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Studying the making of geographical knowledge: The implications of insider interviews

HANNE KIRSTINE ADRIANSEN & LENE MØLLER MADSEN

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The article addresses the issue of being a 'double' insider when conducting interviews. Double insider means being an insider both in relation to one's research matter – in the authors' case the making of geographical knowledge – and in relation to one's interviewees – our colleagues. The article is a reflection paper in the sense that we reflect upon experiences drawn from a previous research project carried out in Danish academia. It is important that the project was situated in a Scandinavian workplace culture because this has bearings for the social, cultural, and economic situation in which knowledge was constructed. The authors show that being a double insider affects both the interview situation and how interviews are planned, located, and analysed. Being an insider in relation to one's interviewees gives the advantage of having a shared history and a close knowledge of the context, and these benefits outnumber the disadvantages. Being an insider in relation to one's research matter makes it difficult to contest hegemonic discourses and tacit values and ideas. Recommendations on how to handle the double insider situation are given. The article concludes that for analytical purposes, it is useful to separate the two roles, but in reality they coexist and are intertwined.

Keywords: *geography, insiders, interviews, positionality, power relations*

Hanne Kirstine Adriansen, School of Education, Aarhus University, Tuborgvej 164, DK-2400 Copenhagen NV, Denmark. E-mail: hkoa@dpu.dk; Lene Møller Madsen, Department of Science Education, University of Copenhagen, Universitetsparken 15, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark. E-mail: lmmadsen@ind.ku.dk

Introduction

In the summer of 2003, we conducted interviews for a research project concerning the construction of knowledge in research communities (Madsen & Adriansen 2006). The project was a contribution to the discussions of 'putting philosophies of geography into practice'.¹ Since 2002, these discussions have occurred especially in British geographies. There has been a call to research 'aspects of disciplinary practice that tend to be portrayed as mundane or localized but represent the very routines of *what we do*' (Lorimer & Spedding 2002, 227, emphasis in original). At the time of the interviews, the interviewees were colleagues from an agricultural university and our former colleagues from a geography department. In addition to being insiders by interviewing our colleagues, we were also insiders in the sense that we – as geographers – were studying the making of geography, or in other words studying discourses we were part of ourselves. Hence, we had a double insider role. This distinction between having insider knowledge of the participants and insider knowledge of the research matter is important because the insider role is negotiated differently in the two cases. Being an insider in relation to the interviewees means that the friendship or interpersonal relations can be at stake, while being an insider into research practice means that one's 'professionalism' as researcher can be at stake. The purpose of the present paper is to analyse this double insider role and the special opportunities and challenges it presents, and to provide recommendations for other insider interviewers.

Interest in the making of geographers and geographical knowledge is not new. Different researchers have addressed this from different perspectives at different points in time. One prominent example is the dialogue project by Anne Buttimer and Torsten Hägerstrand in the 1980s

which originated in humanistic geography (Buttimer 1983; Hägerstrand & Buttimer 1988). The past ten years, however, have seen a growing body of papers by geographers studying the making of geographical knowledge and geographers' work – predominantly from a social science point of view (e.g. Castree & Sparke 2000; Sidaway 2000; Birnie et al. 2005). The topics range from the use of archival material in geography (Johnston & Withers 2008), to learning to become a good geographer (Simandan 2002; Bauder 2006), and to the role of women in physical geography (Madge & Bee 1999). The present paper should be seen as a contribution to this tradition, which is well represented in Anglo-American geography journals but virtually absent in Scandinavian² geography journals (*Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift–Norwegian Journal of Geography*, *Geografiska Annaler* from Sweden, and the *Danish Journal of Geography*).³

This paper offers close reflection on subtle nuances of the interview experience. It gives voice to the questions, concerns, and reflections that qualitative researchers have before, during, and after interviews that ultimately shape the results of our analysis. It is, however, important to note that we cannot determine the direct effect of insider relations on the results. It is not a one-to-one relationship. Similarly, the effects of an interviewer being a young, white woman as opposed to an middle-aged, black man (and vice versa) are not easily resolved, although gender, age and ethnicity probably affects the result. To paraphrase Browne (2003), it is impossible to speculate on all effects of insider relations, but by addressing these relationships explicitly, the complexity of research relations can be revealed. Hence, with this paper we hope to shed light on the two insider roles as well as share our reflections and offer advice to future inside researchers whether they are insiders to their interviewees or to their research matter.

