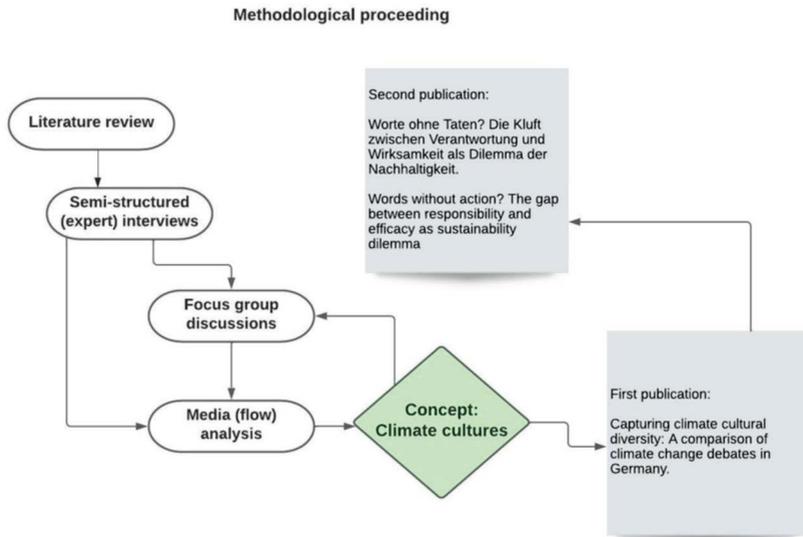


Figure 2: Methodological proceeding (own presentation)



As a preliminary step, an extensive literature review was carried out from September 2018 until May 2019. Key terms were searched in different combinations in German and English in relevant literature data banks and online libraries like *Google Scholar*, the *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)*, the *International Bibliography of Periodical Literature* as well as the internal OPAC of the *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU)* and the online catalogue of the *Bavarian State Library*.

The following terms were searched:

climate change, climate action, climate policy, sustainable development, green consumption, green growth, de-growth, sufficiency, education for sustainable development, responsibility, climate responsibility, responsibility diffusion, self-efficacy, efficacy, power, power relations, societal power relations, climate justice, culture and climate, climate cultures, practice theory, individualism, cognitivism, embodied information, social space, habitus, rationality, denial, climate change denial, collective denial

Core concepts and key ideas were subsequently collected, organised, excerpted and edited further. Based on the overview gained through this literature review, the guideline for the semi-structured expert interviews was developed.

3.4 Expert interview analysis

In this first empirical step, interviews were exclusively held with experts (mainly scholars, government officials, politicians, representatives of NGOs), i.e., individ-

uals who had specialised knowledge on the topic of the societal reception and treatment of climate change and climate action.

The following table shows the interview partners' professional roles:

Table 1: Interview partners/experts (own presentation)

Date	Interview partners (IPs)
19/03/2019	Academic (sustainable consumption)
26/03/2019	Division head (climate change) at private foundation
12/04/2019	Head of environmental NGO
16/04/2019	Chairperson socio-ecological think tank
25/04/2019	Academic (sustainability innovation)
26/04/2019	Expert 1 federal environmental agency
02/05/2019	Expert 2 federal environmental agency
08/05/2019	Academic (sociology and sustainability)
21/05/2019	Teacher (secondary education)
27/05/2019	Member of Bundestag (CDU)
16/07/2019	Member of Bavarian parliament (Freie Wähler)

Here, the aim was to gain a comprehensive overview over the current state of 'official' knowledge in connection to climate related responsibility attributions, efficacy expectations and the role of scientific information for practical behaviour in society. These official discourses presented an apt starting point for gaining access to the stances that exist in German society: however, here I was acutely aware that they represented only a fraction of the population, namely certain privileged segments of society (that hold high levels of what Bourdieu considers to be *cultural capital*). Therefore, they can be classified as *elite discourses*.

Guided semi-structured interviews with experts were chosen as a qualitative method, because the interview partners can be considered 'part of the practice field' (Meuser and Nagel, 1991, cited in Schirmer et al., 2009, p. 194). Therefore, they are 'intimate insiders' (Liebold and Trinczek, 2002, cited in *ibid.*) of a particular socially relevant topic, in this case climate change and -action. Because of his or her presence in the field, the expert is an experienced specialist with regard to the practices and ways of thinking that are commonplace in German society in connection with the topic of climate change and -action.

As Schirmer et al. write: "In general, this method is part of a comprehensive examination of a research subject. By itself, expert interviews and their analysis do

not make much sense" (Schirmer, 2009, p. 193). This is because it is imperative that further perspectives beyond the view of the expert are considered, so that more inclusiveness can be attained. Precisely for this reason, this method only embodies the first out of three steps for data collection within this study.

