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3 Urban ethnography and participant observations: Studying the city from within

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Why studying the city from within?

Urban ethnography allows us to understand the city from within by engaging in the multiple perspectives and experiences of the people inhabiting, planning, building, policing, organizing, contesting, or using it. It is especially equipped to study the impact of large socio-political and economic developments like **segregation**, **gentrification**, migration, **urbanization**, ghettoization, and democratization on the real-life experience of diverse people.

Ethnography draws insights through the use of participant observations over a long period of time and repeated engagement with the field. The method has its roots in anthropology and sociology, where scholars from the Chicago School of Sociology adapted the method to study specific urban phenomena like urbanization, industrialization, and immigration (Parks, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925; Wirth, 1938).[1] They approached the city as a 'laboratory' in which people, places, and institutions could be studied through observation. The premise was that 'learning' takes place via the observation of action in its local context. They combined observations with life histories, statistical information, and maps, and were some of the first to develop mixed-methods case studies. Seeing the city as a laboratory thus urges students and scholars to leave the library and bring their bodies out into the city.

Ethnographic findings can shake up ideas we might take for granted about the way the city is lived and used, who belongs and who doesn't, and stereotypical images of neighborhoods and their inhabitants (Jaffe & Koning, 2016). It is especially equipped for projects seeking to understand cultural expressions, urban life, and subgroups. It may also have a strong spatial focus when it is used to study the routines, **aesthetics**,

1 For further reading on the ongoing relevance of CSS see the volume *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: The enduring relevance of the Chicago School of Sociology* (Jones & Rodgers, n.d.)

use, or design of urban space and place. Urban ethnography is also used to study policy processes and the ways in which the city is governed, planned, and designed (Schatz, 2013; van Hulst, 2008). By scrutinizing the practices of those responsible for governing the city and juxtaposing them with the perspectives and experiences of clients and citizens, urban ethnography provides welcome insights into the politics of welfare, police, policy, and planning *in action*.

An important goal of urban ethnography is to reveal hidden processes, for example forms of inclusion or exclusion that do not show up in statistical data or unexpected forms of agency by people who are usually described as passive. It offers a welcome 'eye-level' perspective of spaces in a world that is dominated by maps and plans drawn from a 'helicopter view'. Ethnographers look beyond policy documents and evaluations and approach policy making as a discursive practice that should be understood as enacted and embodied and that is highly contingent on its local context (Baiocchi & Connor, 2008; Wedeen, 2010; Ybema et al., 2009). All research that is concerned with the complex and multiple meanings of the city and that seeks to look beyond conventional understandings of socio-spatial, political, or cultural issues could benefit from an ethnographic approach.

Good ethnographies are usually developed through in-depth conversations with and guidance from supervisors or peers. But ethnographic fieldwork is something that researchers first and foremost have to *do*. The job of ethnographers is to go out in the streets, parks, bars, community homes, or institutions of the city and engage with everyday life. This requires researchers to trust their own sociological instincts and communicative skills. Researchers have to become skilled at listening and seeing what is relevant. They have to be able to construct a fieldwork plan but also stay open to unexpected events and opportunities.

This chapter describes a set of skills, strategies, and underlying knowledge that are necessary for any urban ethnography. While other chapters in this volume discuss **interviewing** (chapter 5), document analyses (see chapters 6 and 8), and **mapping** (see chapter 11) which are all key methodologies used in urban ethnography, here, I focus on one specific, distinctive methodology in ethnography: participant observation.

First, I will discuss the opportunities of ethnographic fieldwork, its limitations, and the underlying assumptions that ethnographers have to consider while developing the aims of a research project. In the next section, I lay out strategies to prepare for fieldwork. I focus on strategies for making qualitative fieldnotes during fieldwork. I follow with a discussion of the representation and interpretation of ethnographic data after fieldwork. Finally, I discuss issues of credibility and ethics that are especially relevant to arrive at convincing conclusions.

