

ORAL HISTORY GUIDE FOR THE ROMA SOUL FOOD PROJECT



Creative Europe

Deliverable D3.1. Oral History Interview Guide

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Authors: Alexandros Touloumtzidis and Kleri Bakoura

Qualia

The logo for Qualia, featuring the word "Qualia" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Above the letter "i" is a small, stylized blue icon of a brain with neural connections.

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is a tool at the disposal of the ROMA SOUL FOOD consortium and its collaborating researchers, employees and other stakeholders. It is a handbook aimed primarily at stakeholders in oral history and oral testimonies from the countries participating in the project, namely Serbia, Greece and Slovenia. However, as a public deliverable, it is a handbook open also to the general public. It presents the main points of conducting an oral history interview and provides some tips and guidelines on how to conduct it in an effective way, both for obtaining the information and for the harmonious interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. It has been drafted through bibliographical research, but also hands-on experience of its authors.

It should be made clear that this guide is only one approach to how one can conduct an oral history interview, as everyone can choose the way in which they feel most comfortable and believe they can conduct the oral history interview in the best way. However, as this guide has been produced as part of a European-funded project that needs to produce specific results, there are some points where encouragement is given to those who intend to use this guide to conduct an interview as part of the ROMA SOUL FOOD project. As an example, we could mention the audio and video part, in which a single qualitative result should be delivered at the end of the project. The guide also encompasses several ethical points that should be followed by all those involved in the interview process. Specific examples in the ethics and conduct section will be given below. Therefore, this guide is not a dogma and those who use it should follow it faithfully. Each interview has its own particularities and those involved in them should show high levels of adaptability; especially since in the context of the ROMA SOUL FOOD project the interviews will be conducted in Romani language and its various dialects, as apart from the members of the different Roma communities, all other interviewers will have to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers in order to be able to reach and obtain information from their interviewees.

It should be mentioned that this guide is addressed to anyone who would like to enter the world of oral history and the preservation of personal and community memory. However, we encourage readers who would like to delve further into the subject to dive into methodological and practical issues, which they can do through the relevant bibliography provided at the end of this guide.

Finally, we would like to thank all the stakeholders who will use this guide, as well as the members of the ROMA SOUL FOOD consortium, who took care of the translation of this guide into 5 languages, thus maximising its impact. Of course, this would not have been possible

without the funding of the ROMA SOUL FOOD project from the Creative Europe Programme, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the European Commission.

Before the interview

Familiarisation with the topic - primary research

When the topic is defined, as in this case the recording of contemporary cultural practices related to the cuisine of Roma communities in Serbia, Greece and Slovenia, it is necessary for the interviewers to be familiar with the topic before proceeding with the interviews. This can be done in many ways, but it has certain limitations:

When discussing contemporary issues, the sources of information on the subject vary. One can look for them in classical literature, among books, articles, conference proceedings, edited volumes, etc. However, one can also look for it in less conventional media, such as in articles on the internet, in audiovisual material, whether this consists of video and audio (some kind of interview) or audio only (podcasts, recordings, etc.); also in features and articles in the conventional press or even in discussions that may have been conducted by the researcher himself and in help groups (fora type). It is important to stress here, however, that any information used by the researchers-interviewers should be well cross-checked and they should try to verify any information that is not supported by specific sources.

Familiarity with the topic and the existence or construction of a general background of knowledge about it is an important prerequisite for conducting interviews. It helps us to cross-reference information, to place the interview subject in the time and space of the wider historical context in which they acted and tell their story, and to evaluate the information we receive. We must, however, make a distinction between the topics addressed by each research team. There are topics which are more specific and the context of events is very strict. For example, whether we are conducting investigations into the NATO bombing of Belgrade, or the Greek dictatorship, or the processes of secession of Slovenia from Yugoslavia, the reference events are specific and so the general background knowledge will help us first to verify whether the information we receive is indeed rooted in the events, whether the interviewee was directly or indirectly involved in them, but also to look for his/her place in them or the role he/she played. Also, we will in most cases be able to clarify whether the interviewees had any involvement in the events or whether their memory is mediated, i.e. whether they heard what is being narrated by someone else or had these perceptions from some other source.

However, there are also issues that are more open and conducting interviews helps us to build more accurately an existing repository of information or to contribute to the pluralisation of

information. This is also the case with the current strand of the ROMA SOUL FOOD European project. The purpose of the interviews is not to investigate the experience of a subject on a specific event, but to enrich with more or diverse cultural practices the already existing thematic of cultural practices of Roma communities in relation to their cuisine and food in three countries (Serbia, Greece, Slovenia), where this part has not been researched in depth. In this case, the general background information will help us to confirm information or avoid certain errors due to the refraction of certain phenomena through the prisms of the present. For example, since our research in the ROMA SOUL FOOD project will be intergenerational, meaning that we will draw information from older and younger people in the communities, the issue of seasonality in finding food products can be refracted through the present commercial conditions, where finding any product, any season has become the norm. This was not the norm until a few decades earlier - a researcher would need to be careful to discern when an older person is timing their narrative to understand whether at the time of the narrative it was possible to use, for example, summer food products in winter.

The basic background of knowledge on the topic is also correlated with the degree of familiarity that the informants develop with the interviewers. Often, to 'unlock' the informant, the interviewer must be able to show that they are relevant to the topic being addressed and can to some extent adapt to the standards of the community with which they are talking. Particularly when the subjects of the interviews are members of marginalized groups and communities, such as the Roma communities in the reference countries, then complete ignorance of their terminology, the structure of their communities and how they function, are inhibiting factors for the prevalence of trust between the interviewee and interviewer, which may lead to withholding information, problems in communication and ultimately to an interview/material that cannot be adequately used for the purposes of the research.

