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CURRENT ISSUES IN METHOD AND PRACTICE

Disentangling the tourism sector's fragmentation: a hands-on coding/post-coding guide for interview and policy document analysis in tourism[†]

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Qualitative tourism research is inevitably multidimensional. The fragmentation of the tourism sector across policy domains, scales, space and stakeholders leads to 'blurry' and aggregated datasets. Yet, tourism studies have a weak record in describing how results emanate from raw qualitative data. This paper presents a coding/post-coding scheme that proved robust in disentangling multidimensional tourism datasets in a middle-range research project that necessitated reflecting on the position of the researcher and the literature study during the data analysis. It describes the pragmatic decisions taken to organise the qualitative data from a research project on cross-border tourism and regional development processes. The paper also functions as a reflexive account of how this scheme came into existence. It contributes to the tools available to practically acknowledge the fragmentation of the tourism sector and the resulting multidimensional qualitative data, and calls for a more open accounting of the data analysis process and the underlying research values in tourism studies.

Keywords: qualitative methodology; interview coding; policy document analysis; middle range theory; tourism studies; cross-border tourism

Introduction

During the last two decades, tourism scholars have increasingly adopted qualitative methodologies that build on reflexive and interpretative instead of positivist research perspectives (Stergiou & Airey, 2011). While this 'liberation in "soft science" inquiry over recent decades has opened up ontological, epistemological and methodological opportunities' (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015, p. 30), it has also led to practical issues of what constitutes proper qualitative data analysis in tourism research. Regarding tourism, relatively little has changed since Decrop (1999, p. 157) boldly stated that 'qualitative researchers often fail to explain how and why their methods are sound. This results in confusion and misunderstandings'. Yet, the tourism sector has characteristics which, when researched in a multi-level, inter-stakeholder perspective, necessitate a thorough data analysis and a detailed description of the different analytical steps. Especially the well-documented fragmentation of the tourism sector (Adu-Ampong, 2017) is at the basis of 'blurry' or 'messy' qualitative datasets. This

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fragmentation includes: diverse ownership structures of businesses, consisting of both empowered global corporations and in most cases more numerous small and medium enterprises; the geographically uneven distribution of tourism attractions and stakeholders within and between destinations; decision-making power that is dispersed over public, private and civil society actors, and; scattered and sometimes contradictory impacts of tourism development across social, economic and environmental spheres (Stoffelen, 2017). Qualitative tourism research, hence, often results in highly multidimensional datasets that need to be systematically disentangled to result in meaningful and robust insights.

Recent attention to qualitative methodologies in tourism studies has mostly been given to conceptual and disciplinary issues (e.g. Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017; Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015) but practical descriptions and discussions of both research design (Mason, Augustyn, & Seakhoa-King, 2010) and data analysis schemes remain rare. To cover this lacuna, this paper describes the CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software)-assisted data analysis of a study in which the above described complexities were obvious and pressing. In the sections below, I describe the different steps I took to make sense of the data gathered during a research project on tourism cooperation and regional development processes in European borderlands. The paper presents the hands-on analytical and interpretative tools that I combined to unravel the multidimensional and blurry qualitative dataset established during the research.