The method of the semi-structured interview, hence an interview that uses a rough guideline, was chosen because according to Meuser and Nagel this does justice to both, "the thematically bounded interest of the researcher", as well as the expert in his or her function (1991, p. 448). The preparation necessary for the conception of the guideline (here, the extensive literature review) ensured that the researcher was already familiar with the foundations of the research subject necessary for the conversation. Besides, "even though this might sound paradoxical, it is indeed precisely [...] the guideline itself, that guarantees the openness of the interview" (ibid., 1991, p. 449). When it is seen not as a recipe, but instead as a backup tool, the interview will be kept alive and not be impeded by it.

Of course, the choice of the interview partners does also hold significance – i.e., experts who are qualified to grant their insight into the stances of the public as well as to give their own personal perspective. Here, the selection criterion was that the expert needed to have significant professional contact with the topic of climate change. Additionally, the aim was to paint as broad a picture of expert assessment as possible, hence professionals from the fields of science, politics, NGOs and private businesses (albeit them still all belonging to the exclusive category of *elite* discourses) were included. Generally, initial contact was established via phone and email. The interview partners were partially recruited via the researcher's own network and partially, in order to prevent the interviews from becoming too biased by this one specific societal position, via internet research and subsequent cold call. Hence recruiting was not carried out according to a random methodological scientific strategy, which did however bring the advantage of alleviating initial reservations through the superficial connection that did already exist (in some of the cases). This helped in the research moment, making it resemble a more relaxed private and therefore authentic conversation.

Furthermore, in two cases the method of *snowball sampling* was used, i.e., people were contacted on the recommendation of individuals already interviewed who knew someone who could further contribute meaningfully to the research subject. Already in 1958, James Coleman believed this strategy to be particularly helpful for social-scientific research, as it enables the creation of a setting along existing and naturally interacting entities. There is however a certain apprehension that in this interview situation, there is an increased risk for *social desirability* to occur, namely a distortion of response behaviour that is attributable to the need for social validation. This then manifests itself through expected answers and a fear of rejection or judgement by the interview partner if an authentic response were to be given (cf. Bundesamt für Naturschutz, 2014, p. 21). Udo Kuckartz gets to the heart of this issue by

saying: “Of course it is not difficult to respond to the questions, similar to those one is asked by border authorities when entering into the US, in the right way and immediately you find yourself in the delicate presence of committed protectors of the environment” (2010, p. 145). This obstacle was dealt with by completely anonymising the interviews, which was clearly communicated to the interview partners beforehand and guaranteed via a data privacy form.

Of course, in this way the researcher’s classification of who is seen as an expert played a fundamental role: “Already at this point it becomes apparent that at the end of the day what enters into the thesis as expert knowledge lies in the discretion of the researcher” (Schirmer, 2009, p. 195). Moreover, it is necessary to reflect on what role the person speaks in in the research moment. Since the expert status in most cases resulted from the experts’ occupational roles, they potentially saw themselves as representatives of their particular field which may have had consequences for the openness with which it was spoken. Therefore, it must be recognised that the experts did not provide *facts*. Instead they presented matters that they judged out of their special professional perspective, which in turn was being supplemented by personal motivation as well as aspects stemming from several social contexts. “Hence it is about open, secluded, secret, reflected, un-reflected, formal or informal, conscious or subconscious knowledge” (*ibid.*). Since all these knowledge types are important in their own right, the challenge consisted in bringing to the table a certain sensitivity for reading *between the lines* in order to adapt the interview strategy to each conversation respectively as well as for the subsequent analysis.

In one of the expert interviews it became apparent that the questions in the two sections *responsibility* and *efficacy* were not perceived as distinct (enough). Consequently, the interview guide was adapted slightly. Overall, the guideline succeeded in repeatedly prompting the conversations, yielding a series of relevant and comparable answers in each interview. Furthermore, a few high-ranking politicians could be recruited, which allowed a valuable insight into the connection of information and power that presents one key focus of the present study.

It proved unproblematic to find interview partners as they all, by the nature of their occupation, had a pronounced interest in the topic. However, disappointingly, an AfD-member of the Bundestag cancelled his (long planned) interview on very late notice. It would have been particularly interesting to see how a politician who does not speak out for climate action would have answered these same questions.

3.5 Media analysis

This study’s main aim was to establish “the connection to the social fields of practice and the specific expectations for concrete [relational] offers and etiquette” (Bremer, 2004, p. 16). As one-on-one interviews alone are not equipped to deliver this, “fig-