



EuroClio

Inspiring History
and Citizenship Educators

Methodological Guidelines for Conducting Ethnographic Research

2025



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Image: EuroClio

Principles

Good research practices are based on fundamental principles of research integrity. They guide individuals, institutions, and organisations in their work as well as in their engagement with the practical, ethical, and intellectual challenges inherent in research. These principles include:

- **Reliability** in ensuring the quality of research is reflected in the design, methodology, analysis, and use of resources.
- **Honesty** in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting, and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full, and unbiased way.
- **Respect** for colleagues, research participants, research subjects, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage, and the environment.
- **Accountability** for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision, and mentoring, and its wider societal impacts.

Why are we doing research?

The research conducted for EuroClio or under EuroClio's framework will serve three main purposes:

- 1. Impact Research:** to have a better understanding of the impact the projects we do have on its participants, we will conduct focus groups with them before and after the project's implementation. If the project lasts for a long time, the focus groups will be conducted after finishing different project stages (to be identified according to the proposal).
- 2. Inform Future Projects:** the research will inform future project proposals. This way, we will ensure the projects address the real needs of the field, and the research outputs will prove the necessity and importance of future projects.
- 3. Inform EuroClio's Work & Manifesto:** having a better insight into the real processes, dynamics and actors involved in history education and their beliefs, needs and opinions will allow EuroClio to ground its work better and also to be in line with the reality of history education. The research will also help to prioritise topics and lines of work and ensure the work done improves and has a good influence on teaching and learning history. This type of research will help us better understand how history education contributes to societal change.

This document serves as a basis for conducting research at EuroClio, so everyone involved in it parts from the same place. But also, in case any project includes a research component, it will help to design this research in line with EuroClio's ethnographic framework.

Why ethnography?

The main advantage of using an ethnographic approach is that it gives the researcher direct access to the group participants. It is a useful approach for learning first-hand about the processes, dynamics, behaviour and interactions of people within a particular context, in our case, history and education. Because of these reasons, we have decided to develop qualitative research in combination with a more quantitative approach to measure the impact of EuroClio's work in history education and its actors.

What is ethnography?

Ethnography is the most basic form of social research. It is understood as a reference to a specific methodology where the researcher takes part in the daily life of its participants for a determined period of time.

There are distinct understandings of ethnographic research, each with its own epistemological background and research practices. For example, critical ethnographies and feminist ethnographies are examples of theoretically informed approaches relying on the principles of critical theory and feminist theory. Autoethnography is an approach where the researcher's personal and reflective perspective is part of the analysis. Since the Internet and social media expansion, some researchers have conducted virtual ethnography or netnography.

Reflexivity is a crucial part of ethnographic research. This means being aware of your personal interests, objectives and beliefs as a researcher and understanding how they may influence your data collection and analysis. For this, it is important to have moments of reflection before, during and after conducting research where you consider your personal and research motivations. If you are working with a group of researchers, it is important to reflect together and question each other's methods and findings.

The strengths of qualitative research are its world-oriented process and inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on descriptions rather than numbers. Using a qualitative research approach allows researchers to:

- a. Understand the meaning for study participants of the events, situations, experiences and actions in which they are involved or participate.
- b. Understand the specific contexts within which participants act and the influence of these contexts on their actions.
- c. Identify unexpected phenomena and generate new and grounded theories.

Furthermore, qualitative research has an inherent openness and flexibility that allows you to modify your design and approach during the research.

How to design your research?

1. Setting your research questions and objectives

Before designing and conducting research, you must set your research's object, questions and objectives. Knowing what it is that you want to achieve will help you decide what the best way is to achieve these objectives. In addition, a clear understanding of your goals and objectives will help you avoid losing sight of your path or investing time and effort in things that do not contribute to these objectives.