Introducing the case study[2]

In one of my own projects, I studied how citizens, tourists, local policymakers and politicians, police officers, and other street-level professionals negotiated **ownership** of public space in the Red Light District of Amsterdam. The period of research marks the aftermath of a policy called the 1012 project, which sought to upgrade the area, establish a more diverse range of functions, and diminish criminal activities. The policy was honed and criticized by various people and institutions, and many evaluations contradicted each other. My project started in 2014, in the period after the 1012 policy was implemented and when new challenges emerged. The area became more attractive to tourists, leading to increased crowding in the very limited public spaces. Between 2014 and 2020 the number of visitors to the city increased from 5 to 20 million, of whom the majority visited the Red Light District (Couzy, 2020). Functions that catered to local residents disappeared as rents quickly increased. A large number of residential buildings became vacations rentals with the increasing popularity of Airbnb. My research is not meant to evaluate the 1012 policy, but aims at analyzing how citizens, policymakers, and other public professionals negotiate ownership in the context of these changes. I used urban ethnography to study the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences of ownership as well as the efforts to (re)establish ownership through local interventions and policies.

'Thick description', limitations, and underlying assumptions

Studying the city from within requires a specific type of writing that is based on detailed fieldnotes and diary excerpts. Clifford Geertz called ethnographic writing '**thick description**' (Geertz, 1973: 27) referring to the detailed descriptions of what researchers see, hear, smell, and sense in order to describe situations, events, and behavior of people in such detail that the reader can be transported to the situation at hand.

Participant observation is an embodied practice that includes the experience of the researcher as an important source of information. The interactions between the researcher and the researched are fundamental as they shape the way ethnographers interpret what they observe (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 11). A common critique of ethnographic research is that it is subjective, biased, and seemingly lacks the validation criteria of predominantly quantitative studies. As discussed in the introduction of this volume, the **ontological** and **epistemological** nature of ethnography is not more or less trustworthy than quantitative research, it simply has a different form of reasoning (usually **abductive** or **inductive**), and different purposes and underlying assumptions. Its epistemology rejects the notion of a fixed truth. It is based in the **constructivist** idea that researchers are always engaged in a dialogue with what they research and that social realities are actively constructed via social interactions. By entering the field, the researcher thus changes the field itself.

2 An early analysis of this case study was published in *Rooilijn* (Verloo, 2017).

As in any methodology, there are limitations to what can be done with ethnography. These are mostly related to the specific goals of an ethnographic approach. An ethnographic approach does not enable us to predict future developments; for example, it cannot predict voting behavior or housing prices. Nor is it intended to prove causal relations, such as the likelihood of youth to turn away from crime after a policy intervention. It does not usually provide data that is generalizable for a larger unit than the unit of analysis; insights about a specific culture, place, or group can usually not be generalized for all such places or groups. But where studies that prove a correlation often cannot explain why it exists, ethnography is all about the why.

Ethnographers study *why* people behave the way they do and *why* processes unfold in a certain way. Ethnographic data provide insights in the *process* of producing culture, identity, and space or place. To deal with the limitations and specific challenges of ethnography, researchers are transparent about the ways in which they are involved in the production of knowledge. A fieldwork plan and transparent techniques of note keeping, representation, interpretation, and reflection are necessary for conducting convincing ethnographies that shed new light on old issues.

Preparing for ethnographic fieldwork

The decisions fieldworkers make in designing their projects play a key role in the type and quality of the data they collect and analyze. In the following I list a set of considerations that help researchers to prepare their fieldwork.

Unit of analysis

As in any study, defining a **unit of analysis** is closely related to the research question and sub-questions. Ask yourself, 'what is part of my study and what is not?' A **unit of observation** within what is being studied provides an **empirical** focus for participant observations. It may be a particular subgroup, a space or place, an organization or policy/planning process or, often, a combination of these things. Ethnographers usually start with a unit of observation but expand this focus throughout the fieldwork based on experiences that draw attention and moments of serendipity that provide unexpected opportunities.

