COVER SHEET

SAGE Cases in Methodology (Methods in Action Case)

Arranging and conducting elite interviews: practical considerations

Christopher Huggins, University of Portsmouth

Relevant disciplines

Political science (and applicable to the broader social sciences)

Academic level

Postgraduate research students or other researchers new to elite interviewing.

Methods used

Elite interviewing, qualitative interviews, semi-structured interviews.

Keywords

Arranging interviews, elite interviewing, interviewing practicalities, interview invites.

Link to the research output

Contributor biography

Christopher Huggins is a PhD candidate and politics tutor at the University of Portsmouth.
His research focuses on the motivations behind and effectiveness of local government
transnational networking in south-east England and northern France. He also has previous
practitioner experience working in local government.

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Abstract

Elite interviewing is an established research method in the social sciences. It offers researchers a number of advantages, particularly when the motivations and perceptions of participants are the subject of inquiry. I used elite interviews in my research on local government transnational networking. While I was confident this approach was well suited to the aims of my study, I remained uncertain about the practicalities involved in arranging and conducting interviews and I was afraid that such practical aspects would have a detrimental impact on the reliability of my results. This case outlines the practical issues I faced when arranging and conducting interviews. This highlights the importance of these practical considerations in the success of elite interviews, in addition to its methodological suitability to a study.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this case you should:

1. Appreciate that the practical application of a method is as much a factor in its success as its methodological suitability for the study.

2. Be aware of the variety of practical aspects that require consideration when arranging and conducting elite interviews, and be able to plan your own research accordingly.

3. Understand the importance of researchers establishing their credibility and

professionalism when interviewing elites.

Introduction

Elite interviews are a common and useful method regularly employed in political research and in the broader social sciences. Rather than involving the general public, they target actors who are in a privileged position in relation to a particular activity or area of policy, often having direct influence over it. They are usually professionals or elected politicians, so expect a certain level of professionalism in all their work-related interactions, including with researchers.

My research into local government transnational networking aimed to explore the actions and perceptions of such actors in detail. This necessitated a method which could get to the heart of these perceptions; semi-structured qualitative interviews with elites clearly offered the answer. This case therefore outlines my experience of using elite interviews as a research method in this project. Rather than a methodological discussion of elite interviewing, it discusses some of the practicalities involved in undertaken them, particularly in arranging and conducting interviews. The central argument is that no matter how methodologically suitable elite interviewing is for a particular study, its success still depends on the researcher's ability to effectively undertake them.

As someone 'new' to academic research, two texts in particular proved valuable in weighing up the respective methodological advantages and disadvantages of various approaches: Colin Robson's *Real World Research* and Lisa Harrison's *Political Research: An Introduction*. Having chosen elite interviews as the most suitable method for addressing my research aims, Steinar Kvale's *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* offered more detail on the specifics of interviewing. I was also able to draw on a body of literature in my field which utilized elite interviews and evaluate their success in

addressing each study's respective research aims. However, while I was certain I had chosen the correct method for collecting my data, I was still unsure about the practicalities involved in its execution.

David Richard's short article 'Elite Interviewing: Approaches and Pitfalls' was a good reference guide providing helpful advice when interviewing political elites. However, it still lacked applied examples. I was of course able to rely on the valuable advice of my supervisors and colleagues, based on their experiences. I also had the advantage of having previous work experience in local government, meaning I was familiar with the day-to-day working practices of my potential participants. Nonetheless, I was left with a number of basic, but still important, questions, such as: "how should I contact my participants (by letter or telephone)?", "what information should I include in an interview invite?", "what should I do if no one responds?", "how should I prepare for an interview?", "how should I dress?" and so on.

The following sections outline the practical aspects in undertaking qualitative interviewing in my research, offering advice and examples where possible. Much of this advice will seem obvious, and in some cases trivial, however it still bears consideration. Indeed, no matter how appropriate the method is to a research project, its success still depends on its practical implementation in the field by the researcher. Nonetheless, any approach to employing elite interviews is unique to the research in question. This case therefore first contextualizes my approach by outlining my research project. With this context in mind, the advice offered further below is transferable to other research projects.