The research questions aim to explain in a specific way what you are trying to learn or understand through the research. More than any other aspect of your design, your research questions will influence all parts of the research, to which they must also be responsive. Try to answer these questions:

- What do you want to know?
- What are you aiming to answer?
- What do you hope to learn?
- How will the research result be used?

Answering these questions is useful for two reasons. First, they will guide your design decision to ensure the research is worth doing and that you are getting your answers. Second, they will help justify the need to conduct research as they explain why your results and conclusions are important.

Furthermore, researchers need to participate in discussions about the possible conscience of their work, including harmful consequences and potential risks, in planning research projects

After answering those questions, you can set up your objectives. These can be divided into two types:

- a. Practical Objectives:** They focus on achieving something. For example, meeting needs, changing situations or achieving goals.
- b. Intellectual Objectives:** They focus on understanding something and gaining knowledge of what is happening and why.

Deciding on and evaluating the different objectives you bring to the research can be difficult. Moreover, it is not something you should do only once, at the beginning of your study, and then forget about. Some of your objectives may not be clear until you are well into the research, and they may change as the research progresses.

Once you have identified what you are trying to resolve or know more about, assessing how much you know about the issue and what gaps you need to fill is important. After identifying gaps in your knowledge, you should do preliminary research based on a literature review to understand your research object better.

Now that you know what you want to research and how much you know about the field, think of the best way to answer your research questions:

- Who has that information?
- Do you have access to the field?



If you are conducting research within the framework of a project, it is important to go back to the project's proposal, as it will have the answers to the project's objectives and what you should consider in your research.

1. Selecting your methods

In a qualitative study, you are the research instrument, and your eyes and ears are the tools you use to collect information and interpret what is happening. When planning your research methods, you should always include feasible informal data collection strategies, such as informal meetings, casual conversations or incidental observations.

To decide on what method fits your research best, you need to reflect on:

- Research relationships:** what type of relationships will you establish with those you are studying?
- Selection:** which situations or individuals do you decide to observe or interview, and what other sources of information do you decide to use?
- Data collection:** how can you gather the information you will use?
- Data analysis:** what will you do with this information to interpret it?

There is no "recipe book" for qualitative methods. The appropriate answer to almost any general question about using qualitative methods is "it depends". Decisions about your research methods depend on the questions you are studying, the specific context of your research, as well as other components of the design.

Negotiating Research Relationships

The relationships you create with your participants are an essential part of your methodology, so how you initiate and negotiate these relationships is a key design decision. What you need are relationships that allow you to ethically obtain information that is capable of answering your research questions.



In the framework of a project, you might use interpretive and participatory action methods, which means working together with participants to generate knowledge that is useful to them and the researcher and contributes to personal and social transformation.

Presenting yourself and your research

To ensure ethical research, participants must be able to make an informed decision regarding their participation. For this, deciding how you will present yourself and your research is crucial. You should then draft a one-page sheet with the basic information regarding the research topic, your research questions and objectives, and who is involved in the research (e.g., is there an external donor? Who forms the

group of researchers?). [Here](#) is an example of an information sheet developed within the framework of the EVZ project.

If you decide to conduct interviews and focus group conversations, you must sign an informed consent with all your participants. You can update EuroClio's [template](#) to adjust it to the necessities of your research. **Make sure** all participants have signed before the interview or focus groups. The informed consent should be stored digitally in the [HQ > 3. RESEARCH > INFORMED CONSENT \(> Create a folder for your project if there is none\)](#). And share a physical copy with Paula.



Selection of places and participants

In qualitative research, there is an intentional selection of places and participants. Specific situations, people or activities are deliberately chosen to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and objectives but cannot be obtained through other options. The participants are chosen based on their unique ability to provide information because they are experts in an area or have been privileged witnesses to an event. There are some things to keep in mind while making your selection:

- a. You should aim to achieve representativeness or typicality of the situations, activities or individuals selected.
- b. You should correctly capture heterogeneity in the population.
- c. You should select groups or participants with whom you will be able to establish the most productive relationships – relationships that will allow you to give the best possible answer to your research questions.
- d. You should consider how easy it is to gain access and collect the data.