A spatial unit of analysis – a neighborhood, square, street, café, market – seemingly provides a clearly defined boundary. On the other hand, what citizens consider to be 'the neighborhood' usually does not overlap with administrative boundaries (Madden, 2014). Since urban ethnographies' main goal is to overcome stereotypical meanings, researchers must be flexible in their definitions and allow themselves to adjust their units of analysis based on empirical insights.

When studying a particular subgroup, ethnographers usually choose to do participant observations in social situations and/or interactions as 'temporally and spatially bounded series of events' (Garbett, 1970: 215). This means that researchers can prepare their fieldwork by rethinking what kinds of social situations or interactions they should observe and participate in, in order to answer their research question.

When studying an organization or (policy) process, the unit of analysis is often not a place or a group, but the socio-political relations among members of an institution, between public officials and citizens, or professionals and clients. This means that positions are explored within a complex set of interrelated processes. For this purpose, 'shadowing' someone is a particularly suitable data collection strategy because it allows the researcher to closely follow a subject over a period of time to investigate what they actually do in the course of their everyday practice, not what their role dictates (Pickering, 2010)[3].

Whether researchers decide to focus on a place, particular group, organization, or process, it is important to note that we can only understand them in relation to other spaces, people, and processes. Although these units of analysis seem bounded in space and time, their meaning should be understood in a wider context.

An important question is thus, how can we decide what the boundaries of our unit of analysis and unit observation are? Which events that are external to the situation have to be taken into account in order to understand the behavior of actors within them (Garbett, 1970: 217)? The answer to this question has to be given in relation to each particular field and specific research question.

During my fieldwork, I did participant observations in the social situation of a local celebration. Citizens, civil servants, and politicians celebrated, presented, and discussed the outcomes of the annual 'Schouw'. The Schouw is a community activity that neighbors organize each month in order to collectively walk a route through the district and observe various forms of nuisance: dirt, graffiti, crime, cabs that are parked illegally, overcrowded streets. The municipality facilitates this annual gathering – a social situation that provided insights in the relationship between citizens and local politicians.

Understanding exactly what was going on during the event required me to relate the meeting to the broader context. My fieldnotes said, 'During the dinner I noticed some tension; some eyes were rolled, citizens gazed at each other and locked eyes while the borough mayor gave his speech.' I could only make sense of these interactions because I attended a series of meetings some weeks before in which the organizers of the Schouw complained that not enough was done with the outcomes of the Schouw in local policies. These prior meetings had set a tone that affected the relationship between citizens and local officials during the celebration dinner.

3 For further reading on the particular method of shadowing, see Gill, Barbour & Dean, 2014; Quinlan, 2008.

Fieldwork plan

In advance of fieldwork it is useful to make a fieldwork plan that includes a strategy for collecting relevant data from primary sources – fieldnotes, diary, interviews, etc. – and secondary sources – policy briefs, leaflets, flyers, etc. – that provide input for better understanding the unit of analysis.

Very few urban ethnographers nowadays are able to do what cultural anthropologists did by living with communities for years. Instead, many urban ethnographers combine what some have called 'appointment ethnography' and 'deep hanging out'. The latter is referred to as ethnographic fieldwork in which the researcher is aware of what she sees, smells, hears, and senses. Appointment ethnography is characterized by moving in and out of the lives of participants by the help of appointments (Lindegaard, 2017).

A fieldwork plan answers the following questions:

1. What is my unit of analysis and why?
2. In what kinds of places, groups, processes, or interactions should I do participant observations and why?
3. Whom should I interview, shadow, or observe and why?
4. What will I do and focus on during participant observations and why?
5. How often should I observe certain events, or at what times should I do participant observations at specific sites, and why?
6. Where will I start my fieldwork, and why?
7. How will I introduce myself to the people in the field?
8. How can I stay focused and open for unexpected changes, people, events, places?