Background to the research project

My research investigated local government transnational networking, broadly defined as the relationships local authorities built up with their counterparts in other countries across

national borders. For me this represented an interesting phenomenon, not only because it seemed to be a by-product of the European integration process, but also because it showed local government acting beyond their local administrative boundaries and beyond their formal legal competences.

While several scholars had studied the impact of this activity on the broader trends of regional cohesion, European integration and Europeanization, very little was understood about the motivations of individual local actors engaging in this activity. In effect, the existing literature seemed to assume local government was unwittingly engaging in these links rather than making a rational decision—however bounded or not—to actively take part. This was the contribution I intended to make. I set out to determine local government's motivations for their involvement in transnational networking and how effective they were at achieving the benefits they sought.

To ensure validity I practised triangulation by using multiple methods. Analysing local government committee and policy documents outlined the motivations behind local government involvement in transnational networking, while direct observation allowed me to see first-hand how effectively council staff and politicians engaged in this activity. The bulk of my data, however, was gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews with elite participants; those with direct and professional experience in local government transnational networking.

The rationalization for this method was based in my research aims. I was interested in *participant's perceptions* of transnational networking activities and its effectiveness. By interviewing those involved in local government transnational networking, an in-depth understanding into the rationale for participation, difficulties encountered and characteristics of effective networking could be gained. Crucially, interviews captured perspectives which would not have been present in other sources of information, such as public documentation.

Interviews also allowed for direct contact with participants, providing the opportunity to follow-up responses to questions or to probe for more detail.

Overall, I conducted 68 interviews. My participants included local government administrative staff, councillors and others who had direct involvement with local government transnational networking. My case study selection meant these interviews took place across south-east England, northern France and in Brussels.

Inviting participants

Through existing contacts, document analysis, web searches and adopting a snowball sampling approach I had compiled a list of 119 potential participants. I obviously could not force potential participants to take part in an interview. Nonetheless, it was equally important to ensure I had a sample which was representative of all administrative staff and councillors involved in transnational networking in my case study areas. While Peter John notes that—compared to other areas in politics—local government is open and data is more readily available, ensuring a good response rate to my interview invites was a concern. Making a good first impression was key to ensuring potential participants would be willing to be interviewed.

Of course any study which involves human participants needs to be carried ethically and this is a core part of the Economic and Social Research Council's *Framework for Research Ethics*. Among other things, this requires participation in the research to be on the basis of informed consent. Being transparent and providing information to participants about all aspects of your research and what impact it will have on them is therefore paramount. Participants must be given all necessary information about the research and their involvement before formally agreeing to participate. However, bombarding potential participants with all this information as an introduction to your research is likely to confound and put them off

taking part.

I therefore adopted a two-step process: firstly, initial contact was made with potential participants outlining—in broad terms—the research project and asking if they would be willing to participate. Once this initial agreement had been secured participants were then formally invited to participate and given all the necessary information to make an informed decision. Only at this stage was participants' informed consent assumed.

Making contact with potential participants

This requires some prior knowledge about the 'bureaucratic culture' your potential participants operate in and how it is most appropriate to communicate with them. I was fortunate in that I had previous work experience in local government. I was aware that email is ubiquitous and the default mode of communication among administrative staff. Unlike in central government or large corporations, even senior council staff usually had direct access to their email inboxes and were able to pick up emails and reply directly, rather than through a personal assistant. Emails were likely to be picked up quickly and often resulted in a quick response. Thus for the majority of my participants it was appropriate to make initial contact by email. When inviting local councillors, however, a formal letter was more appropriate as a means of first contact. Councillors were less likely to use email as frequently and their position as elected public officials necessitated a more formal approach. When writing letters I always used official university headed paper. This served to reassure any potential participant of my credibility as a researcher and that the research project had the university's backing. In both cases making an unsolicited telephone call would have been considered inappropriate. I only adopted this approach if other contact methods were unsuccessful (see 'No replies?' below). How ever participants are contacted, keep an audit trail of all contacts made.