We argue that in order to analyse and understand the implications of the double insider role, we must pay attention to each stage of the research process. Obviously, the insider role is most explicit during the interview situation itself, but it also affects how the interviews are planned, located, and analysed. By analysing the whole process, we illustrate our double insider role and the contested nature of our position as well as the multitudes of power relations and tacit negotiations taking place when conducting insider interviews. To that end, the remainder of the paper is organised as follows. First, we discuss the making of geographical knowledge and provide a brief overview of how the insider role has been addressed in geography and related disciplines. Then, our methodological reflections are presented by explaining the research project for which we interviewed our colleagues and by establishing what it means to be an insider. In the third and major part of the paper, we analyse the various stages in the research process where the insider role has an impact. This means we study how the two insider roles can affect not only the interviews, but also the whole research process. We reflect upon the experiences, difficulties and surprises we had before, during and after the interviews. Finally, there is a discussion and we conclude by giving a few recommendations for future insider interviewers.

Studying the making of geography and the insider role

The last 20 years or so have witnessed an increasing volume and diversity of critical analyses of the production of geographical knowledge. Feminist geographers were among the first to call for the need to address our own position as producers of knowledge (McDowell 1992). The discussion in wider circles of geography really took off in the new millennium. As noted by Lorimer & Spedding (2002), it is important to address the relationships between the everyday activities of geographers and the theoretical-methodological tools that we choose to employ in our research and teaching. They further highlight the spatiality of this type of research: 'As we turn our attention to the making of knowledge, so too must we locate ourselves in the spaces in which these events unfold ... because of the differences that they make to the production, negotiation and reception of facts and ideas' (Lorimer & Spedding 2002, 227). Also Livingstone (2000) has argued that in order to understand the discipline we must understand it in the context of space and place. Following this, the 'tradition of thought' should be complemented by understanding the 'tradition of practice', which takes place in specific places and times. Hence, space and place as well as the practices and power relations of the involved actors are important when studying the production of geographical knowledge (Elwood 2006). In recent years, geographical fieldwork has come under close study by feminist and postcolonial geographers pointing to the masculinist and ethnocentric language and assumptions of this endeavour (e.g. Nagar & Ali 2003; Bracken & Mawdsley 2004). Likewise, there is a growing body of papers in human geography on how we interact with the people we study (e.g. Pratt 2002; Cupples

& Kindon 2003). These discussions have been very inspiring for us.

Within the field of geography, the interview situation and challenges where the researcher has an outsider position have been discussed in numerous papers (e.g. Moss 1995; Rose 1997; Sin 2003). Fewer papers go into detail with the opposite situation – when the researcher is an insider. Among the few geographers discussing the particular aspects of the insider situation are Browne (2003), DeLyser (2001), and O'Connor (2004). The three papers discuss the challenges involved when being an insider in relation to one's interviewees. Browne writes about interviewing friends, DeLyser about colleagues in an historic park, and O'Connor about interviewing fellow Irish immigrants, and we found all three papers to be of great inspiration for understanding the importance of positionality in relation to conducting insider interviews. However, the papers do not address the challenges involved when being an insider in relation to one's research matter.

The issue of positionality, which is an aspect of the insider issue, has been analysed widely among geographers (e.g. Chacko 2004; DeVerteuil 2004; McCleery 2004). This discussion has especially been presented by feminist and post-colonial geographers (e.g. England 1994; Larner 1995; Rose 1997). McDowell has pointed to the contribution of (feminist) geographers in considering positionality in the production of knowledge: '[T]his aim – the construction of committed, passionate, positioned, partial but critical knowledge – is one which is eminently geographical in its recognition of the locatedness of knowledge' (McDowell 1992, 413). Positionality has been analysed in relation to diverse issues such as peer reviewing of journal articles, interviewing elites and being a foreign speaker in Anglo-Saxon academia (Berg 2001; Desmond 2004; Helms et al. 2005). We find that reflecting critically on the issue of positionality is important when doing insider research. We agree with Kitchin & Tate when they point out that being an insider may make research more difficult: 'You may fail to notice pertinent questions or issues because of the inability to step back from a situation and fully assess the circumstances' (Kitchin & Tate 2000, 29). Therefore, when doing insider research it is necessary to address the insider relationships explicitly in order to reveal the complexity of research relations.

