2

Starting

Practical and Ethical Considerations

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2.1 Introduction

Conducting research on global environmental agreement-making requires time for preparation. The scope of a research project may range from a PhD thesis, where a single researcher starts to become familiar with the research process and techniques (see Chapter 13), to a large-scale collaborative project involving several scholars with sometimes diverging disciplinary backgrounds and research interests (see Chapter 11). Regardless of this, researchers will be faced with the challenging task of developing a research methodology that is both intellectually provoking and feasible. Feasibility in this context covers two important issues: first, the development of your methodology – that is to say, the broader framework that justifies the selection and application of certain concepts and methods; and second, the practicability and implementation of conducting this research. The latter involves several tasks, ranging from gaining access to the field to employing a data collection method in a complex, and often overwhelming, research environment.

Agreement-making sites can be used for various research purposes. Scholars with different, or even contradictory, ontological and epistemological assumptions (about what is and how it can be comprehended) can use the same negotiation site to address widely dissimilar research questions or apply distinct research methods to a shared problem. For example, an ethnographer who views the negotiation site as a "relational space" (see Chapter 10) and a scholar who understands global meetings in terms of social networks (see Chapter 12) might both use participant observation, but their intellectual purposes, research questions, and theoretical assumptions will not be the same. While each data collection method comes with its own unique challenges – sometimes implying the need to adjust one's methodology throughout the research process to respond to unforeseen circumstances (see Chapter 14) – studies conducted on-site do share specific features as regards both challenges and opportunities. This chapter addresses these by providing the reader with a step-by-step guide to getting started with research in the specific setting of global environmental agreement-making.

Global environmental negotiations vary in size and purpose (Chasek 2001). Different on-site conditions necessitate different forms of conduct from the researcher to carry out the research while complying with both scientific and ethical standards. A conference of the parties (COP) held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which assembles tens of thousands of people at a large and specially organized

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conference venue, has its own rules regarding access and poses unique challenges (see Chapters 6 and 7). This is particularly the case for solo researchers, who may find it difficult to capture processes and actors across the whole site and duration of a “mega-event” where the individual is submerged in a multitude of people. In comparison, research during intergovernmental conferences (IGCs) organized in the United Nations’ Headquarters in New York City, as exemplified by the BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) treaty negotiations (see Reflection Box 6.1), requires careful and restrained behavior (e.g., when approaching interview partners or participating in “informal informals”) in order not to become too conspicuous, and a disrupting factor, during a relatively small event. Online meetings and hybrid events further expand the sites of agreement-making and create a new set of challenges for the researcher (see Chapters 10, 11, and Reflection Box. 14.2)

Regardless of the size and purpose of a global environmental meeting, the preparatory phase, on-site research, and processing and analyzing of data can be organized in a step-by-step way. The aim of this chapter is to guide the researcher through key elements of this by breaking it down into the following components: (1) Methodological: how to develop a research project (Section 2.2); (2) Ethical: how to reflect on and comply with ethical standards (Section 2.3); (3) Legal: how to protect, manage, and store data (Section 2.4); and (4) Organizational: how to prepare research on-site (Section 2.4). Starting with the development of your research methodology and ethical and legal issues in the first part, the chapter describes practicalities that need to be considered before, during, and after fieldwork at negotiation sites in the second part. It will assist the reader in preparing research on-site and will address key crosscutting issues relevant to all chapters of the book, including research ethics, data management, and the central question of how to decide whether you need to be on-site to answer your research question and advance the state of the art on global environmental agreement-making or whether you can conduct your research virtually.

2.2 How to Develop a Research Project

Any research starts with curiosity and questioning, but this has to be developed into a researchable problem. Once we find an area of interest, we immerse ourselves in the topic by reading the existing literature, by searching for the most recent research findings (e.g., in university libraries or on the web through Google Scholar, Research Gate, or the Web of Science, etc.), or by approaching experts in the field. Global environmental politics has become part of the public and political debate: the UNFCCC COPs, in particular, have turned into prominent events that the whole world seems to watch. They are broadcast (at least partly), reported on, and their actors, processes, and sites are recorded through many audiovisual and textual media, most prominently the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (*ENB*) (see Chapter 8), all of which can be used to inform and transform your curiosity into a research question or puzzle. Attending a global environmental negotiation – on the basis of desk research – is another valuable way to locate the research interest by providing the opportunity to observe and identify relevant actors, sites, and processes of global environmental agreement-making, which can then inform the construction of the research problem and the project to address this.