Data Collection

As a general note, regardless of the method chosen, it is important to keep **field notes** or a **research diary** while conducting research. The field notes should be written either during the stay at the site or immediately after. While it is useful to write down the information directly linked to your research questions, it is also important to provide general descriptions of the places, events or interviews, as they can provide useful information. The field notes should also include a preliminary analysis based on your observations and some reflection on how you felt during the research, what didn't work and what could be improved in the future.

There are many methods you can use to collect data.

- a. Active Participant Observation:** the researcher participates in the activities and interacts with the participants. The researcher takes field notes, photographs, or records the activities, but from the perspective of a temporary group member. This allows you to better understand the participants' perspectives by developing an "insider's view", meaning you would experience and feel what it is like to be part of the group studied.

- b. Passive Observation:** the researcher solely observes without interfering nor participating in the activities, nor do they interact with the participants. Instead, the researcher observes as an outsider taking field notes, photographs or recording the activities. It is worth noting that you cannot assume that your presence does not affect your participants' behaviour. Even if you don't interact with them, be aware of biases resulting from your presence.
- c. Ethnographic Interviews:** also known as open-ended narratives or life history interviews. Researchers often supplement what they have learnt through observations by interviewing participants who can help them better understand the setting or group they are researching. An important part of the interviews is establishing a rapport with the participants. The best way to do this is by being a good listener, which means listening and hearing much more than talking and conversing. High priorities are showing genuine interest towards the participant and doing what you can to make the other person socially comfortable. When conducting the interview, you should choose a setting where the participant can relax and talk openly. Be sure that the participant knows that the interview forms one part of your data and that they understand the overall implications of being interviewed.
- d. Focus Groups:** can be defined as a carefully planned conversation designed to obtain information about a defined area of interest in a non-directive setting, conducted with approximately 7-10 people guided by an expert moderator. Since it is a guided conversation, the researcher should create a permissive climate that encourages the expression of different conceptions and points of view without pressuring the participants to reach a consensus. The size would be small enough so everyone has the opportunity to share their thoughts and big enough to ensure a diversity of opinions. At the same time, it should be heterogeneous to ensure representativity but homogeneous enough that all participants share some characteristics (for example, they are all history educators from different countries and backgrounds).
- e. Document Research:** this means the analysis of relevant documents. These can be gathered either during the observations (e.g., at a protest, the organisers might disseminate pamphlets and leaflets among attendees) or specifically for analysis (e.g., the research is based on document analysis of textbooks from a specific country).

Interviews and focus groups can be taped with the participants' consent. Even if you are good at keeping notes, having an actual account of what was said and how is helpful. Recordings allow you to transcribe interview data for closer analysis. If the participant does not want you to tape the interview, take enough time after the interview to write down more complete notes about what was said.

How do you store the data collected? First and foremost, do not share recordings or transcripts of interviews and focus groups on shared drives. Only share them with the research team in a private folder so you can control who has access.



Additionally, a copy of the audio/video recordings and transcripts should be stored in the HQ.

Data Saturation

A common question is till when you should collect data. The easiest answer is until the data does not offer new information, known as data saturation. This means the point where enough data has been collected to draw necessary conclusions, and any further data collection will not produce value-added insights.

Data Analysis

Any qualitative study involves decisions about how the analyses will be conducted, and these decisions must influence, as well as be influenced by, the rest of the design. One of the most common problems is allowing field notes and unanalysed transcripts to accumulate, making the final analysis task much more difficult and daunting. To solve this, the analysis should take place throughout the research project. This means that you will continuously analyse, interpret and learn from your empirical data.

The first step in data analysis is to read the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups and the notes from the observations. The first reading you can do quickly to get an overall picture of the data. However, as you proceed, it is useful to be much more thorough. While reading, you should note what you see in the data and develop preliminary ideas on categories of data and the relations between them.