EQUIPMENT

The equipment part is another important chapter regarding oral history interviews, which falls under the part of preparation before the interview (purchase and preparation of the equipment), during the interview (use of the equipment) and after the interview (management, transport and storage of the material). However, although the key issue in oral history interviews is to record the testimony in a way that facilitates access to the information, i.e. that the material can primarily be heard and thus seen without any problems, the aesthetic aspect has started to gain more and more space. In short, this means that the ethical part of how an oral history interview is conducted is intrinsically connected to the creative part, with the aim that the use of the material beyond strictly historical research should also lead to its creative use, for example in the production of documentaries, theatre performances, etc.

It should also be noted that the purchase and use of equipment is a function of the final purpose of the research team or whether there are contractual obligations. For example, different equipment requirements exist for a university or self-organised group of researchers whose main objective is to produce primary material to be used in historical research, and different requirements exist for a research group that has a contract to produce a final deliverable and aims to use the material for creative purposes, as in the case of the European project ROMA SOUL FOOD. In the first case, a simple audio recording with a mobile microphone extension or an audio recorder would be sufficient; in the second case, recording audio and video to a specific standard requires the use of specific equipment with specific recording capabilities. Below we will discuss the two main areas of recording (audio and video) and the corresponding equipment needed to achieve specific results.

We will start with sound, which is the most important part of recording an oral testimony. It is now commonly accepted that for a person to watch an oral history interview or other genres related to it, such as documentaries based on oral testimonies, sound is a more important part than image. A testimony whose sound is annoying or of bad quality discourages the viewer and does not help them to continue watching, as it creates gaps in the flow of the story or ambiguities while being a very disturbing condition. On the other hand, if the sound is good and the picture is of poor quality, then they are more likely to continue watching as they can follow the flow of the narrative and story without problems. As mentioned, audio can also be recorded from a mobile phone device. In circumstances where there is no noise or commotion in the environment in which the interview is taking place, then a mobile phone recording could work well. Particularly

with newer generation mobile phones that use condenser microphones and especially those that use microelectromechanical microphones, they can produce high quality sound, while in flagship mobile phones there are also some features that help to isolate the sound of the main source, by extension the speech coming from the interviewee. However, because they are all condenser microphones, in an environment where it is not quiet or the interviewee for some reason causes micro-noises (e.g. squeaking on the chair, tapping fingers on the table, etc.) then mobile microphones may not do as well.

Today, however, most mobile phones can be connected to devices that can receive and deliver sound in very high quality. The connection is usually made with an adapter, which is connected to the usb c port of the mobile phone, and the microphone receiver is connected at the other end, while the transmitter is located close to the source, i.e. near the mouth of the interviewee. Also, with adapters, the mobile phone itself can act as a receiver and only the transmitter needs to be connected. The connection in both cases can be either wired or wireless. There are several positives and negatives between wired and wireless connection, which are beyond the scope of this guide. However, we will emphasize that primarily the conditions under which the interviews are conducted (indoors or outdoors, in a crowded or uncrowded venue) and secondarily the financial aspect largely determine the choice of wired or wireless connection.

The easiest, most functional and in some cases quite economical solution is the supply of a digital recorder. A portable digital recorder. The advantages over the previously mentioned solutions are multiple: first, the sound quality they can capture is better than the microphones of mobile phones, and the sensitivity of the microphones they carry is higher, but also because portable digital recorders carry built-in preamplifiers, which improve the signal before it reaches the recorder, resulting in a louder and more detailed sound. Also, most portable digital recorders incorporate various types of microphones, which are often directional, i.e. they pick up the sound from a specific direction. This contrasts with the built-in microphones of mobile phones which have mostly omnidirectional microphones, which try to pick up sounds coming from any direction. Following on from this, many handheld digital recorders also have various advanced filters, such as frequency limiters, to exclude the recording of low frequencies coming from far away or from the background, thus emphasising the frequency of the person speaking. Finally, compared to mobile phones, which also perform different functions, portable digital recorders have a longer recording time, as their battery lasts longer than a mobile phone, and are also more durable, as they are built for use in difficult conditions, such as for outdoor recording in high wind or high vibration areas. Portable digital recorders are an important tool for the researcher's work

and an economical instrument, as their price ranges from a few euros for the simplest devices to hundreds of euros for the most professional devices.

Since the sound part has been mentioned, we now move on to the image part. In relation to the image, things are a little easier for researchers. Nowadays almost all phones on the market, even in the lower categories, can offer users high quality moving image/video. To the greatest extent, all mobile phones can record video at 1080 pixels resolution, which is equivalent to High Definition - Full HD video, at 30 frames per second. This resolution is a commonly accepted resolution supported by most modern devices (TVs, monitors). As one moves up in phone class, and especially as one moves closer to the flagship phones of mobile phone manufacturers, one is given the option for even higher video recording, reaching 8k (7680 horizontal x 4320 vertical pixels) on even the most expensive phones. It should be mentioned here, however, that such resolutions (4k, 8k) produce very heavy files, which are later difficult to manage by many devices during editing, even if it only involves placing clips one after the other to produce a single file. However, the important thing, regarding the image, is that even with a conventional piece of equipment, such as a smartphone-type mobile phone, which most people now use, the researcher can produce a high-quality image.

For those who want to produce a higher quality image or have more options in how to frame, then they should consider three solutions: a) video cameras; b) DSLR cameras; c) Mirrorless cameras. These solutions, on the financial side, are relatively more expensive than some low- and mid-range mobile phones but can be comparable to the purchase of some flagship mobile phones but can also exceed them by a few thousand euros; the last one, however, concerns cameras, which are largely used by professionals. The differences between the three categories vary, while DSLRs and Mirrorless cameras are very similar in their use. We will only dwell on one basic detail before going into what the user can do with these cameras. The big difference between a camcorder and a DSLR or Mirrorless camera, regarding the issue of conducting oral interviews, is that camcorders by definition can record continuously, without interruption, for as long as their battery, or the memory we use, can last. On DSLRs and Mirrorless cameras, there is usually a limit to how long they can record continuously (usually 15 to 30 minutes), so the researcher should also keep this in mind, looking at and pressing the record button again once the recording stops. Related to this is that video cameras, precisely because they are created for video recording only, do not struggle or heat up so much during recording, whereas DSLR and Mirrorless cameras whose main application is photography, heat up a lot in some cases, especially under harsh weather conditions (very hot) or if they record in very high resolution, 4k type.