Outside geography, discussion of the insider situation can be found in anthropology and the field of educational studies. In the latter, it is not uncommon to interview one's colleagues (e.g. Edwards 2002; Burton 2004). Within anthropology, especially the situation of doing 'fieldwork among friends' has been discussed (e.g. Hastrup 1987; Hendry 1992; Neal & Gordon 2001). Being an insider is often seen to have more advantages than disadvantages (a greater knowledge of the context, shared outlook, etc.). Nevertheless, the role is complex and often contested throughout the research process (O'Connor 2004). Among the disadvantages is the lack of distance to the research, as mentioned by Giddens (2003, 647): 'A researcher could begin to identify so closely with the group that she or he becomes too much of an 'insider' and loses the perspective of an outside observer'. This dichotomy between having an intimate knowledge of

the context (which is usually appreciated) and being too embedded in the research matter (which is not welcomed) is not easily resolved and needs attention.

Methodological reflections

Because the interviews analysed here were conducted as part of a larger research project, the present paper can be seen as a reflection paper discussing the implications of the insider role for the whole research process. This is similar to the articles written by Browne (2003), O'Connor (2004), and Sidaway (2000), where they also reflect critically upon the making of geographical knowledge based on previous research projects. In order to understand the present paper, it is necessary to explain the wider research project it is a part of.

The research project concerned the construction of knowledge in research communities. Based on the idea that a discipline can consist of several academic or research communities, our 'unit of analysis' was a particular research community in Denmark, namely a group of researchers at various Danish universities who carry out rural studies. These researchers construct what we have labelled a national 'agri-rural research community'. We used the concept 'research community' as a way of locating research thinking, practice and representation in a spatial setting, because what research is cannot be uncovered in isolation from the conditions of its making. Subsequently, 'fields of legitimate research' exist within a research community; these are the tacit values and ideas as well as the processes of shared meanings and negotiations, which legitimate certain research practices and lead to the abandonment of others. Hence, in our understanding a research community is an intellectual space inhabited by a set of ideas that are (almost) hegemonic. According to Bourdieu (1975), the pivotal power struggle in academia concerns the monopoly of scientific competence. In a research community, however, this power struggle does usually not take place within the community because there is a hegemonic discourse on what constitutes scientific competence. This means that within this space, justification of, for example, research designs is not necessary because the members share the same ideas about 'valid research'. Instead, power struggles concerning the monopoly of scientific competence take place between research communities.

It was the tacit values and ideas within the research community that we wanted to shed light on and make explicit through our research project on a specific research community in Denmark. Our primary interest was the 'cultural turn' which has been dominant in rural studies in the UK but which to some extent has by-passed rural studies in Denmark. Because we knew the community, we had some ideas as to why this was the case, but we wanted to know the research community's own answer.

We made a semi-structured interview guide focusing on ten themes. In addition to questions meant for assessing the state of the research community, our questions referred to the daily practice of the researcher, e.g. their existing personal and professional networks, conference attendance,

teaching, and interactions within the field. Finally, two questions concerned a common 'canon' or body of literature within the field. The questions were meant to make explicit what was legitimate research and scientific competence within this community. Thereby, we were questioning the hegemonic discourse of our own community. This community has its strength in field-based empirical studies based on multi-methods. Questioning the dominant methods was not challenging to the interviewees in the same manner as questioning the principal theoretical position as the interviewees were well accustomed to consider their use of data and methods. Discussions of different theoretical stances, on the other hand, were not common within the community. One might say there was a hegemonic discourse that this type of debate was not relevant for the research. Therefore our questions concerning the possible interest and relevance of the cultural turn in Danish rural studies were challenging.

The outcome of the research project was a paper, hereafter called the 'original paper', published in a leading rural studies journal (Madsen & Adriansen 2006). While we described that we interviewed our colleagues, the methodological implications of this was not dealt with in detail in that paper. In the present paper, we analyse the implication of our double insider role for the process leading to the results presented in the 'original paper'.

What does it mean to be an insider?