In this book, and as is most fitting with the agreement-making framework, we view methodology as including: (1) the conceptual basis that informs how we approach our object of study – in this case a broadened understanding of what constitutes negotiations, global environmental events, and agreement-making; (2) how this is constructed as a research problem to be located at specific sites, by engaging relevant actors, observing particular processes, documenting power relations on-site; and (3) the appropriate methods to gain information and knowledge on these in order to address the research question or puzzle. The research itself does not necessarily unfold from (1) to (3) in a linear manner. In fact, you may not be able to give a clear account of your project's methodology until after you have finished the research and are writing up, which is the point at which you may need to describe how the chosen theory and/or concepts have informed how you constructed, analyzed, and have come to understand your research problem. Chapters 4 and 5 describe this process as it unfolds through different research journeys, which indicates the divergent pathways that this process takes. Nevertheless, there are steps or stages to the process of "building" a research project that we try to distill here (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 *A step-by-step approach for developing your methodology*

Step 1: Identifying your research area, interests, and research question
a. Reading, reading, reading
b. Literature review to assess state of the art and situate your research interest within the field
c. Conversation with peers
d. Attend and observe relevant meeting
e. Watch webcast negotiations
f. Ask questions (what, who, when, where, why, how)
g. Develop your research question/hypothesis
Step 2: Developing your conceptual and theoretical framework (see Chapters 2 and 3)
a. Reading, reading, reading
b. Literature review to assess how your or similar research questions have been addressed (using what theories and methods) by other scholars
c. Conversation with peers
d. Identify concepts/theories that you are interested in and that are suitable for your research purposes
e. Apply to empirical material (iterative process)
Step 3: Selecting your research methods and tools
a. On-site vs./and off-site
b. Single researcher/collaboration (Chapter 11)
c. Acquaint yourself with research materials, tools, and methods, and select yours
a. Text (Chapter 8)
b. Interviews (Chapter 9)
c. Surveys (Chapter 3, Box 3.1)
d. Ethnography (Chapter 10)
e. SNA (Chapter 12)
d. Test your methods

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Step 1: Identifying Your Research Area, Interests, and Research Question

In addition to acquiring knowledge about the area and object of study, one should become familiar with the kind of research that has been conducted and published so far. What do we already know about global environmental agreement-making, what research questions have scholars addressed so far, what methods have they employed, and what concepts or theories have they used to explain their observations and research findings? Assessing the state of the art (i.e., listing all relevant publications on the basis of categories such as focus of study, research question, method, or conceptual and theoretical framework) enables a researcher to learn, develop their curiosity, and situate their own research interest. Positioning your research within existing work and clarifying how you intend to advance specific aspects of the state of the art is a cornerstone of scientific practice. Many chapters of this book include literature reviews and examples of the kind of research that has already been conducted on the topic, as well as some of the gaps and questions that remain to be addressed (see Chapter 7).

Conversation with peers, attendance at relevant events, and looking up online material (such as recorded negotiation sessions) are useful strategies that will help you avoid erroneous research directions and misunderstandings. Reach out to experts in an issue area, theory, or methods that you are interested in; these could include practitioners, government representatives, nonstate actors, journalists, or any other participant that is willing to share their experiences on certain aspects of their work and involvement in agreement-making. Exploratory interviews are a good methodological tool in this regard because they require careful preparation and help structure early research ideas (see Chapter 9). The same is true for attending events related to the negotiation site under question. Scholars interested in a Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP may wish to attend a meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) or a preparatory event first (see Chapters 2 and 13). A SBSTTA meeting will allow you to acquaint yourself with negotiation practice and specific actors, conflict lines, emerging issues, and so on, and enable you to meet future attendants of the event. Meetings are increasingly webcast and made publicly available (see Chapters 5 and 13); this provides interested researchers with digital material that can be used as an additional source during the preparation of the research questions and design (Vadrot et al. 2021).

The development of a research question is an iterative process, where you bounce back and forth between what you would like to know, what is already known, and how you can locate and "get at" your research interest. One way to find out what you do not know about your topic of interest is to ask obvious questions, for instance about the specific outcome of a negotiation, important actors, central conflicts, and power asymmetries. It is also useful to ask the standard journalistic questions: who, what, when, and where, although it is highly recommended to focus on how and why (Booth et al. 2008). Thus, while asking the first set of questions will allow you to reconstruct a given aspect of a negotiation (such as the inclusion of specific wording in the final negotiating text), analytical questions enable us to ask why and how certain actors have succeeded in promoting specific words or deleting bracketed text, which might have altered the meaning of the agreement in a way that would have weakened their position in world politics (e.g., Hughes and Vadrot 2019;

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Vadrot et al. 2021). Other analytical questions include those about the history, composition, categorization, and values of a research topic (Booth et al. 2008) – for instance: when, why, and how the "ecosystem services" concept entered biodiversity negotiations during the CBD COPs; who promoted it and who opposed it; and the effects it had on environmental protection, actor constellations, and global environmental discourses.