As has become a consensus in social science, there is not just one correct way of doing qualitative data analysis. The analysis process is dependent on the researcher's philosophical stance as well as pragmatic operational decisions (Saldaña, 2009). The presented data analysis scheme leans towards a post-positivist approach within a realist ontology. From this perspective, coding is used to capture, albeit imperfectly, socio-spatial processes and stakeholder experiences. Coding schemes like the one presented in this paper serve to identify and acknowledge biases in the research (Ponterotto, 2005). In this the presented approach differs from other (for example some postmodern) research that is more skeptical towards coding and CAQDAS to uncover socio-spatial processes and patterns (Scheurich, 2013). However, through valuing stakeholders' subjectivities in shaping cross-border tourism governance, capturing contextualised insights and reflecting on the researcher's bias in processing this information, the presented coding/post-coding scheme also incorporates some interpretivist reflexivity (Grix, 2002; Ponterotto, 2005). It thus constitutes a light form of 'bricolage' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The coding/post-coding guide of this paper describes pragmatic decisions that could be taken to organise a large multidimensional qualitative dataset. Simultaneously, it also functions as a personal, reflexive account of how this scheme came into existence. For this reason, the next section shortly introduces the research project that led to the establishment of the coding/post-coding guide. The novelty of the paper lies not just in describing the coding steps, which consist of several conventional coding techniques in an iterative scheme specifically created for the research project, but also in combining these with the post-coding analysis, which has received remarkable little attention in tourism methodologies. The paper aims to contribute to the tools available for qualitative data analysis in tourism studies. It intends to spur the debate on how to practically acknowledge the fragmentation of the tourism sector and the resulting multidimensional qualitative data, similar in objective to Attride-Stirling (2001) but applied to tourism studies.

The research project

European cross-border policies have mainstreamed from the 1980s onwards, with a central position for tourism. The assumed ease of cross-border cooperation in this sector as well as

its regional development potential through direct revenue generation and 'soft' effects on regional identity, place branding and rural service provision make that many tourism projects have recently established across borders (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017).

However, tourism is often characterised by an 'implementation gap' in effecting regional development (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016). Inclusive governance and planning are often noted as key processes to overcome these situations yet the establishment of such systematic tourism cooperation in cross-border contexts is difficult and under-researched (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014). The doctoral research in geography that was at the basis of the methodological scheme presented in this paper, therefore, aimed to identify the mechanisms in terms of governance, planning and policy that explain the functioning of tourism for regional development in European borderlands.

To extend the view that tourism is a transformational driver in region-building processes to cross-border contexts, the research was positioned at the meeting point of predominantly post-positivist 'cross-border cooperation approach', which stresses the endogenous and regionalised character of cross-border development in globalising societies, and the interpretivist 'people approach' to border studies which highlights the constructionist processes through which borders are socially and discursively demarcated, justified and institutionalised (Van Houtum, 2000).

The study included comparative research in the German-Czech and German-Belgian borderlands. The former constituted the main study area. It was divided by the Iron Curtain until 1989. Subsequent socio-economic development strategies were quickly framed in explicit cross-border strategies. Nevertheless, the Iron Curtain separation still influences the area's weak socio-economic outlook and the fragile but improving cross-border cooperation. The latter area was selected for comparative purposes. Its selection took place after the data collection and analysis of the German-Czech study. Both areas incorporate transnational and within-country cross-border cooperative aims in tourism and regional development but are characterised by different cooperation histories.

The study had a process-based research design, meaning that it focused on the underlying mechanisms of tourism-induced regional development rather than an impact analysis. Considering the aims to map cross-border governance structures as well as power (im)balances, experienced collaboration obstacles and socio-spatial inclusion of tourism stakeholders, the methodology built on semi-structured in-depth interviews and policy documents. I also gathered field notes and conducted informal conversations with tourists and locals for supplementary information. Interviews were predominantly with public, civil society and public-private stakeholders. The interviewees operated in the fields of tourism, regional planning, regional and community development, natural resource management, heritage conservation, cross-border cooperation and local politics. They were selected with a purposive sampling method. I used an initial literature study to identify relevant stakeholder types and interview topics, which were subsequently contextualised with internet research and an initial policy document review. This led to a continuously updated stakeholder mapping. The stakeholders were contacted by email and telephone. I asked interviewees at the end of the interview if they could identify other relevant stakeholders, whom I subsequently approached with interview requests. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed to establish some order in a multidimensional topic, yet enabled interviewees to discuss additional items that they deemed noteworthy. An interview protocol guided each interview. The included topics were combined from the initial literature and policy document reviews as well as an online search for the actions and strategies of the interviewee.