The distinction between being an insider and an outsider is not an easy one. We have had numerous discussions while writing this paper, if we could 'truly' call ourselves insiders. Is one an insider, when one starts questioning the hegemonic discourse, when one wants to study the tacit values and ideas? At the time of the interviews, one of us was no longer employed in a 'rural studies' department and it could therefore be questioned whether she was still an insider to this community. We decided to adopt Narayan's (1993) stance that we all belong to a number of communities simultaneously. To us, an insider is someone who is considered an insider by the other members of a given community and/or who participates on a par with the other members of that community. Often, when researchers state they are insiders to a given community, they are outsiders in the sense that they are researchers and thus not participating equally with the others in that community. We consider ourselves insiders to the agri-rural research community because we were considered insiders by the other members and participated on a par with them.

For analytical purposes, it is interesting to separate the two insider roles. In reality, however, this becomes very difficult as the two roles are intertwined: We were colleagues with our interviewees because we share(d) research matter.⁴

Method and data

The data used in the present paper were transcripts of the five interviews used in the 'original paper', field notes made

during and after these interviews, and correspondence with the interviewees concerning the manuscript.

The interviews were semi-structured, focused around ten different themes (as mentioned above). All interviews were taped in agreement with the interviewee and later transcribed. We both participated in all five interviews and took turns at being the interviewer. During the interviews, which were recorded, we both took notes. Furthermore, we wrote down our immediate impressions after each interview and later used these to carry out mini focus group meetings with each other. This process of reflecting upon the interviews highlighted the different thoughts we had regarding the interviewee as well as the interview situation and turned out to be very useful for the later analysis. We used data triangulation in order to strengthen the credibility of our research and to create new insights (see Baxter & Eyles 1997; Madsen & Adriansen 2004).

Two interviews were with professors (one female and one male) and three interviews with younger members (two males and one female) of the research community. Concerning our own position, it should be mentioned that we are both human geographers with more than ten years experience in carrying out fieldwork and have made interviews in numerous situations. We are both women and have both finished our master's and doctoral degrees at the department of geography where three of the interviewees were employed. At the time of the interviews, we were engaged in postdoctoral research outside geography departments. One of us was at the department where the other two interviewees were working, and one was employed at a third research institution. This means that we had different relations to the interviewees. Some were present colleagues, some former colleagues, some were friends,⁵ and one was also a former supervisor to one of us. It is important to note that the project was situated in Scandinavian academia as this has bearings for the social, cultural as well as economic situation in which the knowledge was constructed. In Scandinavia, education is free and accessible for all classes, gender relations are fairly equal, academia is not particularly hierarchical, and social and cultural relations in academia are anti-authoritative.⁶ Furthermore, recent research has shown that the workplace culture in Scandinavian academia is different from that in other European countries (Hasse et al. 2008).

Research implications of the double insider role

In order to shed light upon the implications of the double insider role, we now turn the attention to the different phases of the research process. In that way, the outcome of the research is related to the actual practice performed.

Planning the interviews

Being insiders provided us with many advantages in the planning phase: shared outlook, cultural understanding and close knowledge of the context. We were also aware, however, that it would be a challenge. During the planning

phase, we had several discussions about the possible effects and conflicts it could raise, both in relation to our research and in relation to our position within the community. First, there was the question of legitimacy. We found it relevant to study the making of geographical research, but would the research community perceive it to be legitimate to question the research topics, theories and methods, i.e. the hegemonic discourse used within the community? Second, we discussed our status within the community. How could we, as young researchers within the field, navigate through this? Qualitative researchers often challenge hegemonic discourses and taken for granted knowledge and some qualitative researchers have pointed to the difficulties in gaining the necessary perspective when studying one's own community (e.g. Bogan & Biklen 1998; Giddens 2003). These reflections were both frustrating and inspiring for the research process. They became part not only of the planning phase but also of the whole research process and still seemed alive even when writing this article.

The interviewees were contacted by e-mail in which we asked for an interview and explained the purpose of the study. Subsequently, we telephoned the interviewees to make an appointment concerning the interview. Sending an e-mail first rather than telephoning them was chosen in order to distance ourselves personally from the interviewees and to create a 'professional' distance.

All the researchers we contacted were willing to participate – perhaps because they were our colleagues and felt obliged to say yes, and perhaps because we knew how to 'handle them' so they would be positive. Hence, in this case we benefited from the insider role – from knowing our interviewees well.