Step 2: Developing Your Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The formulation of a research question goes hand in hand with the development of a methodology and theoretical framework to guide the research. There are several possible approaches regarding the order of these tasks, depending on the principles that inform our reasoning. While some scholars develop theories that are based on empirical data (*induction*), others use observations to validate or falsify specific theories (*deduction*). In the social sciences, and in our attempts to make sense of empirical phenomena and generalize mechanisms, we often find ourselves "constructing theory" – that is to say, "engaging in creative attempts to generalize mechanisms, particular cases, or links between causal statements (Abend 2008, 177–79; Gross 2009) in ways that provide better traction for understanding observations they work with and possibly anticipate observations in other cases" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 167). The process of theory construction understood in this way (grounded theory, abduction) is often perceived to be an iterative, pragmatic process of "puzzling out," implying a "dialectic between data and generalization to account for empirical findings" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 167). These different approaches to conceptual and theoretical development are explored extensively in the first section of this volume. In Chapter 3, the authors recount the steps they undertook in developing and adapting their analytical frameworks for studying nongovernmental organization (NGO) influence, Chapter 4 examines the role that different thinkers (Bourdieu and Foucault) and concepts (e.g., habitus, discourse, epistemic selectivities) can play in research construction and analysis, and Chapter 5 identifies how concepts can emerge through the ethnographic process.

Step 3: Selecting Your Research Methods and Tools

The selection of methods in the context of studying agreement-making will depend on whether a researcher plans to attend an intergovernmental meeting and in what form (physically or digitally, see Chapter 13). The decision of whether to include fieldwork at negotiation sites in your research design is part of your methodology. In contrast to *methodology*, *methods* may be defined as research tools and procedures for collecting data, including quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, participant observation, surveys). Ethnography, for instance, can be both a method for collecting data through participant observation (e.g., field notes or audiovisual material) and a research lens attributing meaning to the observer (how they are situated within the field site) and the specific community under study (see Chapters 10 and 11).

While any research will start with getting your methodology right, thinking about techniques for conducting the research, and developing a comprehensive overview of the tools and instruments to be used, the methods themselves will be developed at a later stage. Methods imply identifying the actual tools and steps of data collection and analysis. The latter entails experimenting, testing, and adjusting your methods if the circumstances of your research change (see Chapter 13). While it may appear that agreement-making as a field of study is more attuned to qualitative methods, this is certainly not the case. Being on-site also offers many opportunities for collecting quantitative data (e.g., survey data, network data, textual data) or combining qualitative and quantitative methods (see Chapter 13 [this volume]; Vadrot et al. 2021). In contrast, research off-site can draw on participant lists, iteration of texts, and *ENB* reports (see Chapters 8 and 12).

On-Site Versus Off-Site

Attending intergovernmental negotiations as part of your research project is appealing for many reasons, including beyond the actual research work: It enables you to study agreement-making in practice, acquaint yourself with multilateral environmental diplomacy, and meet key state and nonstate actors from all over the world that may become important connections in your future academic or nonacademic work. Growing scholarly interest in attending environmental meetings can partly be explained by their attractiveness as sites for data collection. Even if the researcher has no interest in text-based negotiations and other areas and procedures of the event as such (e.g., side events, exhibition halls, or activism; see Chapter 7), they may use the time on-site to approach potential interviewees, collect material (e.g., leaflets, books, and brochures) on specific issues, or network with like-minded people. The sheer number of participants – one could say that some of the most significant actors in the community are there – promises easy access to a large sample of contacts and potential interviewees in a short time.

Research into environmental negotiation processes and practices has strongly benefited from scholar participation in those events. Studies that draw on “insider perspectives” (including diplomats reflecting on their experiences and *ENB* reporters; see Chapter 8) might reveal negotiation dynamics, including bargaining behind closed doors (which may be problematic from an ethical point of view, as will be outlined in Section 2.3).

However, this does not mean that there is no valid research on environmental agreement-making using methods that do not involve on-site participation and data collection. *ENB* reports and other textual material, including the protocols of meetings, compilations of decisions and so-called nonpapers (see Chapter 8), interviews conducted after a meeting (with respondents identified thanks to meeting participant lists; see Chapter 9), press releases, audiovisual material, statements uploaded by state and nonstate actors, and webcast sessions all allow off-site researchers to pursue their research interests and conduct valid, reliable research on diverse aspects of the negotiation at hand, including intersessional periods and other relevant meetings and events (see Chapter 6). Gradually, virtual sites and digital spaces (e.g., social media, webcasts, and video recordings of sessions) have emerged; not only do they provide additional opportunities for collecting data, but as such they also constitute important new sites for agreement-making. They have continued to expand, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UN’s ambition to become environmentally sustainable (see Chapters 6 and 14).

Participant Observation

While almost the same methods can be used for off-site and on-site research, participant observation and ethnography (except for digital ethnography; see Chapter 14) tend to be reserved for those researchers who strive to collect data and find an answer to their research question by "being there." While ethnography can – as mentioned earlier – be employed as a data collection technique as well as a methodology and a heuristic (see Chapter 10), participant observation entails specific research tasks, such as observing a group of people and taking field notes on diverse aspects (for instance: specific actions, speech patterns, habitual strategies, or moments of contestation). Our emphasis on the "participant" in participant observation during negotiations is justified insofar as it implies that the researcher becomes part of the group and gains a deeper understanding of the events, actors, and patterns of interaction at the negotiation site.