But there are specific advantages to using DSLRs and Mirrorless cameras over video cameras. One very important issue is that all DSLR or Mirrorless cameras can modulate the image, depending on the conditions prevailing during recording (too much or too little light, hot or cold light, bright or soft colours) and can shape an image to the user's liking. For a user to be able to have these features in a camcorder, he would have to buy very expensive models. Also, DSLR or Mirrorless camera owners can more economically change lenses on their cameras to be able to create better conditions when recording. For example, there are lenses whose focal depth is ideal for portraits and thus for recording a portrait of a person as it gives a verbal testimony, and at the same time bright enough (i.e. their aperture allows a lot of light to pass through) to be able to illuminate the interview subject even in low light conditions. By the same token, to be able to obtain a video camera that allows one to change lenses, one has to move between very expensive options. Finally, it could be mentioned that DSLR or Mirrorless camera owners also have the simultaneous possibility to record on photographs various material that the interviewees may possess (photographs, diaries, official documents).

It is important to note that with any option (video camera, DSLR or Mirrorless camera), and in any price range, these cameras can connect to the most advanced microphones on the market. Therefore, the user can achieve a very good, combined image and sound result.

To conclude with the equipment part, we consider the supply of a tripod to be an essential part of a reliable recording of oral testimonies. Potentially this could be avoided if the camera used is supported by a fixed object. However, this changes if the balance of the camera is changed for some reason, e.g. changing the lens, which is heavier than the camera body or longer and creates an imbalance. Unsupported image capture object leads to an unstable image, which can become very disturbing to the audience. Therefore, in order to avoid having to support the image recording medium on something different every time, but also to always achieve a stable and straight (not crooked) image, it is recommended to buy a tripod, even a cheap one, which can support the weight of the recording device (whether it is thinner and concerns the stabilisation of a mobile phone, or heavier and concerns the stabilisation of a camera). It is also recommended to buy a tall tripod with folding legs rather than a short tripod for mobiles only, as every situation is different and there may not be an object of height (such as a table) for the researcher to support a short tripod.

PRE-INTERVIEW GUIDE AND CONSENT FORMS

Once the researchers has done the general research on the topic of the examination and has chosen their equipment, the next step is to create a guide for the specific topic they examine. This guide can be used either for their own thinking organization and how they think about structuring the interviews, or as a guide during the interview. However, it is the experience of the Qualia team that making notes during the interview is disruptive for the interviewee, especially if it is accompanied by long pauses that allow the researcher to take notes. Therefore, the team's suggestion is to use this guide in an advisory capacity to ensure that the researcher has the information about what they want to know, and to leave the recording of the information to the medium used. The notes work mainly for points of interest, such as noting a topic or information that was said, or if they still have eye contact with the monitor of the recording instrument, noting the time when something interesting was heard and he wants to find it directly.

Certainly, what the researcher should know and learn immediately in order to place the interview subject in space-time and note them in the guide is the demographic data. Information such as first name, last name, and gender, their parents' information, marital status and spouse's name if any; if they have children, where they were born, where they grew up and where they live. In matters such as those dealt with in the ROMA SOUL FOOD project, and especially those that deal with issues that are so connected to the home (and specific parts of it), it is good to get information about the structure of the home and things related to it. For example, questions such as *do you remember your childhood home? Do you remember what the kitchen of your family's house was like? Can you associate certain figures with the kitchen room?* All the above are preliminary questions, but they are very important for interpreting the subsequent information and for building a profile of the interviewee.

Next, the guide should include questions that are based on the research that has been conducted and relate to the main topic of the interview. At this point, a method of approaching the specific issue should be chosen. If this approach has a temporal character, e.g. following the development of the interviewee's life, seasonality or seeking practices based on the evolution of the calendar e.g. practices related to Christmas, Easter, St. George's Day (if we are also referring to Roma communities) or corresponding Muslim periods; or whether it will be thematic, such as specific types of food (e.g. vegetables or meat) or a certain theme, e.g. health and food or magic and food, is entirely the choice and responsibility of the researcher. Therefore, questions such as *what are the preparatory stages for celebrating St George's Day in relation to food*, or questions

such as *did you fast and if so from what and for how long*, are acceptable at this point in the guide. At the same time, if the primary research has led the researcher to identify some specific practices or foods, they can delve deeper into how they were prepared, made and eaten, with an emphasis on detail. For example, questions such as *can you tell me how you prepared that food or how your family prepared that food* are acceptable at this point in the guide.

Finally, there should be provision for some open-ended questions at the end of the interview. Once the issues raised in the main body of the interview have been covered, it is advisable for the researcher to leave some space in the guide to note issues that they may not have understood well or for which further clarification is needed. For example, a structure of the type *you mentioned this event, can you please tell me a little more about it*, or questions of the type *you mentioned this event but did not go into detail, can you please expand?* This type of open-ended questions will help to deepen the understanding of what the interviewee said, as well as help with interpretation later when analysing the data.

Regarding the preparation before the interview, the researcher should also take care of some legal issues concerning the storage of the material and the safeguarding of the interviewees' personal data. Each team of researchers or even independent researchers will have to draw up so-called 'disclaimers', which should cover specific issues. In more detail:

1. They should inform the interviewee(s) about who is conducting the research and in which context it falls (e.g. in the framework of the European ROMA SOUL FOOD project).
2. They should inform the interviewee(s) about the subject and the reason for their research.
3. They should inform the interviewee(s) what they are providing (about their testimony) and what it will be used for.
4. They should inform the interviewee(s) about the location (physical or digital) where the material will be stored, how they can access it and in what format they can find it (e.g. physical object e.g. CD or digital e.g. storage on specific servers).
5. They should inform the interviewee(s) about any restrictions they may place on their material (e.g. deleting a certain part of the interview as they do not want something they said to be heard by mistake or not uploading their interview online or using the interview after a certain number of years, e.g. 5 or 10 years after the interview or after the death of the interviewee).