The starting point

Upon returning from fieldwork and following the transcription of the interview recordings and subsequent member-checking, a rigorous methodological reflection and data analysis became pressing for several reasons.

The first reason was the richness of the gathered data. In total 49 interviews were conducted that lasted between 45 min and two and a half hours. Interviewees belonged to a wide range of tourism-related stakeholders sourced across multiple scales and sectors. Each stakeholder brought different perspectives and described numerous context-specific issues. This made the identification of larger processes, commonalities, contradictions and illustrative examples an arduous task. Second, the interview content was highly multi-dimensional. Considering the multi-scalar cross-border settings of the study areas, the large range of interview topics had to be discussed for both sides of the border as well as across the border, and had to be compared between within-country and transnational borderlands. The third reason was the comparative aim of the study. The data and its analysis should enable systematic comparison between the case studies but remain sensitive to context-specific socio-cultural relations, histories and cross-border cooperation experiences. Fourth, different data types had to be combined to get detailed and independently framed insights in the specific case study contexts. Additionally, the interviews and policy documents, sourced in multiple languages, needed to be treated equally. Data triangulation was required, not only to make sense of the content of the data but also to improve the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Decrop, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Oppermann, 2000).

The methodological plan discussed below was created to disentangle the data and interpret intermediate results. It also allowed to reflect on the required next analytical steps and to justify the decisions afterwards. The plan describes a form of thematic analysis. This type of analysis is flexible and theory-independent. It contrasts to grounded theory methods in that it does not require the generation of full theories from information grounded in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Hence, thematic analysis is particularly useful for midrange approaches like the research presented in this paper. The research departed from a mostly empiricist position to knowledge creation but was also motivated and guided by theorizations, conceptualizations and previous research findings in the literature on cross-border governance, planning and tourism cooperation, yet without formal hypothesis testing.

The different methodological steps centred on the coding of the interview transcripts and policy documents. As defined by Saldaña (2009, pp. 3–4),

> [a] code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. […] [It is] a transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis.

Coding should lead to data reduction, organisation and analysis (Cope, 2010). It restructures the multi-thematic and composite content of the transcripts and documents, thereby ordering them per topic instead of per source. The thematic re-organisation of the texts should enable the researcher to identify recurring themes, compare visions and interpretations of stakeholders, and identify similarities, differences and contestations (Cope, 2010; Flick, 2014). I used the NVivo^{TM} CAQDAS package during this coding process.

Useful starting points for data coding can be derived from the methodological literature yet no standard framework is available to deal with the above described complexities.

Moreover, this project followed a midrange approach while the qualitative methodological literature, largely resulting from health sciences, mostly focuses on grounded theory based enquiries (e.g. Dierckx de Casterlé, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). As described above, grounded theory methodologies and coding schemes have different objectives regarding theory creation than midrange research. Nevertheless, considering the empiricist point of departure of the presented research, some grounded theory-inspired approaches like the constant comparative method in which the researcher bounces back and forth between higher order classification and empirically grounded observations (Glaser, 1965), were useful to identify patterns and trends while maintaining empirical closeness. From a practical perspective, however, I felt the necessity to create a tailored analysis scheme to practically disentangle the multidimensional data and to facilitate my methodological reflexivity throughout every step of the data analysis. The scheme needed to be open to reflecting on the role of the researcher and the interaction between the empirical observations and the existing literature. In addition, the reflexivity could not be enforced by using multiple researchers to independently code and analyse the data, which is regularly mentioned as a tool to increase the robustness of the results and the quality of the interpretation in post-positivist qualitative research (Decrop, 1999; Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). I, therefore, had to develop the coding and post-coding analytical steps specifically for the project.

The coding/post-coding scheme (Figure 1) should not be read as a linear black box for achieving results. Rather, it represents the flexible, iterative and reflexive set of decisions taken for this study which could serve as guidelines for future research with similar designs. In the description of the coding/post-coding analysis scheme, I present examples from the analysis of the German-Czech case study.