The interview situation

It has been argued that being an insider to particular communities enables the researcher to understand and empathise with the interviewees' points of view (Oakley 1981; Browne 2003). For us, however, this insider position was also a challenge especially in the interview situation. This can be described in relation to two issues: power relations and presupposed shared understandings. These issues are elaborated upon in the following.

Power relations. As argued by Kvale (1996), in professional interviews such as a research interview, there is usually an asymmetry of power because the researcher is in charge of questioning the researched. This has been further elaborated by Rose (1997), who has pointed to the links between power and difference or distance. Due to our position as insiders, however, there was little difference or distance between us as researchers and our colleagues, the researched. We tried to create this distance by being 'professional and not personal'. Some of the interviewees acknowledged this approach and chose similarly to be 'professional'. By professional we mean answering to our request in a formal manner, not chatting too much about collegial matters, and acting as though we did not know each other as well as we did. With some of the interviewees it was easier to create a distance and they were

willing to accord us the analytical power of researcher and discuss the issues on our agenda. The concept 'analytical power of the researcher' stems from Rose (1997). She explains that the researcher holds a privileged position by deciding the questions asked and when they are asked, by directing the flow of the discourse, and by having the final power of interpretation. This analytical power is present even when the researcher is an insider. Rose further links the analytical power of the researcher to the issue of distance. Even though the researcher and the researched may be placed in the same landscape of power, there is still a distance between them due to the analytical power of the researcher. With other interviewees we had to negotiate the power relation during the interview and we had difficulties in maintaining the position as interviewers. Especially the three interviewees who knew both of us well had different ways of approaching the situation. While two of them accepted the situation although with a quite different approach, the third person approached the situation with hesitation.

As discussed by Kvale (1996), an interview follows an unwritten script with different roles specified for the two actors. The script may be described as an agreement on the roles of the involved parties and how they act. For instance, the interviewer defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview and the research. With one of the interviewees, we experienced a constant negotiation of our roles as described by Sin (2003). The following is an exchange from the interview:

Interviewer: Then we return to the question about rural studies. Well, we did not intend to jump between the questions ...

Interviewee [interrupting]: That's because your interview guide isn't made well enough.

Interviewer: Well, it's because we did not anticipate that you ...

Interviewee [interrupting]: That I didn't sign it!⁷

During this interview, we had to explain what the purpose of the interview several times, tell what the other interviews had been like, and discuss when the tape recorder should be turned on, etc. To us, it seemed as though the interviewee tried to ignore the unwritten script (mentioned above). Normally, the script will be implicit in the sense that it is not articulated but instead embodied through the situation, e.g. the interviewer takes the leading role and the interviewee accepts the questions posed by the interviewer. In our case the interviewee avoided the script by questioning our professionalism and thereby the power relation of our respective positions.

We do not know if this interviewee intentionally wanted to question our professionalism and our tools. Nevertheless, the situation was marked by our difficulties in obtaining the analytical power of the interviewer. Another example of the negotiation of the script is shown in the following exchange from the same interview:

Interviewer: Imagine that you were going to edit a book

Interviewee: I won't have time to do that

Interviewer: Well, you will get some time to edit a book

Knowing the interviewee, who was usually polite to outsiders, we interpreted the blunt refusal 'I won't have time to

do that' as part of our usual way of talking and hence a clear sign that we were insiders.

The other two interviewees accepted the script, although they did so in two different ways. One of them took on a very professional attitude, 'pretending' that we were not well acquainted, while the other embraced the situation by joking. The last two interviewees only knew one of us very well, which made the situation closer to a 'normal' outsider interview situation. In these two cases, the script was accepted implicitly and we were given the analytical power of the researcher.

Being an insider in relation to one's research matter means that as an interviewer one's professionalism can be at stake. We knew from previous research that an outsider position allows a researcher to ask questions that an interviewee may consider 'stupid' but which can reveal unexpected and valuable information. It is difficult to ask this kind of 'stupid' questions while maintaining a professional attitude. Likewise, the interviewee may feel that their research practice is under scrutiny by a fellow colleague. Only in one instance did an interviewee directly question our roles as researchers within the same research field:

Interviewers: What are rural studies? Can you explain that to us?

Interviewee: Do you want *me* to explain that to *you*?

Apart from this, the interviewees did not react as if the questions made them feel uncomfortable or that they feared giving 'wrong' answers.

