

OBSERVATION, INTERVIEW, NOTE TAKING, DOCUMENTS

OBSERVATION:

Observation is a way of generating empirical material in *naturally occurring settings*. Note taking ((+ photos, video, audio)) is very important when observing.

Can be:

- * Passive observation
- * Participant observation

- Immersion
- Intersubjective understandings between researcher and researched (Crang & Cook 2007)

- * No innocent positions

Targeted note-taking: Focus can be on objects, people, events, place (naturally occurring). (Blomberg et al. 1993) – could be on human-artifact relation; on conceptions (of e.g. identity, cooperation, or e.g. users); activities (planned, unplanned, where, how); interactions (with whom/what, how, where, frequency, directions, forms of communication (formal, informal, silent, loud, noise, etc.)); patterns, deviations, routines, rhythms, etc. (Crang & Cook 2007). It depends on your research question / topic / interest.

* What people say they do and what (we observe) them do is not the same (ideal and manifest behavior) (Blomberg et al. 1993 + Crang and Cook 2007).

* Be aware of loaded categories - instead provide detailed descriptions

* Where are we, weather, time of day, location, who is present (for full list see Crang & Cook 2007:51- 2)

Besides conversing with the one(s) studied, during PO, you can study/note the following when conducting observation – this also goes for interviewing:

- * Body language
- * Gestures
- * Cues that lend meaning to words
- * Setting of location
- * Other people present (The Sage Handbook 2005 + Crang & Cook 2007)

* Interviewing is part of participant observation

INTERVIEW:

Interviews are not naturally occurring, they are 'constructed' by researchers, and, as such, they do not provide direct access to the experiences of the ones studied (Silverman 1998). Other artificial research environments: focus groups, experiments, survey, questionnaires. Also, remember that naturally occurring data is coined by what you want to do with them; that is, no data is 'untouched by human hands' (Silverman 2005).

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Interviews can be:

- * Structured interviews (planned, strict procedure to be followed)
- * Semi-structured interviews (few questions / a topic to discuss)
- * Unstructured interviews (open-ended, no planned topic) (Sage Handbook 2005)

How to ask questions?

'Grand-tour': what, who, where and how? -> their words, their version

- Wherefore
- What do you mean, when you say..
- Can you tell more about how it can be that you do this, not that
- How did you get involved, interested, enrolled.. (Crang & Cook 2007)

'Why' questions can be asked within qualitative research, but avoid using them (or wait as long as possible with asking them) – they lead to a path of means and ends / presuppose that the person knows why / mute open-ended answers / mute the relational. (The Handbook 2005 + Silverman 2005).

Issues to consider:

- Information about project
- Ethical considerations (informed consent – see course page for an example)¹
- Where (location, on the move)
- Who is present
- E-interviews / Online setting (lecture on Sept. 15th)
- Transcriptions (Crang & Cook 2007)

Group Interviews (focus group)

- * Can be systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in formal or informal setting.
- * Can be brainstorming with little, no structure or direction from the interviewer or structured
- * Can be based upon stimuli (topics, visual aids) provided by the researcher (Crang & Cook 2005; Sage Handbook 2005; Silverman 2005; Blomberg et al. 1993).

Important issues when conducting GI:

- * How many? Who?
- * Moderator
- * Group dynamic
- * Participation and viewpoints from all is welcome, not looking for consensus
- * Take notes after session (Crang & Cook 2005)

¹ Datatilsynet (Personvern) informs us that as long as the interview stays on the (analog/digital) recorder - not being transferred to a PC (computer) - and as long as you preserve the anonymity of your informants in your transcripts (personal data, places, etc. that leaves traces to who they are (aka Gisle's lecture)), and as long as you destroy the recording(s) after your exercise, you do not have to apply for permission to conduct the interview.

NOTE TAKING – used both within interview and observation

Keep a journal – field diary or note book through out your research process (Crang & Cook 2007)

Jot down what you observe / encounter / hear / smell / engage in / non-verbal communication / tone of voice / etc. Remember to note: date, time, place, persons present (roles, occupation, affiliation). Video, photos, tape recordings serve as good memorable-tones, but remember to ‘log’ them. (Blomberg et al. 1993). Also, if you use a tape recorder and non-verbal communication happens (e.g. pointing at something, shaking head) make sure to take notes (Crang & Cook 2007).

Fieldnotes are notes you:

*jot down of impressions in the field while (participant-)observing, listening in, talking, asking, doing (“**scratch notes**” Sanjek 1990).

*take when you engage in direct conversations about a topic (interview) and write answers down verbatim away from ongoing activities (**notes of “transcription”**, Clifford 1990) – (e.g. what artifact is this, answer, what do you call it, answer, what do you use it for, answer, how is it different from x artifact you use, answer, when do you use it, answer, do others use it, answer, for the same purpose as you, answer, etc.)

*make when you write up your impressions or ‘verbatim’ and make “a more or less coherent representation of an observed cultural reality. While still piecemeal and rough, such field descriptions are designed to serve as a data base for later writing an interpretation aimed at the production of a finished account. [...] it involves [...] a turning away from dialogue and observation toward a separate place of writing, a place for reflection, analysis, and interpretation.” (Ibid:51-52, original italic). (these notes are “**descriptive notes**” Ibid.)²

*write down (each day) after your empirical study – reflections, questions to ask, your reaction, etc. (these notes are “**fieldnote records**” Sanjek 1990).

DOCUMENTS/texts already in the public sphere to serve as empirical material

– what and where to be found:

- * Newspapers
- * Libraries
- * Local / state archives
- * TV, radio, internet
- * Screen dumps
- * Letters
- * Agreements
- * Annual reports
- * Marked surveys
- * Brochures (see eg. Crang & Cook 2007:67)

² Literature not listed on syllabus:

The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 2005

Clifford, J. (1990): Notes on (Field)notes. In Sanjek, R. (ed.): *Fieldnotes. The Makings of Anthropology*. Cornell University Press. Pp. 47-70.

Mautner, T. (2005): *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*. Penguin Books.

Sanjek, R. (1990): A vocabulary for Fieldnotes. In Sanjek, R. (ed.): *Fieldnotes. The Makings of Anthropology*. Cornell University Press. Pp. 92-121.

Silverman, D. (2005): *Doing Qualitative Research*. Sage.