The advice here is to know the working context of your participants and their preferences. Previous experience of participants' particular settings—as I had—of course helps. There is no point going to the effort of sending a letter by post when a simple email will suffice. Equally, do not put off potential participants expecting more formal correspondence such as letters by sending an unsolicited email.

Writing the invite

Just like a job application, you are more likely to be successful if you address a letter or email to a specific person rather than a generic job title or department. It is more professional which will serve to reassure any potential participant of your credentials. It also shows that you have done some background research; again, this provides reassurance and reinforces your credibility.

In terms of content, clearly set out your research and how you want the participant to be involved, while not bombarding anyone with too much information; conciseness is important. I aimed for 150 words. Also avoid academic and research jargon, instead using the day-to-day language of your potential participants. This meant I often referred to "local government co-operation" instead of the more academic "transnational networking". In emails, the main body of text should be clearly visible without having to scroll down. If you are sending a letter make sure it all fits onto one page, without the text appearing too 'busy'. In my invites, the first paragraph set out who I was and my research project. The second paragraph constituted the invite. Formally close both emails and letters (see Appendix A for example text).

No replies?

Several of my initial requests for interview went unanswered. When interviewing elites this is

to be expected. There were a number of reasons for this. Many of my contacts had retired or moved jobs. This resulted in over 25 per cent of my contacts being classified as 'unobtainable'. Additionally, my experience of working in local government was receiving what seemed like a continuous stream of emails, so it was inevitable that some of my interview requests were not picked up straight away.

If I received no reply after two weeks I sent a follow-up email or letter. I sent another two weeks after this if I still received no reply. The key was to be cordial and not too 'pushy', highlighting I was aware of how busy the potential participant was and I would be grateful for their time (see Appendix B for example follow-up text). I also attached a copy of the first email or letter in case the potential participant had not received this initially. If a potential participant had a relatively senior position within their organization, I tried to find out if they have a personal assistant who I could make contact with instead. If these approaches failed I would try and make contact by telephone. These follow-up efforts resulted in a total positive response rate of 57 per cent.

Formalizing participation

Once I had made successful contact with participants and arranged a time and place for the interview to take place (see 'Arranging interviews' below), I informed participants I would send them a confirmation letter. This formalized participation, setting out the agreed date, time and location of the interview. Enclosed with this letter was a participant information sheet. This contained all the information about my research project and what role participants had. This gave all the necessary information for participants to make an informed choice about their participation (see Appendix C for example confirmation letter and participant information sheet text). Again, both the letter and information sheet were on university headed paper. These documents not only ensured the research was conducted ethically, but

also served to reassure participants of my credibility and professionalism as a researcher. The letter also served as a helpful reminder to participants of the interview date, time and location.

<div align="center">**Arranging interviews**</div>

Once your participant agrees to be interviewed, you are able to arrange a time and place for the interview to take place. This highlighted a number of further practical considerations.

Arranging a date and time

Be flexible when making arrangements. Your participant is usually taking time out of their working day and so often you will need to work around their timetable. However, you should aim for a mutually convenient time. There is no point agreeing to a date or time it is not feasible for you to commit to. I found most interviewees were happy to be flexible on time provided I was flexible on the date.

I tried to ensure most of my interviews were arranged from mid-morning onwards. Firstly, as I relied on public transport to take me to various interview locations, I was able to take advantage of cheaper off-peak fares. This increased how far my research budget could go. Secondly, this gave me the option to arrive at my location ahead of schedule, providing contingency in case I was running late and giving me plenty of time to find the interview location. If you are conducting multiple interviews in one day be sure to leave enough time between them; not only will you find interview lengths can drastically vary, but you will also want some time immediately after an interview to reflect before going into another (see 'Immediately after the interview' below).