Regarding the last point, it should be stressed that for this reason it is very important to explain from the beginning the objectives and the results that the research wants to produce, because for example, the ROMA SOUL FOOD project will have to upload on the internet interview pieces

from all the interviewees. If for some reason, an interviewee sets a condition that their interview should not be uploaded online, this material cannot be used by the researchers for the project's deliverable. Therefore, since we have informed the interviewees from the beginning that this material will be uploaded edited on the internet, if someone disagrees from the beginning, the interview will not proceed, because the contractual obligations of the researchers are specific. This, of course, does not preclude the interview from taking place, in case the researchers' obligations have been completed and they want more material available for purely research purposes.

THE INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

The interview from a research perspective

In this chapter we will examine two key interview questions. The interview process itself from a research perspective and from a directorial perspective. The purpose is to provide the readers of this guide with all the necessary tools and methods so that they can better adapt their own style and perspective to the interview. In this first subchapter we will deal with the methodological approaches in terms of conducting the interview.

As mentioned above, each researcher is free to unfold their own style and methodology during the interview. Usually, however, they usually fall as variations into one of the 3 categories mentioned below. There are three basic methodologies for conducting an oral history interview. The first is the strictly structured interview; the second is the fully open discussion; and the third could be called the semi-structured interview, an approach developed by Gabriele Rosenthal and her team. Each of these methodologies has its own proponents and detractors and arguments have been made for and against all of them.

In the first case, that of the strictly structured interview, the discussion is based on a very specific questionnaire, which the researcher has prepared in advance. In the case of the ROMA SOUL FOOD project, this could be like the guide mentioned above. In this approach the interviewee does not have much room for maneuver. They must answer specific questions, which are often of a closed type (e.g. *were you there on this day?*) which can produce up to one-word answers of a yes or no type. The danger in this case is, as Roy Hay points out, that the interviewee becomes 'trapped' in the logical patterns produced by the research team. Thus, other aspects of the experience that the interviewee may recall may be completely suppressed. This approach, although it obtains qualitative information, has a mathematical logic that tries to lead to comparable results, since the common thread is that the same questions are addressed to all participants and interviewees in the research.

At the opposite end of this methodology is the completely free discussion. In this case, the researcher mainly lets the interviewee direct the conversation and take it where they want it to go. By following this method, the conversation may indeed lead to something unexpectedly good and interesting that we may not have thought of and open new horizons in our research. However, there is also a great risk that it will lead to too much material with useless information, which will not help anywhere and, more importantly, will make it difficult to manage the material

after the interview, as the researcher will have to search for the necessary information for their research in many minutes of non – useful material.

The third methodological approach lies in the middle and, due to its great success, it has gone beyond the limits of narrow historical research and has spread to various film genres, such as historical and creative documentaries. As mentioned before, it was developed by Gabriele Rosenthal and her team and involves three stages of implementation: a) in the first stage, a general and open-ended question is formulated by the researcher and leaves the interviewee to narrate, without interrupting. For example, *could you tell me about the typical food preparations for the St. George's celebration?* b) in the second stage, clarifying questions are asked by the researcher on topics already mentioned to gather more and more detailed information on the subject. For example, *you mentioned the preparation of this food, you can give more details.* (c) In the third stage only, the researcher may ask questions about new issues that they know through their research or experience and believe that the interviewee did not raise some issues or omitted to mention. It should be mentioned that this method is much more effective on topics that are very specific, e.g. if we only wanted to know about the food preparations for the St. George's Day celebration. In cases where we are asking for life narratives, special care is needed, as the first open question should be, as its name suggests, "open" but also inclusive, so that the interviewee can enclose as much information as possible.

Having mentioned the methods that can be used by research teams or independent researchers, the following are some suggestions that aim to facilitate the conduct of an interview. They will be formulated in the form of bullet points so that they can be summarized for the needs of this guide:

1. It is good to know the interviewee before getting directly involved in the interview. At least one introductory meeting is important to break the ice between the two parties and start building a relationship of trust. Ideally two meetings should be the minimum before the regular interview, a "getting-to-know-you" meeting and a short unrecorded interview, both to build this relationship of trust and to get a feel of who the interviewee is and what kind of knowledge they do possess regarding the subject, so we will prepare ourselves. Of course, in real-life circumstances this may not be possible, and we may have to proceed directly to an interview, either because the deadlines are too close, or because of our own or the interviewee's availability, but it is nevertheless recommended that, where possible, the meetings are arranged.

2. The interview space is very important. Ideally, we need a space in which the interviewee feels comfortable, which in most cases is their homes. We seek a space which has as little sound interference as possible. We try to avoid places where there is noise, such as cafes and outdoor areas with crowds, and we only conduct an interview in such places if the interviewee insists and it is necessary, and we clarify that critical information may be lost if we do not conduct it.
3. Linked to point 2, is the encouragement not to conduct group interviews. Even if the group that wants to conduct the interview with us is a couple, we try to find a way to conduct two different interviews with each person separately. Even the presence of another person in the same room can be disruptive for the interviewee and does not help in building that confidential relationship we mentioned, as by definition with the second person, either because of kinship or proximity, the interviewee will have a greater intimacy compared to us. This disruptive presence unfolds in different ways, e.g. through interventions by the other person, where they interrupt the flow of the main informant's narrative, or even by the interviewee, where they may seek confirmation from the other person (*didn't it happen? I don't remember well?*) especially if the experiences are shared.
4. We ask questions that are as simple as possible. We prefer simple rather than complex questions, as while the latter may be easier for us to include as many questions as possible in one, for the interviewee it can be disruptive, and they may end up answering only one part of the question.
5. We do not impose our views on our interlocutor(s), nor do we ask leading questions (e.g. *was this food prepared in this way, or was it prepared in this particular way?*) We are in that position mainly to listen, not to impose our views, or to listen to something we had predetermined in our minds. In that relationship, which we are trying to build, we are not operating in an authoritative capacity, where we can very easily be taken or attributed, because it is very common for the interviewee to have a lower formal educational level than the researchers involved in the research. It is almost certain that such questions will lead either to misleading answers because the interviewee will agree with us, when they may not want to, out of shame; or to one-word answers with no substance to the interview.