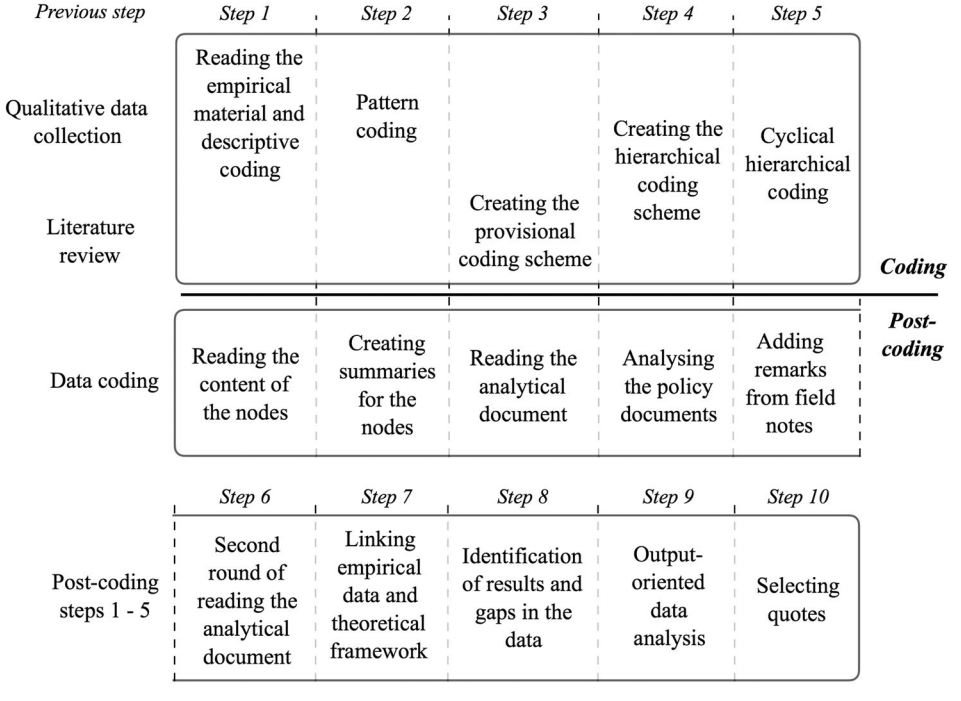

Figure 1. Step-by-step description of the coding and post-coding guide. Note that the coding is cyclical, and several loops throughout this scheme should be made.

The coding phase

Step 1: selecting descriptive codes as emerging from the texts

The first coding step consisted of descriptive coding of the interview transcripts and policy documents. Descriptive coding refers to assigning initial topic or category labels to texts (Cope, 2010). It starts with intensive reading to get familiar with the data, followed by applying the coding while reading. Following Creswell (2007), this reading and descriptive coding constitutes the first move up the 'data analysis spiral', thereby paving the way for later interpreting phases. Importantly, this step is individual and non-comparative. Each text was coded separately so that the coding of previous texts shaped the coding of other documents as little as possible. Topics were registered as emerging from the unprocessed empirical material to avoid a determining influence of the conceptual framework in this phase (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2004). It also means that this step did not include a search for commonalities or larger structures. Consequently, the first coding step resulted in a list of unstructured descriptive codes that represented all discussed topics.

The interview transcripts from the first data collection round in the German-Czech borderlands as well as policy documents on tourism, regional development and cross-border cooperation formed the basis for the descriptive coding. The coding of these texts resulted in 244 topic labels. It is important to be aware that the same text can be descriptively coded in different ways, with different descriptions and different levels of conceptual abstraction (Flick, 2014). I coded all texts with a 'middle order approach'. This approach is a middle way between lumping (clustering larger text excerpts into broader categories) and splitting (detailed line-by-line coding) (Saldaña, 2009). It maintains close descriptive distance to the topics emerging from the text while also allowing to capture larger discussion points. I coded the texts with directly summarising words and phrases, hence with little conceptual or theoretical reflection. Table 1 gives an example of a coded excerpt from a German-Czech interview transcript. The 244 descriptive nodes and their content were used as input for step 2.

