

Doing socio-legal research with experts as interview participants

Thursday, 13 April 2023

Sala dela Consiglio, Villa Salviati

Time: 10 am- 12 pm

The workshop focuses on conducting interviews with (legal) 'experts' - broadly understood as professionals who carry out the 'work' of law – in the context of socio-legal research projects. By bringing researchers who have collected data from 'elites' for their research, the workshop engages with some methodological and practical challenges while collecting and interpreting data from experts.

The speakers will share and reflect on their experiences around 5 different themes. Participants are welcome to contribute to the discussions during the sessions.

Speakers:

Patrícia Jerónimo, Associate Professor at University of Minho & Visiting Fellow at Robert Schuman Centre

Karolina Kocemba, Max Weber Fellow

Ximene Rego, Postdoctoral Fellow at University of Minho

Sapna Reheem Shaila, Max Weber Fellow

Moritz Schramm, Humboldt University Berlin

Organisers: Sapna Reheem Shaila and Patrícia Jerónimo

SESSION I: 10am- 11 am

I. Why interview legal practitioners?

The workshop will begin with the speakers reflecting on why they have chosen legal professionals as part of their research and how such a decision shaped their research question, research design and findings. The panel will also engage with why there is a need to study the human actors who make the law and carry out the work of law in legal scholarship.

II. Getting 'access' to legal experts

Under this theme, the speakers will reflect on how they have managed to gain access to judges, lawyers, prosecutors, commissioners in the context of their research. They will also reflect on the 'snowballing' technique and the implications for data analysis.

III. Navigating the outsider| insider paradigm

Through their language, education, professional practice and socialisation techniques, legal professionals constitute a bounded professional group who identify separately from the interviewer and the public. In this session, the speakers will reflect on how they navigated the 'insider'/ 'outsider' paradigm to gather data. At the outset, the

session aims to address the power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee and strategies to navigate them.

BREAK: 11 am- 11.15am

SESSION II: 11.15 am- 12.00 pm

IV. Tackling variations amongst experts

Lawyers, prosecutors, public defenders and judges often offer distinct perspectives and opinions based on their professional identity during interviews. In this session, the speakers will engage with how they have managed data collection from different groups of experts and navigated the power hierarchies embedded within the legal profession. The speakers will also reflect on how they dealt with variations in data during data analysis and writing.

V. Drawing boundaries between the personal and professional identity

This session engages with how researchers have dealt with the data collected from the experts. The speakers will be invited to reflect on whether they chose to anonymise the research participants, if so, why, and how they decided. The speakers will also be invited to reflect on instances where interviewees get carried away despite their expertise and official roles and give personal opinions. The speakers will be asked to engage with how they navigated such cases as part of their data analysis.

VI. Concluding session

The session aims to take stock of some of the particularities and challenges in conducting interviews with legal professionals. The participants will be encouraged to share their experiences with the speakers and concerns about their research design involving expert interview participants.