THE INTERVIEW BY DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Achieving a good aesthetic result, where the audience can watch effortlessly, is a challenge for the researchers. As mentioned, the main objective in oral history interviews is to capture as much relevant information as possible. However, because nowadays both the means of recording have evolved and oral history interviews are also used for different purposes other than purely historical research, the creative perspective of the researcher plays a very important role. Therefore, it is not necessary to know how to handle complicated equipment, but the more he knows, the better the result will be. In this part of this guide, we will note some techniques which are used when interviewing someone.

Linked to the previously mentioned and in particular the preliminary meetings between the researcher and the interviewee, is the repérage. The repérage is essentially the analysis of the place where the interview will take place for the researcher to find the appropriate place/point where the interview will take place. This, in the case of the interviewee's home can be the living room table, with some photos in the background or even a gap in the background (we will explain below why a gap in the background sometimes helps). In the case of an outdoor space, then things become easier for the researcher, as they can potentially visit this outdoor space without the interviewee and see exactly where they will set up their frame. In addition to helping the researcher find the best frame for the interview, the repérage also helps to avoid awkwardness between the two parties regarding indecision about where to sit, which often leads to moving furniture and wasted time.

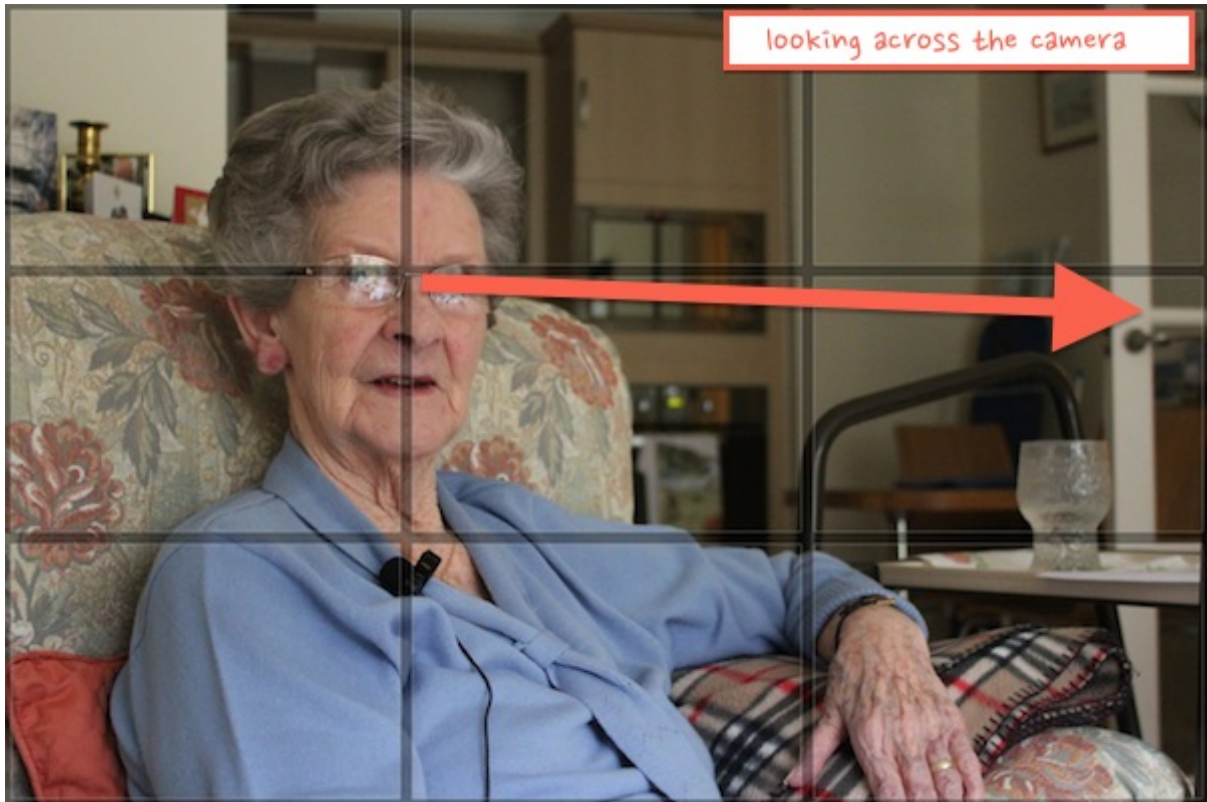
Once the researcher has found all of the above, before the interview starts, they should set up their frame and the camera, which is recording. At this point we will talk about setting up the camera when there is one camera in the room and setting up the equipment when there are two or more cameras in the room. Starting with the first case, which is the most common, the camera should not be facing the interviewee, nor should the interviewee be looking straight into the camera lens. Directly opposite the interviewee should be the person with who is talking. The interviewer should choose the camera positioning according to the space available either from the left or from the right, within 30 to 40 degrees of their position. In this configuration, the camera will be aimed at the interviewee from the side and not looking straight at them. Similarly, the interviewee will not be looking straight at the camera, but at an invisible interlocutor, who is not in the frame. The image below explains how the interview subject should be positioned and how the first camera and the interviewer should be positioned.



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While we are satisfied with the way we set up the camera, there is one more thing we need to take care of for our framing to be correct and to give the viewer the feeling of a conversation between the researcher and the interviewee. This is the so-called rule of three. In practice, this means that the subject the camera is recording takes up about 1.5/3 of the frame. How is this done practically on camera? Every camera, be it a video camera, DSLR or Mirrorless has a feature, which when activated displays on the camera screen a grid of three vertical and two horizontal lines that create nine identical squares. Positioning the subject at the points where these lines intersect gives the aesthetic look we are looking for. Usually, when we record a person positioned as mentioned above, placing the point between their eyebrows at the upper left or upper right (depending on which side we have placed the camera) intersection of the lines, leaving little space above their hair, gives us the image we are looking for. The rule of three is not a statute, but it is a simple way in which we can create the visual representation that through our composition will lead the viewer's eye to the subject of reference, while creating a more dynamic image than a more static one that would have the subject in the center of the frame, as it creates depth and visually serves the purpose of someone narrating something. A proper use of the rule of three should look like this:

¹ <https://pro.europeana.eu/post/exploring-cultural-heritage-through-oral-history>, last visited 30/12/2024.