Step 2: creating overview: pattern coding

In this step, the descriptive codes from step 1 were compared to each other. I merged, deleted and renamed the nodes, the 'containers' that cluster all text excerpts that have been assigned

Table 1. A descriptive coding example from an interview in the German-Czech borderlands.

Text	Codes
An old state and two new states of Germany, and the Czech Republic. It's a very special combination. [Interviewer] Which challenges does that bring? Different mentalities. Different history. Different style of work. Two very different languages. We have a hard language border. Germanic and Slavic languages. Very different. In Germany, you can't find a lot of persons speaking Czech language. But you must look for them. *It's also necessary to collaborate on practical points of interest. The fire brigade was not able to cross the border in the past. Also in emergency cases.* ***The Euregio helped to bundle the interests and with writing a cross-border treaty between Bavaria and Czech local authorities. The Euregio paid for a study for an overview of the different emergency systems. This was about three years ago.***	Local mentality Language *Impact INTERREG and Euregio* **Examples of projects**

the same label, to identify different topic labels that discussed similar issues. This 'pattern coding' (Saldaña, 2009) increases the researcher's insights in the topics covered in the texts. It establishes some hierarchy in the topics that emerged from the data (Cope, 2010). It also creates order in the unstructured codes from step 1. With this pattern coding, I reorganised and grouped the original nodes under eight overarching themes (Table 2). This step reduced the number of nodes for the German-Czech study from 244 to 107.

Step 3: provisional coding based on the literature

This phase consisted of creating an 'empty' coding scheme using the literature study. It included the re-reading and expanding of the studies covered in the initial literature review. Like in structuring content analysis, this step entails extracting useful and recurring concepts and findings from the literature to create researcher-generated, predetermined nodes (Flick, 2014; Mayring, 2004). By this 'provisional coding' (Saldaña, 2009), the literature study became a methodological step.

For the research project on tourism and cross-border regional development processes, the literature review included studies on bordering processes, cross-border regionalisation and planning, regional development, cross-border tourism development and tourism governance. I wrote down a list of relevant concepts, topics and attention points, which I subsequently reorganised into an ordered scheme. This process resulted in five main themes subdivided by 95 nodes on five levels (Table 2). The interview transcripts and policy documents were not coded according to this scheme. The provisional coding served to create the hierarchical coding scheme in the next step.

The empirical insights emerged from the previous steps will, inevitably, influence the nodes created during the provisional coding. Conversely, it is unrealistic to expect complete separation between the descriptive codes and the concepts and theories that frame the research.

Table 2. The overarching themes identified in the German-Czech interviews.

Descriptive coding	Pattern coding	Provisional coding	Hierarchical coding
[unstructured nodes]	Socio-economic situation	Socio-economic borderland characteristics	Socio-economic borderland characteristics
	Identity and mentality	Regional (cross-border) identity and sense of place	Regional (cross-border) identity and sense of place
	Tourism	Border landscape and tourism landscape	Border landscape and tourism landscape
	Landscape	Multi-level tourism governance	Multi-level tourism governance
	General cross-border cooperation	General cross-border cooperation and management	General cross-border cooperation and management
	Governance in general		Facts, figures and important studies
	European programmes and projects		
	Facts, figures, terminology and important studies		

Qualitative research builds on the idea that 'human behavior is never context free and that both respondent and investigator exert a reciprocal influence on one another' (Smith, 1984, p. 382). In other words, it is impossible for a researcher to fully disconnect the 'bottom-up' focus on the empirical content and the 'top-down' theoretical input (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Feighery, 2006). Considering the empiricist stance adopted in the early phases of the research, I decided to start from the data itself and only then include the conceptual framework in the methodological plan. I deemed that the determining role of the conceptual framework, arguably, would have been too large when the data analysis would have started with the provisional coding.