Arranging a location

Elite interviewees will often expect you to come to them to conduct the interview. Indeed

they will be more willing to participate if they do not have to go to great lengths to meet you. In most of my cases, participants were happy for me to come to their organization's offices. In a minority of cases preferred to meet on 'neutral ground'.

When arranging a space for the interview to take place in, make sure it is somewhere free from background noise and distractions. For example, I asked all my participants if they had their own office we could conduct the interview in, or if they were able to book a meeting room in their building. In a small number of cases participants and I arranged to meet and conduct the interview elsewhere, usually a cafe. In hindsight this was unsuitable. There was often background noise which interfered with the recording, making it hard to listen back to the interview and transcribe. It also interfered with the interview itself as the participants and I were often distracted by what was going on around us rather than focusing on the interview questions and answers. The advice here is that wherever you meet, make sure that both your and the participant's attention will not be drawn away from the interview, and, if you are audio recording, any background noise is not going to drown out the content of the interview.

Build in contingency

Remember that if you are interviewing elites they are taking time out of their normal working day to meet with you. In terms of their working priorities, your interview is not likely to be the most important item in their diary. This means you need to build in contingency when arranging to meet your participants, as interviews will sometimes be cancelled or you will be asked to reschedule. In some cases for me this happened with very little notice, and in one case five minutes before the interview was scheduled to take place having spent three hours travelling to the interview location.

I therefore quickly discovered that if I had to travel a long distance for an interview it was worth arranging two interviews to take place in the same location on the same day. Not

only was this a more efficient use of my research budget—as only one trip was being made, not two—but it also meant that if a participant pulled out with short notice the trip was not wasted; while one interview did not happen I was still able to return to base with at least some data to show for my efforts. However, you also need to consider limiting the number of interviews you conduct in one day; I found more than three interviews in one day was exhausting and this could potentially have a detrimental impact.

If you are travelling further afield and for a longer period of time to conduct several interviews, for example over three or four days, consider leaving one day free or large gaps between interviews. This provides room for manoeuvre in case participants have to cancel last minute; an alternative time to meet can be offered. For example, during the course of my fieldwork I travelled to Brussels to conduct 13 interviews. I had five days in Brussels, but deliberately left the afternoon on one day free, and had set aside the last day completely. This proved its worth, as five participants contacted me last minute to rearrange.

Conducting the interview

Conducting the interview itself gave rise to a number of practical considerations. While this section outlines some of these, you should also pilot your own interviews with a small number of participants. Piloting will allow you to see first-hand any practical issues which might affect the quality of your interview. It will also get you used to interviewing. Furthermore, it will test the suitability of your questions.

In my case I conducted two pilot interviews with participants who no longer had a day-to-day role in transnational networking. This meant that if they were unsuccessful, data gathered among my core participants would not be compromised. In my case the pilot interviews were successful, so warranted inclusion with the rest of my data.

Preparation

While the object of you conducting interviews is to find out information, elite participants will still expect you to be knowledgeable about your area of research. As noted, participants' time is limited so they will not appreciate having to go over basic information you could have found out without having to trouble them. It is also a waste of your time to be taking up an interview to find out information easily available through some preliminary research.

Before each interview, I took time to research the participant's organization, what transnational networking activity they were involved in, what relevant policy documents had been published and so on. Much of this information came from my initial document analysis. Also, where information was readily available I looked up participants' career backgrounds.

Presentation

During interviews you want to make your participants feel as comfortable as possible while maintaining your credibility and conveying your professionalism. In elite interviews this usually means dressing smartly, but do not over dress so to make participants uncomfortable. How smart to present yourself comes down to knowing your audience. With local government administrative staff I adopted 'business casual'. I would 'upgrade' to a suit for senior local politicians, such as a council leader.

