

507X8B Ethnographic Methods

15 credits

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The aim of this module is to introduce students to “ethnography” as a research approach and practice, and to consider its relation with ethnography as text (i.e. the written outcome of such research). It will introduce students to the diverse toolkit that comprises “ethnographic methods” and offer them an opportunity to try out some of them in the context of a small team project.

Ethnography was developed by anthropologists in the context of studies of small, primarily non-Western societies in the early twentieth century, but since then, it has continued to evolve and has been adapted to a great variety of settings and used to address a wide range of topics. Ethnography is now conducted not only by anthropologists but by practitioners of diverse disciplines. We ask, ‘what makes ethnography a distinctive method?’, and consider the forms of ‘data’ this enables.

We will look at key concepts that underpin the ethnographic approach, including “tacit knowledge”, “emic” perspectives, field sites, context, “thick description” and “reflexivity”. We will consider the diverse ways that ethnographers learn about familiar and unfamiliar cultures, and the practical aspects of conducting ethnography. This includes issues of access to ethnographic settings, comportment in the field, observation, participation, and processes of recording ethnographic data through field-notes, field diaries and technologies. Although the emphasis in this module will be on doing ethnography, students will be encouraged to reflect on the process of turning fieldwork into a narrative account. What are the processes and choices through which our embodied experiences of fieldwork become text? We explore how ethnography is not as a mechanical “collection of data”, but as a socially interactive and interpretive activity.

Students will form small teams around a research topic of their interest and collaboratively develop a research methodology to conduct their own fieldwork. This fieldwork should be a minimum of four days and situated in the local area. On completion of fieldwork, the research team present their research ‘process’ (rather than ‘results’) to the tutor and fellow students during the final scheduled workshop. This group presentation is 100% of the assessment and awarded a single mark. This module is centred around group work.

It is important to note that many issues of research ethics, research design, and relations between method and epistemology are covered in other modules. They are not repeated here, although their pertinence will emerge through the practical assignments.

Students will be assessed on the basis of the group presentation (assessment is collective, with a single mark given to the group as a whole).

Core readings:

Cerwonka, A and L Malkki. *Improvising theory: Process and temporality in ethnographic fieldwork*. 2007.

Davies, C.A. *Reflexive Ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others*. 1999.

Dewalt, K.M. and Dewalt, B.R. *Participant Observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. 2002.

Ellen, R.F. (ed.) *Ethnographic research: A guide to general conduct*, London and New York: Academic Press, 1984. (esp Chapter 4 Approaches to fieldwork, Chapter 5 The fieldwork experience, Chapter 8 Producing data)

Karp, I. and M. Kendall, "Reflexivity in Fieldwork" in P. Secord, ed., *Explaining Human Behavior*, 1982, pp. 249-273.

Melhuus, M., J. Mitchell and H. Wulff (eds), *Ethnographic Practice in the Present*. 2010.

Robben, A.C.G. and J. Sluka, eds. *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader*. 2006.

Sanjek, R. *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. 1990.

Recommended readings:

Emerson, R et al. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 1995.

Gay y Blasco, P. and H. Wardle, *How to Read Ethnography*. 2007. (Chap. 2 contains a discussion of an excerpt from the tutor's book, *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece*).