METHODS 1: OBSERVATION, INTERVIEW, NOTE TAKING, DOCUMENTS

INF5220
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Based on Sisse Finken’s lecture notes
OBSERVATION

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

Observation can be:
• Passive observation
• Participant observation

• Becoming an «apprentice»

(Crang & Cook 2007)
OBSERVATION

• 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).

• Where are we, weather, time of day, location, who is present (for full list see Crang & Cook 2007:51-52)

• Interviewing is part of participant observation

• Besides conversing with the one(s) studied, during participant observation, 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)

• No neutral positions
  Stuart Hall: Media and The Representions (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sbYyw1mPdQ)
OBSERVATION

- Targeted note-taking: Focus can be on objects, people, events, place (Blomberg et al. 1993) – could be on
  - human-artifact relation
  - concepts practiced (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.

- Be aware of *loaded categories*
  - instead provide detailed descriptions
INTERVIEW 1

• Not naturally occurring. ‘Constructed’ by researchers, and, as such, do not provide direct access to the experiences of the ones studied (Silverman 1998)

• Other artificial research environments:
  • group interviews
  • experiments,
  • survey,
  • questionnaires (Silverman 2005)

• Naturally occurring data is coined by what you want to do with them
  • no data is ‘untouched by human hands’ (Silverman 2005)

Interviews can be:
• Structured interviews (planned, strict procedure to be followed)
• Semi-structured interviews (few questions / a checklist)
• Unstructured interviews (open-ended, no planned topic) (Sage Handbook 2005; Madden 2010)
INTERVIEW 2

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)
    • they lead to a path of means and ends /
    • presuppose that the person knows why
• Be aware of loaded/ directive questions  (Madden 2010, Crang&Cook 2007)

• Intersubjective understanding between you and your interviewee
INTERVIEW 3

• Aim: The long stories of events

• “It is better to appear slightly dim and too agreeable than to give any sign of a critical or sardonical attitude” (McCracken 1988, in Crang&Cook 2007, p 69).

• Practical:
• Take care that your recording equipment is
  • with you
  • functioning
  • with batteries
  • enough memory
  • familiar to you
• Take notes in addition to taping
  • Note the time often

Source: Warfieldian
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Issues to consider

• Preparations / background research
• Information about your project
• Ethical considerations (informed consent – see course page for an example)
• Where (location, on the move)
• Who is present
• Transcribing
• E-interviews / Online setting (Gisle’s lecture on March 6th)
• Follow the Norwegian rules from Datatilsynet
  – see the course page for link
  Datatilsynet (Personvern) informs us that
  - as long as the interview stays on the (analog/digital) recorder
  - not being transferred to a PC (computer)
  - 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))
  - as long as you destroy the recording(s) after your exercise,
  you do not have to apply for their permission to conduct the interview.

Still use a consent form.
NOTE TAKING

• Used both within interview and observation
• Keep a journal, field diary or note book throughout the research process (Crang and 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, 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; Madden 2010).
FIELD NOTES are notes you

• Jot down of impressions in the field while (participant-) observing, listening in, talking, asking, doing

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

• For example:
  • what artifact is this, answer
  • what do you call it, answer
  • what do you use it for, answer
  • when, 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
DESCRIPTIVE FIELD NOTES

• When you write up your impressions or ‘verbatims’:

• 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.” (Clifford 1990:51--52, original italic).
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)
Literature not listed on syllabus

- The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 2005
Oral presentation

Each group is responsible for presenting a paper to the class and questions to another group’s presentation to be discussed in class.

Today we distribute the papers.