Starting the interview

Before formally starting the interview make sure your participant has received all the information—particularly the participant information sheet—necessary to make an informed decision to consent to taking part in your study. For this it was useful to make sure I had spare copies of the participant information sheet with me, in case participants had not received or read it. Before starting I also gave a short personal introduction to myself and my research.

This set the scene for the interview, but again reassured participants of my credibility as I could outline my previous local government experience and highlight my existing knowledge of the topic. Also use this time to outline some of the practicalities, for example establishing how long you have to conduct the interview, making sure you will not be disturbed and answering any questions your participant might have about the interview process.

It is at this point I sought formal consent from participants. I preferred to capture this on the recording rather than using a consent form which participants sign, as is often the case in social research.

Build a rapport with your participants

A successful interview depends on a rapport being built up between the researcher and participant. This will lead to rich and detailed responses from your participants. Trust is also key, especially as some of your questions might be controversial or ask participants to think critically of their organization or their own activity. Building this trust and rapport can take time during an interview. Do not, therefore, open with any controversial questions which might unsettle your participants; this will only close them off for the rest of the interview.

I started all of my interviews by asking participants to briefly outline their background and experience in local government transnational networking. This allowed participants to speak broadly on their terms while getting used to my presence and the interview situation. I then followed this with questions seeking to understand their motivations, before slowly working towards questions which asked participants to reflect more critically on their activities.

Recording interviews

I tried to record all of my interviews. This ensured an accurate record of the interview was

captured and also meant I could focus on the interview, the questions and participants'

responses, rather than trying to capture everything that was said in detailed notes. It goes

without saying that you should be familiar with how your recording equipment operates.

Elites may feel uneasy about being recorded, particularly if they are being asked to

reflect critically on their work or their organization. As noted above, local government is

often considered more 'open' than national or international levels of politics, so this was not

too much of a problem for me. Indeed, all but one of my participants were happy to be audio

recorded. Nevertheless, in all cases establish your intentions to record the interview early on,

so not to suddenly surprise your participants on the day of the interview itself. I highlighted

my intention to record interviews in the participant information sheet sent in advance and

then also reiterated it just before the interview itself. It helped to reassure participants that

recordings were made anonymously. I did this by not identifying participants in the recording

itself and using reference numbers instead of participants' names as filenames.

Taking notes

While I audio recorded all of my interviews, I also took notes. This allowed me to highlight

important points which came up during the interview. Notes were also able to capture the 'off

the record' remarks made by participants not willing to make them on an audio recording.

Additionally, notes severed as a 'backup' in case my recording equipment failed or

participants did not want to be recorded. While it did not really apply in my case, taking notes

also provides a way to record information which an audio recording could not offer, such as

body language.

My notes were taken on a form which structured the notes against questions in my

interview schedule (see Appendix D for an example notes form). This form served a number

of purposes. Firstly it provided a useful way to order and organize the notes I made during

interviews. Secondly, by having the interview schedule in front of me, it ensured all participants were asked the same questions, ensuring consistency among all the interviews.

After the interview

While you may have successfully conducted your interview, there are still some practicalities to consider in the post-interview period.

Immediately after the interview

Immediately after the interview spend some time reflecting. As mentioned, try not to arrange interviews back to back so you can do this. I often found there were additional notes I wanted to capture that I was not able to take down during the interview itself. Get these down as soon as possible before you forget. In addition to these notes, I also wrote a short summary of some of the main themes I felt had arisen from each interview. Again, doing this early on decreases your chance of overlooking something, and will be helpful when you come to analyse your data.

Thank you letters

Be sure to thank all of your participants, not only verbally at the end of the interview, but more formally afterwards. I preferred doing this by letter (see Appendix E for an example thank you letter)—again using university headed paper—as it showed commitment. Not only is this a professional courtesy, but it is also basic politeness. This serves to maintain your professional credibility and also keeps participants engaged in the research.

