6 The Kitchen of Data Collection & Data Analysis

Your mind is like a parachute —
it works best when it is open. (Anthony J. D’Angelo)²⁶

Introduction

The preceding chapter presented a detailed picture of the methodical aspects of the research design and delved into the technical dimensions of the qualitative empirical research to be implemented. This chapter, on the other hand, will provide an overview of the actual implementation of data collection and data analysis undertaken in this study. This chapter contains practical insights into the implementation of grounded theory during this research. Furthermore, it reports what was done, as well as why it was done that way during the generation of the empirical data, what connects with the preceding chapter dealing with methodological considerations and limitations during data collection, along with the subsequent chapter, in which the findings are presented.

Similar to the previous chapter, which was built upon personal experiences and reflections as a researcher in the field, this chapter is a compilation of personal practices in the field. This chapter will therefore also be narrated in the first person, since a reflexive stance on the role of the researcher, as the preceding chapter illustrated, presents only one

²⁶ This quote was credited on a website that collects famous quotations to Anthony J. D’Angelo in his book The College Blue Book. Attempts to verify this were inconclusive, as it had been quoted many times without reference. Nevertheless, it has been used because it is the best portrayal of the goals of the present chapter with respect to the research.
side of the mutual relationship between the researcher and the researched (including topic and respondents). These chapters bridge the gap by additionally elaborating how I, the researcher, processed the material acting, at the same time, as an instrument within the study.

I chose to utilise elements of grounded theory in this research for several reasons. Firstly, grounded theory has allowed me to grant great importance to the perspectives of the actors within the research. Otherwise, it would have been quite possible to conduct a study on this specific group in a political realm with conventional methods, as in previous work which, for instance, scrutinises structural factors or normative notions of representation supported by empirical data (see chapter 2). Before having settled on grounded theory and beginning data collection, I had struggled to come up with a research question related to my broadly defined research interest, German politicians with migration backgrounds. Grounded theory has enabled me to start with the research and then develop the research question based on the collected material. Once the research began to pick up momentum, I had an insight on how to utilise extant literature in order to distinguish my own research pursuits. I realised, in a nutshell, that the existing literature was not my compass and guide in the study, but rather a sort of litmus test for my own purposes. So the progression of research became practical and reasonable. Second, I liked the composition of data according to theoretical sampling and the process of coding, whose elements I deployed, as these differed significantly from theory-testing methods of analysis.

6.1 First Encounters with the Elected: Informal Contacts and Pilot Interview

Shortly after I realised that the only way to develop the research question was to jump into the empirical study I began speaking with potential interview partners at various events, e.g., conferences, public speeches, etc. In this way, I acquired a sort of familiarity with their jargon and self-representation patterns. The interview situation provided me the chance