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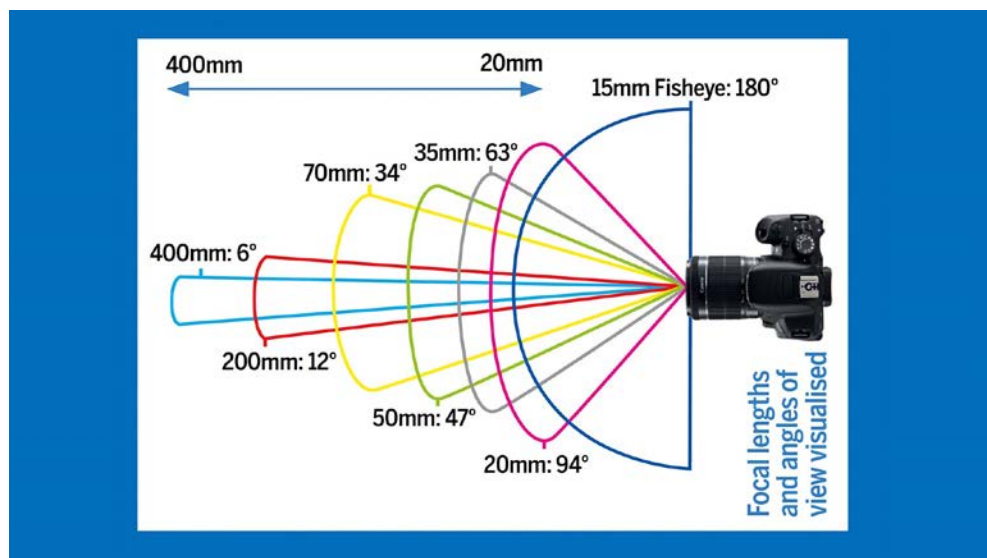
Finally, regarding the frame, we should point out that we should not set up the subject of our interview in front of a window. This should not be the case, because our camera, when it has a light source directly opposite it, tends to darken whatever is in front of that source, to be able to respond to the very bright light to which its focuser is exposed. Therefore, we choose to set up our subject facing a window with the camera behind that window. In this way what we achieve is that the face of the interviewee is sufficiently illuminated and that we have a smooth exposure to the light we get as an image from our camera.

Once we've set up our frame and we're happy with it, we need to make the settings on our camera, which should be adjusted to the lighting conditions in the room. Bear in mind that we can also create the lighting conditions of the interview subject by bringing in our own lighting. However, on the one hand in this guide we discuss what we can do with basic equipment, on the other hand setting up lights gives a sense of formality, which is often interpreted negatively by the interviewee(s) and "locks them out". Therefore, at this point let's look at the settings we can do internally on the camera. 4 are the main points to pay attention to: the aperture of the lens; the shutter speed; the ISO; and the white balance. We should note that all DSLR and Mirrorless cameras have these settings and some video cameras and some mobile phones, mainly flagship

² <https://digitalwriting101.net/content/composing-and-framing-video-interviews/>, last visited 30/12/2024.

phones of each company. But to make the necessary settings, we need to set our camera to Manual Mode, otherwise the camera will choose these settings for us. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as the camera chooses the best settings to achieve a balanced exposure, however, it loses in the style we want to give the image, and sometimes it raises the photosensitivity of the sensor (ISO) too much, creating the so-called noise, or grain, in the image. Let's take them one by one:

The aperture of the lens is a very important factor in terms of the illumination of the image, but also the focus of the image. There are two categories of lenses, always speaking of equipment, which has the possibility of changing the lens (therefore lenses are not changed on mobile phones and some video cameras). Fixed focus lenses and zoom lenses. Each lens has three important numbers on it that correspond to the field of focus; how wide their aperture is and the degrees of the lens ring. Starting with the first ones, as their name suggests they have a specific focus, which is measured in millimeters (8mm, 12mm, 16mm, 24mm, 24mm, 30mm, 50mm depending on the manufacturer). Millimeters determine how wide the field of focus will be or how narrow it will be. For example, an 8mm lens will include more information in its frame, as opposed to a 50mm lens, which has a more focused field. The photo below explains the differences in focal field:



In an oral history interview, because potentially the space we will have will not be big, we need a medium to largen focal length lens, 35mm and above, while 50mm lenses are considered ideal for interviews. The second number, concerning how open or closed the aperture is, relates to how

³ <https://www.digitalcameraworld.com/tutorials/photography-cheat-sheet-what-is-field-of-view-fov>, last visited 30/12/2024

much light the lens allows into the camera body. Fixed focus lenses usually have a lower number, which means they are also brighter lenses. This helps the user in low light conditions to get a brighter image. But the aperture is also related to how focused the image is. A wider aperture leads to less focused faces and objects, while a narrower aperture leads to more focused faces and objects. The image below schematically illustrates what was mentioned above about aperture:

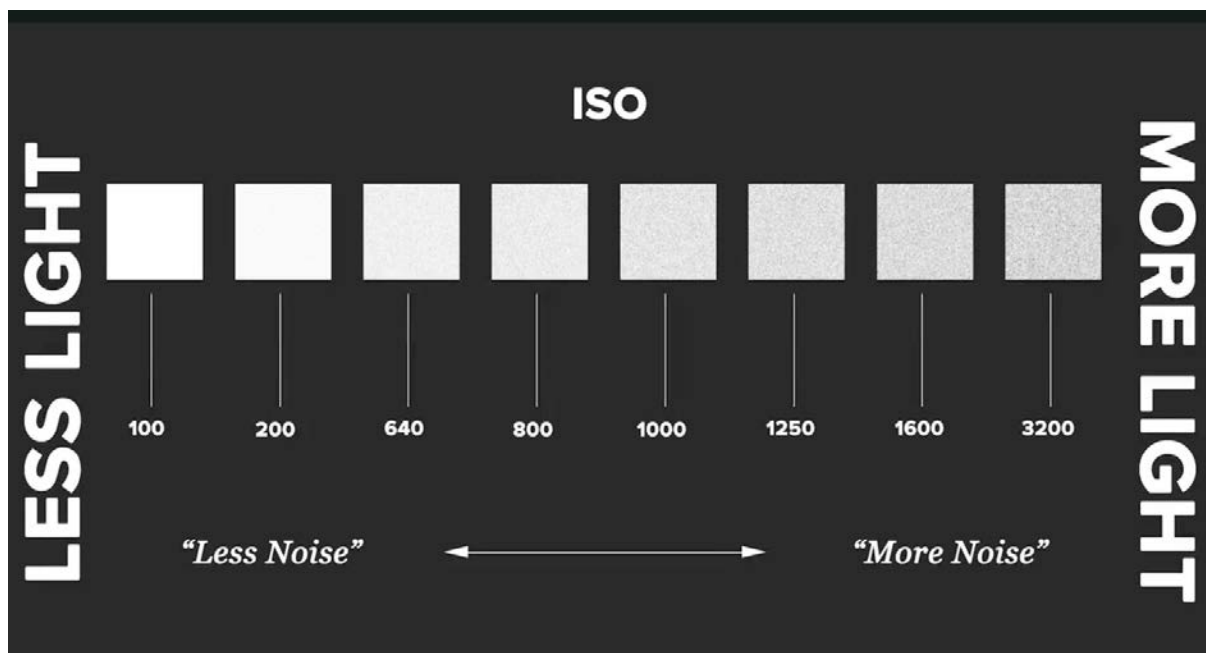
				
f/1.4	f/2.8	f/5.6	f/11	f/22
Very Large Aperture	Large Aperture	Medium Aperture	Small Aperture	Very Small Aperture
Very Small Depth of Field	Small Depth of Field	Medium Depth of Field	Large Depth of Field	Very Large Depth of Field
Almost Nothing In Focus	Little In Focus	Some In Focus	Much In Focus	Almost All In Focus
				

Finally, regarding the aperture, there are cases where, when there is strong sunshine affecting the image, a neutral density filter needs to be added to the lens to shade the image because everything is "burnt" by the high exposure to light. This is where the third number on the lens ring helps us to select the appropriate filter. Usually, however, we never encounter such conditions inside houses or other places, so the use of the filter can be optional for this project and only if there is an outdoor shoot.

The second basic setting is the camera shutter speed. Shutter speed is about how fast the image we are viewing moves and determines how "shaky" or steady our image is. It also affects how much light is allowed to enter the camera body and is measured in fractions of a second or even seconds (e.g. a speed of about 60 to 120 fractions of a second is a good setting for an interviewee who is seated and not moving, whereas a setting of 1 or 2 seconds on the same subject would give a very shaky image with too much light exposure). So, a good setting for an interview is between 60 and 80 fractions of a second.

The third key setting is the camera's light sensitivity (ISO). ISO can, with a good camera, get the user out of a difficult low-light situation, while on the other hand it can also create a lot of noise or grain in the image. The general rule of thumb is, we want the ISO number to be as low as

possible. It usually starts at 100 (on some cameras even 50) and doubles each time. That is, as you go up it goes from 100 to 200, from 200 to 400, from 400 to 800, from 800 to 1600 and so on reaching up to 56,000 or 64,000 etc. ISO relates to the brightness of the image and should come as a function of the other two parameters. That is, once we have set the lens aperture and shutter speed, we should see how good the exposure of our image is and then decide whether to raise ISO or not. If we see that we have achieved good exposure with the first two settings, we will keep the ISO at the lowest level possible. If we see that the image is dark, then we will start to raise the ISO, always keeping in mind that we need to keep it at the lowest possible number. In general, ISO numbers above 1600-3200 will start to slowly introduce grain into the image to make the image brighter. This is one reason why camera settings should be made by the researcher(s) and not automatically by the camera, because it can automatically set values that will spoil the image quality. In the figure below, the evolution of the image is shown as the ISO number is increased:



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Finally, the regulation of white balance has to do with how we perceive the light that is present in the condition in which the interview is conducted. In most cases, cameras manage very well to adjust the white balance automatically, so if it is such a condition, there is no reason to change it. However, if the researcher realises that the white balance is not good, they can change it through the default settings of the cameras, for example indoor lamp light, daylight, etc. It should be mentioned that those researchers who will use external lights to illuminate the

⁴ <https://tifsphotography.weebly.com/iso.html>, last visited 30/12/2024.

interview subject can adjust the white balance to the full, as they can balance the camera colour with the number of kelvins given by the lamp manufacturer.

In conclusion, an important part is the manual focus. It has been observed that in interviews, where there are several objects in the background and the interviewee while talking, the camera fails to get the right focus when operating automatically. We therefore choose to have the researcher define the field of focus so that it is locked in one place and does not get lost or misfocused, e.g. on the hands of the interviewee who is moving them. We should, however, inform the interviewee to stay relatively in the same position in order not to lose focus and check from the screen if we see that it has moved or moved slightly. For those who don't feel comfortable with these settings, the cameras also give the option of continuous focus, locking a point, which again can be lost if something else intervenes in between (e.g. hands), however, most of the time and in normal circumstances, it works effectively.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Calendar and initial thoughts

You have successfully conducted an interview and have just left the place where it was held. It is very important to record your first thoughts and your experience of this interview. What did you think of the interviewee? What did you get out of it? Did you come away with any points that you felt were not clarified or needed further discussion? These notes are extremely important so that you don't forget anything and can plan your next steps. Something may not have been clear to you and may not have been clarified during the interview either. These initial thoughts captured on paper will then help you in analysing your material, deciding whether you want to approach the interviewee again to have another meeting and ask about the points that were not clarified.