Presupposed shared understandings. During the interviews we experienced that the interviewees used examples and metaphors, which we were supposed to understand because we were assumed to share the discourse and to have the same frame of reference. Thereby their answers to our questions became implicit in character. When reading the transcribed interviews, it was clear that many of the sentences did not make sense outside the community because they are inscribed in expected mutual understandings. With three of the interviewees in particular, our relationship was of rather close character where it was difficult to escape this 'common frame of reference' and thereby to obtain explicit answers which would make sense to a wider audience. On reflection, we felt it was awkward if we asked the interviewee to clarify an answer. For instance, one interviewee said:

That's why we have done a great deal within that field and you know that it has been the point of departure for what we have done.

Such a comment does not 'invite' the interviewer to ask for an elaboration – because we were supposed to know what the respondent talked about. We could have asked the interviewees to clarify this, but we experienced the same problems as described in DeLyser (2001), that asking the simplest question in an insider situation can present a great challenge because the respondents expect that you know already. The expression 'you know' may cause problems – how does one know whether one actually knows what the respondents mean when they are not explicit? Again this was most common with the interviewees we knew best. On the other hand, it could also be strange not to acknowledge

shared understandings. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned a large, international research project which the interviewee and the one of the interviewers both were members of. The interviewee referred to this project as if we did not know it at all, explaining its purpose and content. When we compared our notes, it turned out that we had interpreted the situation quite differently, while one of us (the one who was member of the research project) had felt that the interviewee was condescending and felt offended, the other had seen the interviewee's reaction as a positive way of creating a professional distance between us while in an interview situation.

The interview place

In line with Elwood & Martin (2000) and Sin (2003), we wanted to pay attention to the spatial contexts under which interviews are carried out. Our interviews were conducted in the interviewee's office if possible – one was held in a small library down the corridor from the interviewee's very small office and one in the home of the interviewer. The office location was preferred in order to use the spatial aspect strategically to situate the interviews in their social and cultural context and thereby enrich the explanations of the participants as described by Elwood & Martin (2000).

We did not experience much difference between conducting the interviews in the interviewees' office or in the library. Using the home of the interviewer, however, was quite different. This location was neither a benefit nor a drawback; rather, it underlined the fact that we were close colleagues. It only related to one side of the insider role – being colleagues. Further, we did not find the interview different in terms of the data gathered. The place emphasised the informal relationship we had with the interviewee, because in an outsider situation we would not have invited an interviewee to our home. The reason why we chose to do that was that the interviewee was on leave. The interviewer's home was relatively close to that of the interviewee. This interview was very much like a conversation and not as much marked by question and answers as the other interviews. The unconventional interview location gave rise to a conversation rather than an interview.

Another of the interviewees had just returned from a research stay abroad and had a number of boxes with books and papers in the middle of their office. The person was in the process of unpacking when we arrived and continued doing so during the first part of the interview. Unpacking the books and papers that had been used abroad caused the interviewee to reflect upon the outcome of the time spent at another research institution. In this way, the place of the interview influenced the issues talked about during the interview. Hence, in that case the interview location affected the type of data gathered. Because the interviewee was unpacking and thereby reflecting on the recent experiences abroad, we received a richer interview than we would have expected in a more 'neutral' location with no associations. Besides influencing on the content of the interview, the fact that the respondent was unpacking also affected the interview situation; it became less formal. Different interview

sites can situate the participants in particular ways that affect the power relations of the interview experience. After the interview, we discussed whether the interviewee had continued unpacking because we were colleagues and the interviewee did not feel that it was necessary to sit down formally; or whether this was a question of power relations in the sense that, being a professor, the interviewee felt that it was not a priority to stop unpacking and focus fully on the interview. In both cases, the choice of interview location was marked by the insider relation.

Analysing the interviews and writing the paper

Being part of the research field ourselves gave us opportunities and insights that were used throughout the analysis. However, it was also a challenge to have so much insight into the context as described by Strauss (1987). Many respondents were skipping details, words were unspoken, and points were hinted at and not specified. Besides the difficulties of quoting from the interviews, it also turned out to be difficult to analyse the discourses because of the numerous references made to experiences we had in common. We did not always know whether we had the same understanding of the examples and metaphors as the interviewees, as shown in the following example:

Interviewee: We have never, and you know that as children of this house, we have never used that terminology.