I found that keeping participants on board was important throughout the research process, and not just the fieldwork phase. For example, I wanted participants to check and confirm the interview transcripts (see below) and there were often cases where I needed to

clarify certain points. In some cases I had additional questions which only came up after I had started analysing the interview data. This meant I had to go back to participants, sometimes months after the interview had taken place. Your participants will be more willing to assist you after the interview if they feel their contribution is valued.

Transcripts

All my audio recording were transcribed into a written format to be analysed. Budgetary constraints meant I had to do this myself. However, this process immersed me in my interview data, allowing me to obtain a greater understanding of it. Again, the transcription process is best undertaken as soon as possible after the interview, while it is still fresh in your mind. I aimed for a turnaround of two months. The amont of time taken to transcribe an interview varied depending on a number of factors, for example the level of background noise, how easy it was to understand participants and how quickly they spoke.

Once transcripts were complete I sent a copy to participants. Not only was this ethical good practice, but further reassured participants as they were able to check they would not be misrepresented. This confirmation process also limited transcription errors as participants were able to correct mistakes or clarify areas of the recording that were inaudible.
This is best done as close to the interview as possible.

Summary

The above discussion highlights a number of practical issues that require consideration when embarking on elite interviews. Despite elite interviews being a well-established method in the social sciences, the practicalities behind them are rarely given attention. While the selection of an appropriate method for a particular study's research aims and questions is extremely important, executing this method effectively in the field equally important for ensuring its

reliability, and thus the reliability of the study as a whole.

In the context of elite interviews, failing to take account of these practical considerations can lead to a number of detrimental outcomes, for example low response rates, participants not willing to engage with the researcher, participants being closed or guarded in interviews. To overcome these potential barriers, researchers need to give due attention to these practical considerations. Four pieces of advice are particularly relevant: maintaining your credibility in participants' eyes, interacting with participants professionally, adequately preparing and being prepared to be flexible.

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Questions and exercises

1. How do poorly organized and conducted interviews impact on the reliability of a piece of research?

2. The need to assure researchers' credibility and professionalism is regularly referred to in the case. Why is this important when interviewing elites?

3. This case is based in local government which is considered 'open' compared to other levels in politics. What additional practical considerations would need to be taken into account when engaging national- or international-level elites?

4. This case has mainly focused on arranging and conducting interviews. At what other stages in the research process may practical difficulties arise?

Further reading

Richards, D. (1996). Elite Interviewing: Approaches and Pitfalls. *Politics*, *16*(3), 199-204. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9256.1996.tb00039.x

Appendices

The following appendices provide examples of various artefacts I used in arranging and conducting my interviews.

Appendix A: example invite text

Subject: Local government transnational networking **[OR SIMILAR]**

Dear **[NAME]**,

I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Portsmouth currently working towards a PhD. I am conducting research into local government co-operation across national borders. Specifically I am looking at the reasons why local authorities participate in this international activity and how they can gain greater benefits from it. I am particularly interested in the European activity carried out by local government in south-east England and northern France. In order to gain an insight into this activity I am interested to hear the experiences of those involved.

I understand you are **[POSITION/INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKING]** at **[ORGANIZATION]**. I would therefore be extremely grateful if you would participate in a short interview to discuss your thoughts and experiences in this area. The information you provide will be used to help inform my research project. I am happy to meet at a time and place at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Huggins.

Centre for European and International Studies Research

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

Portsmouth

PO1 2DZ

United Kingdom

E: xxxxx@port.ac.uk

T: +44 xxxxx

W: www.port.ac.uk/cesir

Appendix B: example invite follow up text

Dear **[NAME]**,

I contacted you a couple of weeks ago about participating in my research project on local government European co-operation and I was wondering if you have had an opportunity to consider taking part? I appreciate you are no doubt very busy, but your input through a short interview would be greatly valued.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Huggins.