Step 4: creating a hierarchical coding scheme

In this step, I compared the provisional coding scheme with the pattern nodes of the empirical material to create a hierarchical coding scheme. In the end, the hierarchical coding scheme of the German-Czech case study consisted of six main themes (Table 2). These overarched 167 nodes on five hierarchical levels. I described each node with 'rules of inclusion' that described the content that should be captured (Saldaña, 2009; Schmidt, 2004). For example, the rules of inclusion for the node 'delineation governance levels' were:

> This node deals with the spatial delineation of governance levels that are related to tourism. This not only includes levels directly responsible for tourism but also levels such as the geopark, Euregio, … that indirectly shape tourism governance. This node is quite descriptive in the sense that it really focuses on the spatial extent of certain administrative responsibilities.

On higher hierarchical levels, nodes and their rules of inclusion have a high level of abstraction. They overarch nodes on lower levels that are more directly connected to the data. On the lowest levels, nodes were as concrete as 'effects of the transformation from a socialist to a post-socialist society', which was grouped under the 'socio-economic borderlands characteristics' theme, and 'language difficulties', which was grouped under the 'general cross-border cooperation and management' theme.

As shown in Table 2, the overarching hierarchical nodes are similar to those of the provisional coding. On lower levels, however, the hierarchical nodes were a combination of the pattern and provisional coding schemes, and were updated in later coding cycles (see coding step 5 and post-coding step 8).

Step 5: cyclical coding using the hierarchical coding scheme

At this point, all texts were re-read and re-coded using the hierarchical coding scheme. This was a time-consuming step that necessitated a good understanding of the nodes as well as the interview content. Hierarchical coding is a flexible process despite its clear structure. Some nodes had to be updated, deleted, merged, split up or newly created. Hierarchical coding is thus cyclical (Saldaña, 2009) or iterative (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012). Several coding rounds were required to capture the richness of the German-Czech data.

The post-coding phase

Once a dataset has been fully coded, for example using the steps described above, one should still interpret the coded material to move from data to result. Without reflection on how to process the content of the nodes, there is the danger of unconsciously selecting results that seem interesting but that actually confirm the researcher's theoretical

assumptions (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2004). A rigorous post-coding analysis should prevent the careless selection of results that legitimize preconceived ideas, also called 'cherry picking' (Schuermans, 2013). Despite the obvious importance of the post-coding analysis, most tourism literature does not focus on this step.

Step 1: careful reading of the content of the nodes

I was already familiar with the content of the nodes because of the cyclical nature of the coding process. Additionally, the nodes were thematically clear because of the established rules of inclusion. Nevertheless, this first post-coding step consisted of the careful reading of the content of all hierarchical nodes to further improve my familiarity with the thematically re-organised data.

Step 2: creating a short summary for each node

The second post-coding step consisted of writing short summaries of the content of each node. This allowed to search for larger processes, structures and contestations in the data. By summarising each node, one moves from first-order code to second-order category and finally to aggregate dimensions that link up empirically grounded content with more abstract conceptualizations (Altinay, Saunders, & Wang, 2014). I subsequently combined the summaries in a summarising content analysis document (Mayring, 2004). I also made the first tentative links between the research question and the results in this phase.

Step 3: careful reading of the analytical document

This step consisted of reading, updating and expanding the summaries combined in the analytical document. It also included comparing the nodes for content to capture internodal relations. By doing so, I was able to overcome the rather hierarchical relationship between nodes typical for NVivo™ (Schiellerup, 2008). Similarities, differences or complementarities can be written in memos or added manually to the summaries. I wrote these reflections manually in the margins of a hardcopy of the analytical document.