In a paper on how to use sociolinguistic methods to uncover speaker meaning in teacher interview transcripts, Olsen (2006) found that by studying how teachers talk about themselves, about teaching and about their experiences, the teacher's meaning system can be understood. It is precisely the understanding of the meaning systems of our interviewees that became difficult to study due to their implicit character.

In order to receive some feedback on our paper on research communities, we presented our thoughts at a conference.⁸ Further, we sent the manuscript to two peers, one in Scotland and one in Denmark. In this way, we worked with the paper as with any other paper – presenting it at a conference, discussing it with peers. Often we also discussed our research with colleagues over lunch, for instance. In this case, however, we did not involve our immediate colleagues, both because we did not want to jeopardise the relationship with our interviewees and because we had promised them confidentiality. After the paper was accepted for publication, we both felt more at ease talking about it with our colleagues.

In the process of writing the paper, we often discussed how our arguments would be perceived by our interviewees. Following our normal 'codes of conduct' for research we would have allowed our interviewees to see the outcome of the interviews; therefore, our colleagues had been promised that they would be given the chance to see the paper before publication.⁹ However, our double insider role meant that by showing the paper to our colleagues, we were letting them into our research process. Likewise, by asking our interviewees about their theoretical stance and their research

methodology, our colleagues could feel that we were 'checking' their ways of conducting research – which, in fact, we were. Hence, both parties may have felt that their professionalism was at stake.

After reading the first draft of the paper, one of our interviewees responded:

I disagree with your first comment ... as I read it, 'we' appear ignorant – a picture which I think is neither fair nor quite correct. [And further:] I sense that your thesis is that there is a final and correct way of doing things – and that you are checking our statements against this ideal.

The above statements caused us to rewrite the paper in order to avoid making any of our interviewees appear ignorant. There is no doubt that we reacted much more to the criticism because it was put forward by a fellow researcher than if the person in question had been a 'typical' interviewee. Again, our professionalism was at stake. While writing the paper, we realised that our interviewees had more of a say in our interpretations than usual because we were researchers within the same field. We could not ignore their objections with a reference to 'our way of seeing the world' precisely because we were insiders. Hence, the interviewees were 'with us' until the end of the research process. The ending of a research process has been discussed by Reiss (2005). He argues that managing endings in longitudinal studies is an overlooked aspect within many ethical codes of conducting research. We find that being insiders adds to the complexity of managing endings in research projects and needs attention.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The aim of this paper has been to discuss the double insider role when conducting interviews. It has been shown that a distinction between being insider in relation to one's interviewees and being insider in relation to one's research matter is important because the insider role is negotiated differently in the two cases. Furthermore, the two different roles provide different challenges. Being an insider in relation to one's interviewees means that friendship or interpersonal relations can be at stake, while being an insider into research practice and discourses means that one's role as a researcher may be at stake. In practice, being an insider in relation to one's interviewees provides a number of benefits and some drawbacks. Being an insider to one's research matter, on the other hand, is more difficult and calls for close attention to the possible pitfalls.

Although it can be difficult to distinguish the two roles, we find this distinction useful analytically and have therefore attempted to illustrate some of the differences and to provide recommendations for each role separately. As insiders to our research matter, we wanted to question the hegemonic discourses within our community. However, it was difficult to question tacit values and ideas in an 'innocent' manner. By questioning the hegemonic discourse, we would no longer be part of the hegemony and hence our role as insiders could be questioned. This was a real challenge.

While it was an advantage that we knew the discourse, it was at the same time a disadvantage that we were insiders because it was difficult to question the very same discourse. One should be aware that by questioning the hegemonic discourse, one might end up as an outsider in relation to one's interviewees.

Conducting insider interviews with colleagues or friends demands an attentive interviewer who is conscious about pursuing 'you know' type of answers, and making sure that she or he actually does know. Otherwise, the interviewer may end up with data material that is of little or no use because it is full of insider remarks which do not make sense to an outside audience.

While the two roles can be separated analytically, it proved difficult in practice as the two roles coexisted simultaneously throughout our research process. Being a double insider seems to result in a complex, intertwined web of interconnected relations which are not easily separated either in the planning phase or during the analytical phase of the research project.