As Baker points out, participant observation is

> a complex research method because it often requires the researcher to play a number of roles and to use a number of techniques, including her/his five senses, to collect data. In addition, despite the level of involvement with the study group, the researcher must always remember her/his primary role as a researcher and remain detached enough to collect and analyze data relevant to the problem under investigation. (Baker 2006, 172)

To be a participant is a process in two ways. On the one hand, the social researcher should increasingly participate in and gain access to the field – and to the persons in the field. On the other hand, the researcher's observations have to become gradually more concrete and condensed with regard to the research question and the unit of analysis (Flick 1995, 158). These challenges need to be reflected upon even before a selection of the methods for data collection and analysis is made.

Participant observation is associated with many practical problems, such as "how to gain access to the field" (i.e., the political terrain, informal negotiation processes, the people, etc.), as well as ethical and methodological problems. The mere fact that access to the site is conditioned by obtaining a badge that you have to wear during your stay (see Section 2.5) and taking on a formal role (e.g., observer, NGO, government, media) revealed by the color of the badge to all other conference participants does not allow for any "objective" detached observation without becoming an involved part of the whole. Correspondingly, the participant observer needs to be aware of challenges encountered during the research process by engaging in critical self-reflection throughout their research practice (Bourdieu 2003).

2.3 How to Reflect on and Comply with Ethical Standards

Reliable research on negotiation sites has two important ethical aspects: reflexivity and positionality, and compliance with ethical standards. First, researchers have a duty to reflect on (and carefully manage) their position in the field, any potential biases and privileges, how they relate to their "research objects" and the field, and what stakes they have or support. This is especially important if you decide to be an ethnographer (see Chapter 10) or if you participate as part of a group of actors that has a specific stake in the negotiations (e.g., with

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an NGO or a national delegation; see Chapter 13, or accompanying local and Indigenous People; see Chapter 5). As outlined in Chapter 10, conference sites are “relational spaces” and the way people relate to you will depend on the institution that you represent, your reason for being at the conference, and the way you enter into relationships with other participants.

As described in Chapter 5 and in Hughes et al. (2021), researching negotiations implies having a stake, and not being disconnected from the effects of agreement-making on world order or from the impacts of certain negotiation dynamics and outcomes on vulnerable groups, marginalized actors, and society–nature relationships. The latter includes a critical reflection of our own mobility and consumption practices, our carbon footprint, and whether the benefits of traveling to a conference outweigh the environmental damage. In addition, issues such as collaboration with other researchers (including a division of labor before, during, and after on-site research), along with data sharing and authorship, should follow ethical standards as described in Chapter 11.

Secondly, reliability implies compliance with ethics in terms of codified research standards and obligations. Depending on your research institution and the funding agency that finances your work, your project may have to undergo evaluation and approval by a research ethics committee. Criteria may vary depending on the country and institution where you are based, but your ethics declaration should generally include a list of measures that ensure (1) the protection of the rights of your research participants (e.g., how you identify, approach, and inform research participants about the purpose of the study and their rights), and (2) compliance with data protection laws (e.g., how you protect your data/data subjects by safely storing, managing, regulating access and ownership, anonymizing, and pseudonymizing your data).

Research ethics generally aim to protect research participants; in the case of research at negotiation sites, these are the people attending the meeting that you observe. In the negotiation context, they are not considered to be vulnerable persons because they are function owners. This implies that the data you collect is not sensitive per se; however, you should develop measures to ensure (1) that the privacy and rights of each participant are protected, and (2) that research participants are not exposed to any risk greater than the risk they are exposed to by attending the meeting. Box 2.1 contains a standard clause that you may use in an application to an ethics commission.

Box 2.1 Standard clause for application to ethics commission

Participants of *project x* are not vulnerable persons. Research participants will be function owners (state representatives, experts, public servants, scientists, NGO representatives) attending *meeting* y in their professional capacity representing their institution (government, IGO, or NGO). The project is exclusively interested in collecting nonsensitive data respecting the privacy of each participant. Participants will not be exposed to any risk that exceeds the risk that they expose themselves to by participating in international negotiations and/or working in their work environment, where they will be interviewed/observed. *Project x* will not collect or process any sensitive data, and will respect the privacy of each participant by following the principle of confidentiality and implementing related technical, organizational, and security measures.

2.4 How to Protect, Manage, and Store Your Data

Each university should have established technical, organizational, and security measures, such as access control to workplaces, access control to data-processing systems, and control of databases and data alteration. In the European Union context, research institutions must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR) and employ a data protection officer who can inform you of the kinds of measures that your institution has put in place to comply with data protection laws. One example of this is that any processing activities performed on personal data must be recorded in what is called "a record of processing activities." This might mean that you must centrally record and document all applications (even small-scale applications, such as simplifying a quote) that can process personal data.