Reduction or categorisation of data is often the second step of the analysis. For this, you might follow two processes of thought: comparison and contrast of the data. Similarities and differences are often used to define categories and groups and compare data by category, and the main objective is to reorder the data into categories that facilitate comparison between elements within the same category. However, data should not be organised into categories. The researcher should also look for the connections between categories.

Another form of categorisation analysis involves organising the data into more general themes and issues. The categorisation process begins with identifying units or segments of data that seem important or significant in some sense, "marking what is interesting in the text". Codification allows labelling data and grouping it into categories; they are then examined and compared within and across categories.

Research Risks

1. **Researcher Bias:** the selection of data, objectives and preexisting beliefs of the researcher present several risks. Being aware of and explaining your potential biases and how you will deal with them is a central task of your research proposal.
2. **Researcher Influence over Participants:** the influence of the researcher's presence over the participants might also present a risk, as, for example,

participants might not feel comfortable sharing their beliefs when the researcher is present.

3. **Reliability of the data:** this refers to whether the researcher is able to collect data that are internally and externally consistent and credible. Data are internally consistent when the researcher records behaviours that are consistent over time and in different social contexts. External consistency can be achieved by verifying or cross-checking data with other sources.
4. **Relationship with the participants:** When you become fully immersed in a culture or situation, you risk changing the events in which you observe and participate, perhaps even losing sight of your role as a researcher, thereby "going native" and over-identifying yourself with the group under study.
5. **Research Misconduct:** is traditionally defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism (the so-called FFP categorisation) in proposing, performing, or reviewing research or in reporting research results:
 - a. Fabrication is making up data or results and recording them as if they were real.
 - b. Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, images, or processes or changing, omitting, or suppressing data or results without justification.
 - c. Plagiarism is using other people's work or ideas without giving proper credit to the original source.

Writing the conclusions

Doing research also involves writing the research output, disregarding the format. The writing should incorporate not only the analysis of the data but also provide descriptions of the research process. The purpose of the description is to let the reader know what happened in the field, what it was like to be there from the participant's point of view, and what particular events or activities were interesting and worth exploring. Thus, detailed descriptions and quotations are essential.

An interesting and readable ethnographic research report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the analysis and sufficient analysis to allow the reader to understand the interpretation and explanation presented. Be sure that the points that you present as evidence are based on your data. In order to understand your research, the reader needs to see the path from description, analysis and interpretation to results and conclusions in the research report.

How is the research going to be published?

It is important to at least brainstorm and have a general idea of the research's results will be used. Are they going to be published? If yes, where? Are you looking at an internal research report or an academic publication? This is important because participants should be aware of how their words might be used and offered the possibility to remain anonymous and not associated with the research.

As a general rule, EuroClio's research will be shared with the staff and the board at the bi-yearly meetings, and the research results will be shared with the members.



Additionally, the results will inform future project proposals, meaning they will be used to identify possible topics for future projects regarding what trends and dynamics are identified and to emphasise the importance of the project and the real needs it will address. They can be published as working papers or in relevant publications, like academic journals, and edited volumes or be presented at conferences.

How to conduct ethical research?

Research should deliver accurate, replicable, and unbiased results reported responsibly, with the appropriate acknowledgement of all stakeholders. To be valuable, trustworthy, and usable in local settings, the research should be translatable into locally relevant and locally owned and accessible interventions or policies, where applicable. Research integrity educational programmes and other related initiatives should support researchers to reflect these goals in the planning, conduct, and dissemination of their research.

Whatever your methodological and political conceptions, remember that what you call a "research project" is always, to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of the participants in your study. Issues of confidentiality and privacy; your unintentional revelation of identities; deception and misrepresentation of yourself; identification of your biases; violation of your own basic personal moral standards in order to conform; your identification with those lacking power in society; your negotiations with the elite in power or authority; and your publishing field reports that may be truthful but unflattering are all ethical issues that may arise. As far as possible, you should anticipate any concerns that the participant may have and plan how you will address them, both in the pre-investigation explanation and negotiation and in the interview itself, should these issues arise.

