

LEARNING REFLECTION FOR MY THESIS

I consider my thesis, which investigated the barriers and potential opportunities for accelerating sustainability transition in Mauritius, a transformative and enlightening journey as it represented my first, and I hope it won't be the last individual attempt at qualitative research. Thanks to the research master's program for equipping me with the skills necessary for this endeavour through modules like Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography and Joint Multidisciplinary Research Project.

The study was originally conceived as a comparative case study involving two island communities: a sovereign state (Mauritius) and a non-sovereign state (Reunion). However, during the data collection stage, language barriers in Reunion, where French is predominantly spoken, became an obvious hindrance to effective data collection and communication with respondents. While I was aware of and prepared for this, I think I could find a translator who is based in Reunion. For instance, I had the intention to rely on my French-speaking friend in Senegal as my translator as I could not afford to pay for one. However, due to the different time zones in Senegal, Reunion and my current location, it was practically difficult to proceed with this idea.

Again, I decided to shift the second case study to Lesvos, another island with unique sustainability challenges. Yet, recruiting participants didn't go as smoothly as I had hoped. Despite the help of my supervisor at the University of Aegean, finding enough individuals with the necessary knowledge and experience within the given time frame who were willing to commit their time to the study proved more challenging than anticipated. This obstacle led to delays in my data collection timeline and forced me to reassess my research design once more. Ultimately, I transitioned from a comparative case study to focusing solely on Mauritius. This shift meant that my study lost the comparative element that could have highlighted broader patterns and differences between sovereign and non-sovereign islands. However, I believe I was able to conduct a more in-depth and focused exploration of the local sustainability context. This experience taught me that sometimes a research endeavour may not go as planned due to practical constraints, and therefore, some adjustments may be necessary to ensure the feasibility and depth of the study.

My thesis also underscored the importance of being proactive. For instance, many of my respondents were from the network I established during the COP 28 conference in Dubai. During the conference, I frequently visited island community pavilions with the hopes of meeting people with pertinent knowledge relevant to my study. Fortunately, I was able to meet willing participants who also recommended me to other people. My proactiveness was helpful in participants' recruitment and saved time.

The most challenging part of the process was undoubtedly the data analysis phase. Sifting through hours of interview transcripts, identifying themes, and ensuring I accurately represented participants' voices while also drawing meaningful conclusions was intellectually demanding and time-consuming. I often found myself second-guessing my interpretations and struggling to strike a balance between remaining true to the data and developing insightful findings. One of the most challenging parts was figuring out how to present culturally and politically sensitive data without it coming across as a direct attack. Thanks to Professor Ina, I was able to overcome this difficulty with her suggestions.

Looking back, I think I underestimated the time required for qualitative research, particularly transcription and coding. This miscalculation put pressure on my analysis and writing phases, where I had to burn midnight candles to cover up. In hindsight, I would have benefited from starting the transcription process alongside data collection to manage time more effectively.

Despite these challenges, I have no doubt that the experience was insightful. I feel better equipped to tackle similar research projects and have a clearer understanding of areas where I can improve my skills as a qualitative researcher.