As mentioned above, our research practice was questioned by one of the respondents and this led to a negotiation of the power relations during the interview. That particular interview is an example of the how roles may coexist and intertwine. During the interview, we found that showing our research practice (conducting interviews) to a friend and fellow researcher was especially difficult. This negotiation of power relations during the interview was due both to the fact that we were insiders to the research matter and to our insider relation to the interviewee as colleagues. The interviewee would not 'allow' us to question the hegemonic discourse or deconstruct the making of geographical knowledge at the particular department where we had spent more than ten years. Hence, we had been socialised into the field of geography by this person and thereby we were related to this person both through the joint interest in the research matter and by being colleagues. Consequently, it is worth considering whether one can be too close to one's interviewees. By 'too close' we mean that it becomes difficult to ask 'stupid' questions without appearing ignorant or losing face professionally, and at the same time it is difficult to question the joint understanding without jeopardising the collegial friendship.

We want to point out that the insider role is not one role but often a number of roles where one can change from being an insider to being an outsider during the research and that the two insider roles exist simultaneously and are intertwined. Often the situation is characterised by a complex multitude of negotiations. It is important to bear in mind that this affects the interviews throughout the process and that we as insiders should pay attention to the way our role(s) shape(s) the outcome of our research. Further, one has to pay attention to positionality of the involved actors and be aware of the many possible roles one takes on and that the roles are dynamic and can be negotiated during the research process.

This paper has also shown that it is not only the interview situation that is affected by the insider role. It influences the whole research process, from discussing the idea and preparing the interviews to conducting the interviews,

analysing and reporting the work. By being explicit about this, we have tried to shed light on our own role in constructing knowledge.

The issue of being a double insider includes some important methodological considerations when trying to understand the production of geographical knowledge. Therefore, the insider role should be added to the list of issues that are important to consider when geographers study geographers and the making of geography.

Based on our findings, we have extracted the following recommendations for other researchers undertaking equivalent types of projects:

- Pursue 'you know' answers during interviews, otherwise the material may be of little use to a wider audience whose members 'do not know'
- Be aware of one's own and others' role and shifting roles during the research process. Pay close attention to the issue of positionality as this has implications both for the interview situation (and thereby the material collected) and for the interpretation of the material
- Acknowledge that some people may too close to one to establish an interviewer/interviewee relationship
- Step back from the insider role in order to gain perspective, while being prepared that questioning taken-for-granted knowledge may change one's role from insider to outsider in relation to the research community under research.

Finally, it is worth noting that the effect of being an insider will vary between countries. Undoubtedly, the behaviour and negotiation of power relations would be interpreted differently outside a Scandinavian academic workplace context. Therefore, the 'original paper' along with the present one is a Scandinavian contribution to the growing body of papers by geographers who study the making of geographical knowledge and geographers' work.

Notes

- 1 The issue of 'putting philosophies of geographies into practice' was first raised at the annual meeting of Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers in London in 2002. One session was devoted to addressing geographers' everyday activities and the theoretical-methodological tools which geographers use.
- 2 It should be noted that the dialogue project mentioned earlier resulted in the book titled *Geographers of Norden* (Hägerstrand & Buttimer 1988).
- 3 In this paper, we apply the Scandinavian definition of Scandinavia as comprising the countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark.
- 4 This led to the first paper of this study, a paper which the interviewees were invited to comment on before publication. The reflections and analyses in the present paper concerning the roles of the interviewer are, however, solely based on our interpretations and have thus been a more internal endeavour.
- 5 Here we employ Browne's idea of friendship: 'By friends I mean that we would meet regularly, outside of the research setting, share social occasions and hold a common notion of being friends' (Browne 2003, 134).
- 6 While this is a crude generalisation, we want to make clear that Scandinavia is different from, for example, the UK and the USA in these aspects and that our knowledge is constructed in this particular context.
- 7 It should be noted that the interviews were conducted in Danish. We have chosen verbatim translations over 'elegant' ones. Further, we have avoided quoting from interviews where the tonal clues, such as irony, should be known in order to fully understand the meaning of the sentence.

8 'Cultural turns, Rural turns: critical (re)appraisals', 16–18 September 2003, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, organised by the Rural Economy and Society Study Group (RESSG).

9 See Reiss (2005) for an interesting and very honest account of the consequences of not showing the results of one's research to interviewees before publication.

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