear communication in debating code names and their correct uses (pp. 84-85). The sixth chapter (pp. 107-129) builds on this coding strategy and its connection to the authors' analysis. The qualitative nature of this project leads the authors to expand on their interpretative approach to the collected data, as they look at frames and discourses, both of which are shaped by the selected methods. This section details the different practical steps necessary to conduct high-quality qualitative research. The authors outline the different steps taken to ensure a sound collaborative interpretative work, ranging from reading code reports and the existing data, to complementing it through triangulation (p. 111).

The conclusion (pp. 129-138) brings out the main contributions and limitations of this book. Several limitations are also highlighted by the authors, the most pressing one being the representativeness of the data samples, due largely to the EP's multilingualism. Yet, this book still lives up to the promise its name presents. Indeed, the practical retelling of the authors' methodological approach to their project is a boon to other researchers, who—regardless of their experience with Parliaments or qualitative methods—gain a practical understanding of the different steps necessary to conduct this type of research. The book also contributes to the literature by making explicit how gender can influence qualitative research, not only as a topic but also as a shaper of interactions between the researcher and the field during ethnographic and interviewing research. Overall, this book complements the existing literature by bringing in contributions that are especially useful for young researchers working qualitatively on any parliaments, a contribution that is made even more important through its gendered outlook.