For the purpose of collecting data at international negotiation sites, it is often necessary to clarify beforehand how you will identify and recruit research participants for interviews, surveys, focus groups, and so on; how you will inform them about their rights and the measures that you have put in place to protect their privacy, which is usually via a project information sheet and informed consent form; how you will protect the data once collected and stored (for instance, through anonymization and pseudonymization, see Section 2.3); and how you will analyze and use the data. Table 2.2 gives some guidance on how to ensure confidentiality when you identify and recruit your research participants, and how to practice informed consent. Table 2.3 includes guidance on how to protect the data and privacy of your interviewees.

Table 2.2 *Measures to protect the privacy, rights, and data of research participants*

1. Clarifying how you identify and recruit research participants
   Research x involves ethnographic research/participant observation/fieldwork at intergovernmental negotiations during *conference y*, conducting *type of* interviews.
   - Procedures/criteria for identification of research participants:
     - Before including participants in a study, you have to identify who is eligible to participate. For example, the research participant must be a national delegate (head of delegation, delegate responsible for x in negotiation y, delegate specializing in x), expert, public servant, or researcher.
     - Before fieldwork, previous participant lists and official websites of ministries and international organizations can be consulted and potential interviewees identified, which will yield a list of potential interviewees.
   - Procedures/criteria for recruitment of research participants:
     - As a first step, an email can be sent to the secretariat of the convention or organization concerned, informing them about the research project, its objectives, and the data to be collected. An information sheet summarizing the project and an informed consent form should be attached to the email. The secretariat should be asked to inform participants about the study. Additionally, information material (leaflets) can be made available at an information desk on site.

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Table 2.2 (*cont.*)

- As a second step, potential interviewees can be contacted before the fieldwork; you should inform them about the study and ask for an interview that can either take place before, during, or after the negotiations. Additionally, potential participants can be contacted on the basis of the snowball principle and during the fieldwork itself. The Principle Investigator (PI)/researcher in charge should contact potential interviewees while respecting their privacy (do not approach them in front of toilet facilities; preferably approach them during breaks when they are sitting in the negotiation room; be careful when approaching them outside of the negotiation room).
- Before each interview, the researcher in charge (PI or team member) should explain the research project and inform the person about her/his rights. The researcher should hand an information sheet to the interviewee, including an "informed consent form," which first should be explained, then be signed by both the research participant and the researcher.

2. Clarifying how you inform research participants: Informed consent

The PI or the researcher in charge should inform the participant about the objectives of the project, the rights of the participant, and the interview procedure, duration, and contents.

- The participant should be informed both verbally and in written form that participation in the study is voluntary and that they can refuse to participate at any time without having to give a reason, or withdraw their agreement to participate once the study has already started; there will be no negative consequences for them if they refuse to participate or withdraw from the study after it has started.
- The researcher in charge will ask the participant to take time to read the information provided in the consent form carefully and to feel free to ask any questions. The researcher in charge will inform the participant about the fact that they should only sign the declaration of consent
  - o if they have fully understood the type of study and procedure to be followed,
  - o if they are willing to consent to participate, and
  - o if they are aware of her/his rights as a participant in this study.
- The research participant will be informed about the interview duration.
- The research participant will be informed that the researchers do not anticipate any risks to be associated with her/his participation, but that they have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.
- The research participant will be asked to sign the form and will be provided with the contact details of the PI should any queries arise, or information be needed about the data and its use/the project results/the deletion of data.

Table 2.3 *Data protection: Interview data*

- Register your data/all interviews and produce an identity database, e.g., by using an Excel sheet including the name of the interview, date and time, name and contact details of the interviewee, and keywords (it is best to do this on site). Make sure you save this identity database in a folder separate from the folders containing (1) raw data, (2) transcripts.
- Transcribe your interviews and confirm that no sensitive data was collected.
- If some sensitive data was collected (e.g., when an interviewee refers to her/his family, personal values, or preferences), this data should be deleted and you should only transcribe parts of the interview that contain information relevant to the project and not where interviewees share sensitive data.

Table 2.3 (*cont.*)

- In order to protect the rights and privacy of interviewees, data should be anonymized and pseudonymized. Because interviewees are function owners, it might sometimes be difficult to anonymize the data (e.g., there is only one head of delegation of the US).
- Records, transcripts, and registers should be stored separately and various anonymization and pseudonymization techniques should be used to protect the privacy and rights of interviewees.

Anonymization techniques: First, determine the release model for each anonymized dataset. Second, data attributes should be classified and unused data (sensitive data, which the project should not collect) removed: (1) Attributes in the dataset should be classified as direct identifiers, indirect identifiers, or nonidentifiers; (2) Any attribute that is clearly not required in the anonymized dataset should be suppressed; (3) Direct and indirect identifiers should be anonymized, through (a) attribute suppression, (b) character masking.