Step 4: analysis of policy documents

Until this step, I included the policy documents only in the descriptive and pattern coding. Only the interview transcripts were used during the hierarchical coding. I made an active decision to postpone the policy document analysis to the post-coding phase. This decision allowed to more easily compare the content of the policy documents with the content of the interviews. The fourth post-coding step, therefore, consisted of the detailed reading of all policy documents and the addition of notes to the summaries to indicate complementary or contrasting information present in these documents.

Step 5: adding remarks from the field notes

The field notes included my immediate post-interview reflections and, hence, captured interpretative moments arising spontaneously during the research (Schiellerup, 2008). The notes also included the description of observations carried out in the study areas and summaries of informal conversations with tourists and locals. By adding reflections on these notes in memos or manually to the hardcopy of the analytical document, the resulting

document triangulated the different data sources. This triangulation limits methodological shortcomings and improves the robustness of the results (Decrop, 1999; Oppermann, 2000).

Step 6: a second round of reading and interpreting the analytical document

Following from the increased complexity of the summarising document due to the addition of cross-links between nodes and initial comparison to the literature, policy documents and field notes, I conducted a second reading of the document. I also identified the nodes that contain interesting content for the overall research or that contain more descriptive value, for example regarding the study area characteristics.

Step 7: linking the empirical data to the theoretical framework

So far, the scientific literature influenced the study area selection, the contacted stakeholders, the interview protocol and the provisional and hierarchical coding schemes. However, the empirical data itself had not yet been linked to this literature. This post-coding step consisted of systematically reflecting on the literature review and connecting the gained insights to the empirical observations. It was important to make explicit conceptual reflections only at this post-coding step. It allowed me to reflect on the moments when the theoretical input shaped the data analysis, which guards against the unconscious selection of text excerpts that confirm the researcher's theoretical assumptions.

Step 8: identification of key results and gaps in the data

The analytical post-coding document was re-read to recognise interesting findings as well as gaps in the data. This allowed me to identify topics that warranted further data collection and additional stakeholders that could be contacted to complement the data. For example, I identified a shortage of information on communication practices between tourism agencies on local and regional levels as well as community participation in destination management in the Czech Republic. I created a list of stakeholders on the basis of this information. This process is a form of theoretical sampling where 'new research participants or information are purposefully sought based on the findings of previous data analysis' (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017, p. 50). I did not adopt a permanent iteration between the data collection and analysis due to practical reasons. I scheduled a second and final fieldwork stage in the German-Czech borderlands after reaching this post-coding step. This resulted in an additional 18 interviews. With the newly gathered data, I went back to the hierarchical coding, including its cyclical or iterative nature to consider potentially new topics discussed in these interviews, and went through the subsequent post-coding phases again.

Step 9: output-oriented data analysis

After connecting the thematically re-organised data to the scientific literature and the conceptual framework of the study, I linked the post-coding document to specific chapters of the doctoral dissertation.

Step 10: selecting quotes

Finally, I selected quotes on the basis of their representative and illustrative value for the overall results identified in the previous step. The selection of quotes, thus, resulted from

the full data analysis rather than the narrative of the individual text excerpts, covering that a provocative remark is not necessarily a good quote. For example, the summary of the node 'Importance of individuals in cross-border cooperation' contained the passage: 'Most cross-border contacts are made by individuals […] If someone changes [positions], the whole project may change or decline. […] It thus depends on the willingness of the people, but also on their focus and aims.' After consulting the covered codes, I selected the following quote (see Stoffelen, Ioannides, & Vanneste, 2017, p. 132):

> I think it's often a question of [who the] person [is]. When you have a person who is not the devil in person [*laughs*] you can work together. It's a normal fact. (Mayor, German borderland town)