Centre for European and International Studies Research

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

Portsmouth

PO1 2DZ

United Kingdom

E: xxxxx@port.ac.uk

T: +44 xxxxx

W: www.port.ac.uk/cesir

Appendix C: example confirmation letter text and participant information sheet

Dear **[NAME]**,

Many thanks for agreeing to meet with me on **[DATE]** at **[TIME]** to be interviewed about local government European co-operation as part of my research project. As agreed, I will meet you at **[LOCATION]**.

I have enclosed an information sheet which outlines in more detail what my research project is about and what the interview process involves. Please take some time to read through this before the interview and get back to me with any questions or concerns.

I look forward to meeting you on **[DATE]**.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Huggins.

Centre for European and International Studies Research

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

Portsmouth

PO1 2DZ

United Kingdom

T: xxxxx

E: xxxxx@port.ac.uk

Participant information sheet

Local government involvement in European transnational networks

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, I would like you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it would involve for you. This information sheet outlines this. Please feel free to talk to others about the study if you wish. Do not hesitate to contact me if anything is not clear or you have any other questions.

What is the study about?

Many councils engage with local government in other—particularly European—countries. This is often called 'transnational networking'. This can take a number of forms, including:

- Being a partner in an international, European or cross-border project (for example an EU-funded or INTERREG project).
- Being a member of a networking organization representing local government interests whose membership is drawn from more than one country (examples include the Assembly of European Regions, Eurocities or the Arc Manche).
- Having direct links with local authorities abroad (not including town / city twinning).

The aim of this study is to gain an insight into this activity. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

- What is the rationale behind local government participation in transnational networking?

- What benefits do councils gain from their involvement in transnational networks?

- What problems hinder transnational networking or the benefits local government get from it?

- Can greater benefits be gained by local government authorities through transnational networking, and if so, how?

This study focuses on the transnational networking activity undertaken by 'top-tier' local authorities in south-east England and northern France. It also seeks to understand wider trends in this activity.

It is being undertaken as part of a programme of research towards fulfilment of a PhD award.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because of your position within your council or your role in local government transnational networking. Councillors, officers and representatives from several other local authorities and relevant organizations are also being invited to participate in this study.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to participate in the study or not. The study will be described to you and any questions you have will be answered. If you agree to take part, you will then be asked to formally consent at the beginning of the

interview.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview. A mutually convenient time and place will be arranged for this. The interview will be audio recorded. This ensures all information is captured and means an accurate record of the interview can be produced. Notes will also be taken during the interview. Before any questions are asked your consent to participate in the study will be sought and recorded.

Following the interview a transcript of the audio recording will be produced. You will be sent a copy—usually by email—within two months and asked to confirm it.

Following this, your interview transcript, along with other participants' interviews, will be analysed to help inform the research. During this process you may be contacted to clarify certain points in the interview.

The findings of the research will be presented as part of a PhD thesis. The results are also likely to be published elsewhere too, for example in academic journals or at conferences. You, along with the other participants, will also be given an overview report of the findings.

What are the benefits of taking part?

By taking part you will be contributing your own and your organization's views on this topic to the research. Your and others' insights into this area will help to gain an understanding into transnational networking by local authorities. As well as an academic benefit, the results of this study will have an applied aspect too. For example, the results could be used to help local authorities gain greater benefits from their participation. You and the other participants will be given an overview report of the results.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

As part of this study hopes to identify best practice within local government transnational networking and ways of improving the effectiveness of this activity, results will not be made confidential. This is so that people can learn from examples where local authorities do well. This will mean the research has potential benefits for practitioners as well as academics. Of course, if any part of your interview is to be quoted verbatim or your name or organization mentioned in any published material your full consent will be sought first.

The only personal data—in other words that which identifies you as an individual—this study collects is your name, organization and position within your organization. No other personal details will be collected from you as this is not required for this study. Any personal data you provide will be kept safe and secure. Your information will be stored on the university's network which is password protected; only myself and my supervisor will have direct access to it. Your details will only be used in connection with this study and not for any other purpose.