Pseudonymization techniques: The attribute values [name] should be replaced by made-up values [numbers such as: 111267]. For instance, pregenerate a list of made-up values, and randomly select from this list to replace each of the original values. The made-up values should be unique, and should bear no relationship to the original values (to avoid deriving original values from the pseudonyms: e.g., initial date of interview). The identity database should be securely kept and stored separately from the data. The identity database should only be used by the PI and the researcher in charge to resolve any specific queries (the number of such queries will be controlled).

2.5 How to Prepare Research On Site

Given the complexity of global environmental meetings, a careful preparation of fieldwork, including the production of the aforementioned project documents and forms, is essential. Regardless of the research purpose and data collection method, practical tasks can be divided into three phases: before fieldwork, at the site, and after fieldwork. We will describe these phases in Sections 2.5.1–2.5.3, taking a step-by-step approach (see Table 2.3), and signpost where in the book you can find detailed information on the individual steps.

2.5.1 Before Fieldwork

Once you have developed your research methodology, it is recommended to start collecting information on upcoming events. Conferences may be held annually (UNFCCC COPs) or every two years (CBD COPs), while meetings of subsidiary bodies in between COPs sometimes take place twice a year. Treaty negotiations preceding the establishment of a multilateral environmental agreement (MEA) and its decision-making body may be scheduled in quick succession: In the BBNJ case, four IGCs were scheduled within two years. Collecting all available information on the meeting you wish to attend is the first step in preparing your research stay and a precondition for refining your research methodology (depending on access conditions, topics on the agenda, access to specific meeting sites, etc.), planning your research stay (travel to the meeting town, accommodation, and venue), and creating a cost estimate and schedule. Chapter 6 provides an illustrative example of how you might prepare a schedule for yourself at a climate COP (see Section 6.4.1: Prior to the Event).

A research stay can be costly, and both the cost and research environment vary significantly depending on the region, country, and institutions studied (see Table 2.4). If your research project is funded by a university or funding institution, make sure you include travel expenses in your application. In the case of the European Research Council (ERC) project MARIPOLDATA, the budget included several field trips for a team of researchers, which meant that the funding was already in place for the successful PhD candidates. However, if you do not have funding available through your research project or studentship, it is advisable to start looking for funding opportunities as early as possible. You may have access to funds from your faculty or department, or you can search the funding available for travel support and fieldwork from relevant funding agencies or academic associations. Depending on the location of the meeting that you wish to attend and the length of your research stay, the fieldwork may cost anything between EUR 500 and 5,000. Attending the UNFCCC COP26 in Edinburgh (United Kingdom) as a UK-based scholar would obviously have been easier and less expensive to arrange than participating in the CBD COP10 in Nagoya, Japan. However, even finding and booking accommodation and travel within the United Kingdom for COP26 was more challenging than usual

Table 2.4 *Checklist: Preparation for research stay*

- Find a meeting you wish to attend
  - Where and when does the meeting take place?
  - What information is already available (preparatory documents, draft agenda and decisions, *ENB* reports)?
- Check funding sources available
  - Does your university/institution provide funding?
  - Is the travel covered by your grant/a project you are working on?
  - Ask your supervisor for possible sources of funding.
  - Check with associations, foundations, and other institutions with an interest in environmental meetings.
- Registration/accreditation process
  - What are the conditions for access?
  - Contact secretariat and familiarize yourself with accreditation process.
  - Check out specificities (COP: trading badges)
  - Reach out to your head of department (you may need a signature to approve the trip).
  - In what role will/can I attend?
  - How long do I want to stay?
  - Do I need a visa?
- Cost estimate and travel plan
  - Travel arrangements to the meeting town/city
  - Accommodation (conference hotel vs. other accommodation)
  - Travel arrangements from accommodation to meeting venue

due to limited availability and significant cost increases; thus, it is advisable to arrange this as early as possible.

Regarding accommodation, you will have several options. Each conference host offers a selection of conference hotels within different price ranges. Depending on the conference, shuttle buses between hotels and the venue or public transport passes may be available. Staying in a conference hotel offers the opportunity to meet other participants during breakfast or while using organized transportation to and from the venue. Many attendees wear their badges at breakfast time so that you can identify them easily. At the CBD COP14 in Sharm El Sheikh, for instance, the conference location could only be reached by using the shuttle buses between the hotels and the venue; the bus trip took twenty to thirty minutes, which could be used to network, reach out to participants, arrange an interview appointment (or even conduct an on-the-spot interview), or informally talk about ongoing negotiations. Staying at conference hotels may be expensive, hence some researchers prefer to share accommodation (see Chapter 11).

One precondition to be able to participate in a global environmental conference is to register and become accredited. Contact your university or research institution and check whether they are admitted to attend meetings of the convention you wish to attend. If you seek to participate in a UNFCCC COP, participation can be complicated because the conference sets a limit on the number of participants from various groups.[1] In other cases, such as the CBD, it is easier to attend and you may even be able to accredit your institution by asking the head of your department to register your university and provide you with a nomination letter. While selecting and finding an institution through which you can be registered can be a burden and may seem bureaucratic in the first instance, the choice that you make will significantly affect your participation and on-site research. Being part of a national delegation, for instance, may offer valuable insights into dynamics within national delegations and decision-making, but may impact your research in three important ways: first, you may have to fulfill specific tasks on behalf of your government, which leaves less time for research; second, your schedule will be strongly impacted by your delegation's schedule, which will make you less flexible in terms of the meetings you would like to follow; and, third, other participants will identify you as a national delegate and may relate either positively or negatively to your position (see Chapter 13).