Discussion and conclusion: broader implications of the coding/post-coding scheme

Qualitative, region-oriented tourism research is inevitably multidimensional. The transversal position of the tourism sector across policy domains, the diverse and multi-scalar stakeholder composition and power relations, and the spatially explicit nature of tourism development combine to lead to 'blurry' and aggregated datasets. I frankly admit that when I returned from the first fieldwork stage with a seemingly enormous amount of multidimensional data, I lacked any sort of overview of either the valuable content or the way to unravel its results, despite basic preconceived ideas of how to analyse the data. These struggles are inherently part of the knowledge creation process. Describing these struggles and solutions fundamentally improves the insights in methodological processes and the rigour and trustworthiness of the described research. It also serves to establish a more open discussion on how to deal with the complexity of the tourism sector in qualitative research (Ainley & Kline, 2014).

As such, I developed the presented methodological scheme, both as a practical guide for the data analysis and to be able to report in detail on the struggles and solutions I encountered. Apart from its obvious time intensive nature, the approach turned out to be very useful to analyse the data in a systematic and reflexive way. It covers three larger methodological issues.

First, the coding and post-coding guidelines proved robust in disentangling a dataset that was highly multidimensional due to the scope of the research. The study on cross-border tourism governance and regional development explicitly covered the fragmentation of tourism across sectors, scales, space and stakeholders. The specific set-up of the comparative studies that covered both transnational and within-country contexts also added to the complexity of the dataset. Apart from disentangling this dataset, the coding/post-coding scheme allowed to systematically incorporate conventional techniques such as member checking, data triangulation and thick description that increase the trustworthiness of the analysis (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Decrop, 1999; Guba, 1981; Oppermann, 2000; Schuermans, 2013). In short, the methodological scheme facilitated the move from general content to systematically disaggregated and thematically clear research results.

Second, the methodological scheme includes built-in mechanisms to reflect on the researcher's position during solo analysis. While team analysis is noted to increase the analytical depth and facilitate multidimensional thinking (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012; Jordan & Gibson, 2004), this is practically not always feasible. By tailoring the analysis to the specific research project and the tourism sector's fragmented characteristics, thereby starting from scratch with the creation of a methodological scheme, the seed for self-reflection ('questioning how things are done', Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p. 521) was already planted in the very first phase of the conception of the methodology. The resulting

coding and post-coding guidelines were thus constituted to minimise the bias and maximise my self-reflection. The scheme was purposely organised in an iterative way to allow for intermediate reflection on the progress and process of the data analysis.

Third, the methodological guide is reflexive towards the role of the literature study in the data analysis, thereby avoiding 'cherry picking' of seemingly interesting results. Because of the empiricist starting point, the created analytical scheme has incorporated tools of grounded theory approaches, especially in terms of constant comparative method and the connected cyclical nature of coding (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012; Glaser, 1965). Considering the midrange approach of the presented research, the analytical guide includes more attention to the permanent interaction between the literature study, potential preconceived ideas and empirical observations than in purely grounded theory inquiries. Combining the reflections above, the scheme fitted the theoretical underpinning of the research, which departed from a post-positivist perspective but edges towards interpretivist approaches in terms of reflexivity.

This paper contributes to methodological discussions in tourism studies in several ways. The presented coding/post-coding guide is a practical tool for making sense of intricate qualitative tourism datasets. While it is not the aim of the paper to present an inflexible blueprint for qualitative data analysis but to present a personal, reflexive account of how the presented methodological scheme came into existence, the coding/post-guiding framework could be used for reflecting upon possible methodological steps in future studies with similar epistemological positions and research designs. The described analysis is also practically applicable for middle range research, building on conventional techniques from grounded theory but aggregated in a specific scheme enriched with additional reflection on the interrelations between observations and conceptual frameworks. Especially the combination of the iterative coding and the post-coding, which constitutes a methodological phase that has received remarkable little attention in tourism methodologies, contributes to tourism studies. Finally, the paper spurs the discussion on how to translate conceptual and epistemological debates on qualitative methodologies in tourism research into workable practices.

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