Trying to understand how participants will perceive your actions and how they will respond to them is, therefore, a fundamental ethical obligation. The first step is to put yourself in the participant's shoes and ask yourself how you would feel if someone did what you think of doing to you. However, you should not assume that your understanding of the action is the same as that of the participants.

The European Commission has developed [guidelines](#) regarding research ethics in ethnographic research.

Anonymity

If requested, you should ensure your participants' anonymity. This means not disclosing their participation in the research if the results are published but also not sharing their information or participation with anyone outside the research team.

If quotations are used, make sure there are no identifying elements (e.g., the name of an institution they can be linked to, the name of the school they work at or anything that might make their identification possible). A good practice is sharing the research report with them before publication to ensure they agree with their participation and cannot be identified.

Protection of Data

You should make sure your research follows the [European Data Protection Policies](#). You can also follow some [guidelines](#) regarding data protection and scientific research. And research centres like the [European Institute University](#) or [Radboud University](#) have created their own guidelines and tips.

Ensuring a safe space

You should ensure your participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions and beliefs. While conducting focus groups, for example, confronting ideas might be shared. You should be aware of which sensible issues might appear and think of strategies on how to divert the conversation or ensure it happens respectfully and everyone has the chance to share their thoughts.

Working with groups at risk of vulnerability

Research can contribute towards the achievement of human rights and social justice for people at risk of vulnerability (e.g., minorities and people with mental illness and functional diversity), but if not conducted properly, it can obstruct those aspirations, reproduce prejudice and put them at risk. To avoid this from happening, you should ensure they are appropriately represented during the implementation of the research but also ensure the language used during the report or further dissemination does not reproduce discriminatory prejudices or stereotypes.

The European Commission has issued an [ethics guide for ethnographic research](#) addressing how to ensure participatory research does not worsen things.

Conducting Research with Children

Children are frequently assumed to be one of the most vulnerable groups in most societies, so extra care has to be taken when they are the subjects of a research project or if they are otherwise involved in a larger study of a community. You will need both the child's and parental consent and the screening of interviewees. But the extent to which this has to be accomplished depends upon the child's age, the location of questioning/interviewing, the presence of a parent or guardian as chaperone and the length of time spent with an interviewer. All of these factors must be balanced against methodological accuracy and guaranteeing confidentiality and/or anonymity, if requested, for the child's response.

If underage minors participate in your research, please ensure EuroClio's [Child Protection Policy](#) is followed. Additionally, different countries have different guidelines and rules regarding the participation of children in research, and you can have all the information on the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) website.

Ensuring participants' safety

Researchers must attempt to protect all participants in a study from any harmful consequences arising from their participation. This is even more important when those groups or individuals are less able to protect themselves, like children.

Useful Links

Taylor, S. J. (2015). Introduction to qualitative research methods : A guidebook and resource. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

<https://www.researchsoft.org/blog/2022-06/>

<https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/cape-town-statement>

https://embassy.science/wiki/Main_Page

<https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

<https://infed.org/mobi/participant-observation-a-guide-for-educators-and-social-practitioners/>

https://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/media/Guidelines_for_Conducting_Observations_in_Schools_-_Web.pdf

https://anthro.illinois.edu/system/files/2020-01/Sorcinelli_Observation_Guide.pdf

<https://methods.sagepub.com/case/the-intricacies-of-classroom-based-ethnography>

<https://proofed.co.uk/writing-tips/how-to-conduct-ethnographic-research/>

<https://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Eriksson%20and%20Kovalainen.pdf>

<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1071&context=tqr>

<https://methods.sagepub.com/browseseries/seriesmap/research-design-for-qualitative-research>

https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop_en.pdf

<https://www.ru.nl/rdm/gdpr-research/>

<https://www.eui.eu/documents/servicesadmin/deanofstudies/researchethics/guide-data-protection-research.pdf>

https://edps.europa.eu/sites/edp/files/publication/20-01-06_opinion_research_en.pdf

https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu_en

<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/child-participation-research>

<https://euroclio.eu/child-protection-policy/>

Templates

Information about the Project for the Participants

EuroClio & Max Mannheimer Study Centre ***Who Were the Victims of National Socialism?***

Information about the Participation in Focus Group Discussions

What is the purpose of the project?