Before your departure, make sure that you have gathered all the documents (research documents, draft agenda, draft decisions, etc.) and devices needed for conducting your research on site (see Table 2.5). You should prepare a folder holding printed documents and, additionally, save all documents on your laptop, tablet, or mobile phone. Usually, conference venues offer computer rooms and printers where you can print or copy any material needed. It is advisable to bring your own laptop or tablet, one or two USB sticks, and a recorder, and to think beforehand about your field note-taking technique and the devices needed for it (see Chapters 10 and 11).

[1] COP26 of the UNFCCC limited the number of government representatives to 10,000, and allowed up to 7,000 observers, including civil society, per week, and 300 media representatives.

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Table 2.5 *Checklist: Before your departure*

- Assemble all documents (virtually and physically)
  - Everything you need for travel, accommodation, access to site
  - Information sheets about your project
  - Informed consent forms
  - Interview guide
  - Any other research material
- Be aware of dress code
  - Business casual/smart casual
  - For receptions: business/informal
- Check research material and devices
  - Computer/tablet
  - Mobile phone
  - Voice recorder
- Start networking and reaching out to other participants
  - Other research groups
  - Interviewees
  - Other contacts

While the clothes you wear will depend on the climate at the conference location and on individual choice, our experience shows that it is sensible, first, to pay attention to your dress code and, second, to be prepared for cold air-conditioned meeting rooms and extreme conditions at the conference venue, including hot and humid cities. Your choice of clothes may also depend on the actors that you follow and their dress code, but if you feel unsure we suggest "business casual" or "business informal."

Reaching out to other participants can facilitate your research stay in several ways. Some conferences assemble a large number of researchers, giving you the opportunity to connect with other individuals and groups that share similar interests and concerns. When attending a conference for the first time, making contact with others can help you to navigate and gain insight on the present and past meetings, and research collaborations might emerge (see Chapter 11). Ask your supervisor or colleagues who might know other researchers that are observing. There may also be dedicated events, such as the daily Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organization (RINGO) constituency meeting at climate COPS or side events that provide the perfect opportunity to meet others, share research interests, network, and collaborate on data collection for the meeting (see Chapter 6). It is also advisable to identify and contact interview participants before the event as well, to save time and to ensure that your participant can fit you into their schedule once you arrive on site (see Table 2.3).

2.5.2 *During Fieldwork*

When should you arrive at the negotiation site? This will depend on the meeting you attend and what you aim to observe there: for example, if you follow a particular issue or item, you may want to search the schedule to identify dedicated days and relevant side events (see Chapter 7 for an example on gender). UNFCCC and CBD COPs often set up a dedicated desk in the arrival zone at the airport, offering information on the event and free transit from the airport to the conference site and hotels. You thus get a chance to meet other participants before the conference has started and to become part of the community before having accessed the conference venue. Large conferences extend to the public and create new "material geographies" (Craggs and Mahony 2014). Hosting large-scale conferences often brings about changes in host cities, both temporary and permanent. Such events are part of city marketing campaigns and civic boosterism, while placing restrictions on residents and guests. As discussed in Chapter 7, surveillance, police, and a military presence, which are common around meeting venues, can sometimes extend to the city, which becomes securitized (Craggs and Mahony 2014).

Regardless of the kind of research you plan to conduct, you should aim to make yourself familiar with your research site as quickly as possible. Chapters 6 and 7 introduce the reader to the ways in which venues are organized and explain how to navigate the site and conference schedule. Follow the maps and explore the site, the negotiation and meeting rooms, areas where side events and exhibitions take place, and the food courts and computer and print areas. Preparing yourself by exploring the site as well as internalizing the venue's structure and conference schedule is especially important to avoid getting lost when things get busy. The better you know the venue and schedule, the better you will be able to adjust to unforeseen developments, especially as a solo researcher with fewer capacities to cover sprawling negotiation dynamics.

Once you are familiar with the site, you should start to establish a routine and research practice that will organize your day-to-day participation in the event. While it is advisable to start thinking about this routine (including a schedule) beforehand, you may have to adjust it once you are on site and are familiar with the physical and organizational structure of the meeting. It takes a while to internalize where to find everything and to estimate how long it takes to travel to the venue, pass security, and be at a specific place at the conference, or to know where to find quiet areas suitable for conducting an interview or taking field notes without being interrupted by noise or other participants.