If you have any concerns about confidentiality or would like discuss it further please do not hesitate to get in touch.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The findings of the research will be presented as part of a PhD thesis. The results are also likely to be published elsewhere too, for example in academic journals or conference presentations. You, along with the other participants, will also be given an overview report of the findings.

Can I withdraw from the study?

If you wish, you can withdraw at any point until you have agreed the interview transcript.

After this, all interviews will be analysed together. It will become impractical to remove a single participant's interview once the analysis process has started.

If you do wish to withdraw from the study please get in touch. Anything you have already contributed—including interview recordings and transcripts—will be destroyed. You do not have to give any reasons for your withdrawal.

Who is organizing and funding the research?

This research project is supported and funded by the Centre for European and International Studies Research at the University of Portsmouth as part of a PhD project. Information about the university and research centre can be found at www.port.ac.uk and www.port.ac.uk/ceisr respectively.

Who has reviewed the study?

Research at the University of Portsmouth is looked at by an independent group of people, called a research ethics committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the university.

What if I have any problems or concerns?

If you have any problems, issues or concerns please feel free to contact me to talk through them. If you wish to check my credentials then please feel free to contact the Centre for European and International Studies Research at the University of Portsmouth. Their contact details are below:

Centre for European and International Studies Research

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

Portsmouth

PO1 2DZ

United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 xxxxx

Email: xxxx@port.ac.uk

Web: www.port.ac.uk/ceisr

What if I have further questions?

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions. My contact details are below:

Christopher Huggins

Centre for European and International Studies Research

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

Portsmouth

PO1 2DZ

United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 xxxxx

Email: xxxxx@port.ac.uk

Web: www.port.ac.uk/ceisr

Many thanks for taking the time to read through this information sheet and consider

participating in this research study.

Appendix D: interview notes template

Interview details

Interview with	
Local authority / organization	
Date and time	
Location	
Interview ID	

Interview notes

BRIEFLY OUTLINE STUDY AND SEEK CONSENT **Can you confirm you happy to be interviewed as part of this study?**	
Please briefly outline your experience in transnational networking. **What transnational networks does your authority participate in?** *(If examples already known check this is still valid)*	

Do you see transnational networking as an important part of your authority's strategy? *Supplementary:* **do you think this view is shared by others within your authority, both among officers and politically**	32
What benefits does your authority aim to achieve through its participation in transnational networks?	

Are any of these aims more important to you or your authority than others? *Supplementary:* **if so which and why?**	33
Do you think any of the transnational networks your authority participates in achieve your aims better than others? *Supplementary:* **if so which networks and why?**	

Do you think there are any problems—either network-wide or specific to your or another authority—which act as a hindrance to you achieving your aims? *Supplementary:* **if so can you explain these?**	34
What do you think could be done to overcome these issues?	

Do you have any examples of best practice where your or another authority participates in transnational networking effectively?	35
What are the characteristics of an authority which is effective at transnational networking?	

Is there anyone else who you think it would be useful to talk to?	36
Is there anything you think would be useful for me to know or I have overlooked anything?	
Thank for participation and outline what will happen next	
Other notes	

Appendix E: example thank you letter text

Dear **[NAME]**,

Many thanks for taking time to speak with me on **[DATE]** to discuss your experiences in local government European co-operation. It was a pleasure to talk to you and the interview was extremely useful and insightful.

As discussed I will send you a transcript of the interview within the next two months for your confirmation. I may also contact you clarify certain aspects of the interview or ask additional questions.

If you have any questions or concerns in the mean time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Huggins.

Centre for European and International Studies Research

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

Portsmouth

PO1 2DZ

United Kingdom

T: +44 xxxxx

E: xxxxx@port.ac.uk

W: www.port.ac.uk/cesir