All these notes are good to be in a diary structure. This will help you not to lose track of scattered notes but will also help you to refer back to them whenever you need to during your interpretation of the material. The journal will also help when labeling your material (hard drives, storage cards) and sorting it.

STORAGE OF THE MATERIAL

Having completed the interview and having received the consent form from the interviewee, we have already informed them of the place where they will be able to access the material given to us. It is a fact that this place, if linked to a larger institutional structure hosting similar material, could guarantee with greater authority the security and longevity of the material. But this is not obligatory, as we have seen cyber-attacks on major libraries with subsequent destruction of material. Therefore, it is a default choice of each research team to state how they will store the material and guarantee free access, first to those who participated in the research and then upon request to other researchers. In the case of the ROMA SOUL FOOD project what has been decided is that for each country, the physical storage space will be the offices of each organisation, while the digital space will be the Zenodo platform.

The recordings through the audio and video recorders are in most cases made on memory cards or in the internal memory of each device (mainly for mobile phones). Memory cards come in various types, however, to record material in higher resolution than 1080p, it is advisable to purchase fast reading cards rather than the plain ones. These cards, because they are very small are very easy to lose, it is recommended to transfer the data to larger hard drives, which will be the physical objects that the interviewees and researchers can see on. It is also recommended to purchase such HDD or SSD type hard disks, as they have a large capacity and can store large amounts of material and more than one interview. HDD and SSD disks can be purchased at a very economical price, which have a capacity of 1 Terra Byte or 2 Terra Byte. As a contrast, we could say that common memory cards can store 64, 128 or more rarely 240 Giga Bytes of material. It should be mentioned, however, that each research team or individual researcher will have to purchase a reading cable for such hard disks (sata), as they cannot be directly connected to an external port of a computer or laptop.

Having procured the hard disks for storing the files, the next step is to transfer them from the recording medium to the hard disk. This is done through a computer, either by connecting the recording medium directly to your computer, or by supplying a data reader, which we recommend, because it is easier to use and with less connectivity, and it displays the storage directly, without displaying the folders of the camera's operating system, which can be confusing. This is where a researcher can address a specific issue. Some recorders, just because as mentioned they stop recording after a certain period, display the recordings in separate files. Therefore, an interview of one-hour certain recording media may display it in two to four different

files. Here the user can save that interview in two ways. Either they can create a separate folder where all the files of the interview media will be, or if they have some basic knowledge of editing programs, they can merge all the files together, and create a single file. The second way is a little more time consuming, however it is worth following, because the researcher will not have the problem of navigating through different files in the process of interpreting the material. It is also recommended that the material be stored twice, either in two physical locations (e.g., in a computer's internal memory and on a hard drive) or in one physical location and in a digital space (e.g., on a hard drive and in a cloud space).

Once the researcher has finished storing the data, it is a good idea to use a sticker and a long-lasting permanent marker to note what is on each disc. This will help them tremendously in not having to search through different discs for the material but will also help in the sorting process. Also, the physical space that they choose to deposit the hard drives, such as cabinets or shelves, should be well protected from moisture type conditions or away from pipes, etc., as well as being well secured. The cabinet or shelf itself should also be marked with a sticker as to what it contains and ensure that nothing is included inside that can destroy the material that has been collected.

Finally, the classification part is of crucial importance and is influenced by several factors. The most important one concerns the place where the interviews will be deposited. If the research team decides to deposit the interviews in a public archive, e.g. a university or a public library, then the classification part will be handled by the archive team, as most likely, they will have their own classification system. In this guide, we will deal with the latter case, as it raises more issues.

We will take as an example the case of the ROMA SOUL FOOD project, where the interviews will initially be held at the headquarters of the organisations involved in the project. In this case, all the teams working on the survey will have to decide on a joint classification system. Precisely because the interviews will not be many, some basic information on the stickers on the hard drives and on the tabs that will be created would be sufficient. However, because an archive is always dynamic, teams should think proactively and analyze the possibility of expanding the archive through continued research, either through other projects or privately by each organization. Thus, it is advisable to have some basic information on the sticker, such as the first and last name of the interviewee, where the interview took place, and the date. How the discs are now sorted is again a decision for the groups. This could be done in alphabetical order, and each new interview finds its place, or by serial numbers, where a record is also kept so that the teams

know the first and last name of the interviewee. However, this system in transnational projects such as ROMA SOUL FOOD, where interviews will come from at least 3 countries, becomes quite complicated, as it is difficult to coordinate who did the 2th, 3th, 4th interviews and so on. Therefore, in such transnational projects it is suggested to sort through alphabetical order.

Going to the tab of each disk, it can have both physical and digital form (excel files). Again, physical and digital have the meaning of security, not to lose/delete or destroy something without a copy. The tab of each disc, in addition to the list of interviews it hosts, should contain some information about each interview. These could range from basic details of the interviewee, such as first name, surname, age, place and country of conduct, to details about the researcher, who conducted the interview, what recording medium they used and on what media they stored it and may end with the interview topic and its subdivisions. Finally, it should also contain a summary of the interview containing the key information and what was discussed in the interview to assist other researchers in navigating through the interview information.

Finally, two issues that will only be mentioned in this guide are the issue of transcription and copyright, which relate to the use of the material by researchers. Transcription should normally be done in full and for each interview, so that the research team can refer to what a researcher said or take selected parts that could be used in a publication, be it a scientific article or a book. However, this is a very time-consuming and costly process, as it requires a lot of working hours from the researchers, that especially small groups cannot afford. Linked to the issue of citations is that of copyright. We mentioned it briefly above with regard to the consent forms, however, here we will suffice to mention that the copyright of the recording belongs to its producer, i.e. the person or organization that conducted the interview, while the exact words heard in the interview to the informant and the way of their transfer is precisely through written agreements that can be contained in the concessions.

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