Irrespective of the size and type of the meeting, your routine will quickly resemble the day-to-day practices of participating state and nonstate actors. You will arrive at the meeting in the morning (eventually by using conference transportation); pass security; immerse yourself in various meetings, conversations, or activities; walk a lot; observe a lot; take notes; arrange interviews; meet other people; eat quickly in order not to lose too much time; and so forth. Chapter 10 provides an example of what your research schedule might look like (see Box 10.2). When traveling back to their hotels, many participants are exhausted, especially toward the end of the conference, when evening and night negotiations become more common. If you are ready and willing to immerse yourself into the dynamics and drama of the meetings (Death 2011), you may feel the same excitement and exhaustion as those that you observe and interview. Capturing the performative aspects of a conference and how it affects you as a researcher may be more relevant if you are an ethnographer; even if you are not, it might still be useful to reflect on these dynamics and how they shape your on-site research and the conditions for data collection (see Chapter 10 for guidance on this).

In this regard, field notes are an important technique that can be used by researchers even if they do not conduct any participant observation or ethnography in the narrow sense. Field notes may be considered a data collection technique but may also be useful to record important observations and thoughts of the researcher regarding the application of methods, the formulation of assumptions, or interesting preliminary findings. As a data collection technique, field notes can provide a record of observed negotiation dynamics, general conflict lines, individual positions of parties, or the statements and roles of individual actors and actor groups within the negotiation process. There are several types of field notes: methodological, observational, and analytic.

2.5.3 After Fieldwork

After fieldwork, and before you start analyzing your material and writing up your results, you should make sure that your data travels safely home, as well as contacting participants with a follow-up and a "thank you" note.

Taking your data home entails a variety of tasks depending on the kind of data you collected. If you collected artifacts on site (e.g., leaflets, brochures, decision texts, etc.), make sure that you have enough space in your luggage and are able to carry the material with you. After a two-week COP, for instance, you may well have to carry several kilograms of material. In order to avoid extra charges on your luggage if you are flying back, try to leave space when you pack for the trip. Alternatively, you can send the material by post or – if you carried out the research collectively – distribute the material among all researchers. Once you arrive home, it is advisable to archive the material by making back-up copies that can be saved in a folder together with other digital material and collected data, including interview recordings, pictures, videos, and field notes. You can either develop your own data archive, use an existing data archive or digital infrastructure, or use specific software, such as the Qualitative Data Analysis and Research Software ATLAS.ti, which can be used to analyze the material as well.

If you conducted interviews, make sure that you have all recordings, related field notes, informed consent forms, and contact details of your interviewees. In order to protect their data and privacy, you should save the recordings, transcripts, and informed consent forms in separate folders (see Table 2.3). It is best not to wait too long after fieldwork before writing up your observations, preliminary interpretations, and explanations of what you researched at the site. Regardless of the type of data collected, once you have registered and organized your data, you should start writing up your thoughts against the background of the research question that you had in mind, and of the concepts and theoretical framework that guided your on-site research. As outlined in Chapter 11, organizing writing-up meetings straight after fieldwork can facilitate the process of data aggregation and preliminary analysis, especially if you attended a meeting as a team. Ethnographers who aim to develop thick descriptions of the community and site of fieldwork – descriptions of observed actor behavior, negotiation dynamics, etcetera, including a record of subjective interpretations, explanations, or meanings – will especially profit from writing-up sessions shortly after fieldwork. When describing negotiation dynamics and the research object at hand, your writing style should be adapted to the type of data collected, so make sure that you follow the writing standards of your specific discipline.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter introduced the reader to the general features of conducting research on and at global environmental negotiations and agreement-making. It closes with three main takeaways: First, the ethical, legal, and organizational aspects of this kind of research are as important as the conceptual and methodological work that prepares scholars for data collection and participant observation on site. We propose a three-step approach for developing a methodology, which we understand as an iterative rather than a linear process, as further illustrated by Chapters 3 and 4 of this book. Second, cross-cutting issues, such as access, funding, and data protection, need to be addressed early in the research and should be reflected on regularly at different stages of the process. Third, regardless of the research puzzle and methodology, conducting research on and at negotiations will always imply a high degree of reflexivity and preparedness. This theme runs through several chapters of the book, and you will learn more about how to use and adapt a methodology and specific method based on illustrative examples and insider perspectives in each of the book's chapters.

Further Reading

1. Chasek, P. S. (2001). *Earth Negotiations: Analyzing Thirty Years of Environmental Diplomacy*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

This book is a standard work that gives an overview over thirty years of global environmental negotiations, how they work, and how they have changed over time. It is a key source for scholars new to the field and illustrates what negotiation sites look like from an insider perspective.

2. Mitchell, R. B., Andonova, L. B., Axelrod, M. et al. (2020). What We Know (and Could Know) About International Environmental Agreements. *Global Environmental Politics* 20, 103–121.

This article introduces the International Environmental Agreements Data Base (IEADB) cataloging the texts, memberships, and design features of over 3,000 multilateral and bilateral environmental agreements. The authors have created a comprehensive review of the evolution of international environmental law, including how agreements have changed over time.

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