- To enable young people to gain a deeper understanding of the roots of discrimination in the present by researching the victims of National Socialists.
- To design, develop, and test local youth-empowered history projects around the key question: *Who were the victims of the National Socialists?* in six European countries.
- To encourage students to use the acquired knowledge to reflect on contemporary issues and think about what can be done to prevent historical injustices from continuing in the present.

Who are the people involved in the project?

- Team Members: five schools from different European regions: Spain, Belgium, Denmark, Slovakia, and Bosnia.
- Project Advisors: six experts on education and youth projects.
- Council Members: six experts on the topic of the victims of National Socialism.
- Project Coordinators: from EuroClio and Max Mannheimer Study Centre, in charge of logistics and the day-to-day of the project.

What will we do in the project?

- Local History Projects: developed and conducted by the teachers at their five schools. They do different activities chosen by the teachers according to their local context and possibilities.
- Focus Groups: we will develop 1 focus group (happening twice) to get first-hand information from the students.

What is the purpose of the focus groups?

- To know the motivations and expectations of the students participating in the project.
- To ensure the project is interesting and engages them in the process.
- To make sure the content is understandable for the students.

How will we use the focus groups' input?

- For the development of the Toolkit
- To give examples of what students could do or would potentially be interested in doing during the project.

What will be the final products of the project?

- A promotional video in 12 languages.
- Peer-learning Tutorials with footage from students who are directly involved in the project that explains the rationale for the project demonstrate how the project works in practice and convinces educators to explore and use the toolkit.

- A toolkit with step-by-step instructions on how to design the history project for students, and support materials for each step, including preparation and assessment.
- A research report on the effectiveness of the project in terms of learning outcomes.
- An internal and external evaluation of the project.

EuroClio's Informed Consent Template

Informed Consent for Participants in Focus Group Discussions

I hereby agree to participate in a focus group discussion carried out by **RESEARCHER NAME** within the framework of **PROJECT NAME**. The content and methods of the study have been explained to me.

I am participating in this study voluntarily. I agree with the discussion being recorded (audio and video recording) and its subsequent audio transcription with the software DESCRIPT for research and academic purposes. The audio file will be used for the transcription, but the recording will be archived in case the researchers need to corroborate any data, but it will not be shared outside the participants of this focus group. The audio recording and transcript may be made available to me upon request. The final transcript will be used for writing the project's reports and shared among the team working on the project. The interviewee's contribution will be acknowledged in the final product.

I have been made aware that I am free to decide not to answer individual questions during the focus group and that I may ask to stop the recording at any time during the discussion. I have also been informed that all personal data collected, including any information through which I could be identified, will be anonymised and used purely for academic purposes. The study will be carried out in accordance with the provisions made in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union.¹ The interviewers and all project team members are bound to maintain data confidentiality and professional discretion. They may not and will not discuss the interviews conducted with anybody outside the context of the project.

I agree that logs and transcripts may be used for EuroClio publications. In this context, too, I have been informed that personal data through which any individual could be identified can be deleted or anonymised upon request in accordance with the provisions made in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

I agree to the framework conditions of the study as outlined above. The audio recordings will be deleted upon request after the study's conclusion. I am aware that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

I have received a copy of this agreement.

Date, place, name and signature of the interviewee

¹ To read the legal text of the GDPR please see: <https://gdpr-info.eu/>