Notice that I ask 'why' after almost all questions. The answer to this question is important because it connects a fieldwork plan to the **operationalization** of the research question. Questions 3 and 5 require the ethnographer to reflect on the representativeness of the data. Although ethnography does not claim to be generalizable of a larger group beyond the unit of analysis, it should try to be as representative of the object of study as possible. That means that if you study a site, participant observations take place repeatedly and at enough moments in time to be able to say something about that site at different times of the day, week, or even year. When studying a group, researchers have to think how to represent that group in its multiplicities without reifying or stereotyping its members. A process needs to include various moments in time and various activities or struggles. All of this requires ethnographers to strategically identify spaces, moments, events, or meetings that allow them to observe (inter)actions repeatedly.

Fieldwork plan

1. My units of analysis were the practices of citizens, civil servants, politicians, and other stakeholders, aiming to develop a sense of ownership in the Red Light District.
2. Because this was a longitudinal ethnography (i.e. unfolding in time), there were many events and interactions that could not be foreseen, so I made a typology of events that should be observed: meetings between citizens and local officials, community activities, everyday life in public space.
3. I did participant observations with a limited group of approximately 10 citizens, 5 public officials, and 3 politicians. I decided to reduce the number of people to enable myself to follow them in-depth throughout their activities and routines and interview them at different moments in time.
4. My focus during observations of public space was the behavior of people in relation to the public space and facilities, my focus in meetings was on the interaction between citizens and public officials; what they said, their body language, and the dramaturgy of the meeting itself. I participated in walking the Schouw with residents, and in community events organized by the municipality. I observed meetings between citizens and civil servants at the municipality, I shadowed a local police officer for one day. I was present in the neighborhood as much as possible, I walked the routes of tourists during daytime and nighttime, hung out with neighbors, tourists, and café owners, and took walks with various people through the neighborhood. I attended council meetings about the district, participated in public debates, did interviews, and always kept notes and archived secondary sources.
5. I observed meetings and activities that took place in autumn 2014 and spring 2015 and in spring and autumn 2019. In between these more intense fieldwork periods I attended the most important meetings and activities. I made observations of public space on various mornings, afternoons and evenings on various days of the week, and in various sites in the neighborhood throughout the whole period.
6. I started my fieldwork by contacting active citizens who were managing a community organization that seeks to influence local decision making and organized community activities. Because I was studying issues that generate tension, I decided to start out with key interlocutors in the field. Trust would have been more difficult to build if I had started with public officials because then citizens would have thought my research was a municipal assignment.
7. I introduced my research by stating that I was interested in the ways citizens and the municipality were dealing with the increasing crowdedness in the district and what kinds of activities citizens organized for the community.
8. I remained alert and prepared for unexpected changes by maintaining my network with local people involved and urging them to invite me when something important came up.

Doing fieldwork

The personal nature of ethnographic fieldwork requires a high degree of transparency from researchers. In order achieve this, anthropologists have developed a particular technique of note taking that differentiates between fieldnotes, diary, and logbook (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are the main source of ethnographic data. They are the raw data that describe what ethnographers see, hear, smell, and taste in events, rituals, meetings, public spaces, or during policy practices. The main challenge of writing fieldnotes is to make them as descriptive as possible; try to not infer meaning, values, interpretation, or analyses from the fieldnotes. I often see my students describe people as 'poor' or 'typical Dutch', their behavior as 'friendly', places as 'busy' or 'full', and policy practices as 'dominant'. This is not very helpful because these terms are multi-interpretable and these descriptions do not reveal what is going on. Fieldnotes are more useful if they describe the details of how people dress, what they say, how they move, and what they do, and how people behave when they are being 'nice' or 'friendly'. Places are better described by specifying exactly what 'busy' looks like, how many people are present, or how many buildings, houses, benches, etc. there are. Counting specific elements or people in public spaces is an important aspect of making fieldnotes. Policy practices are best described in terms of how people act, what they say, and how others respond.

Interaction-rich ethnography rests on and incorporates microscopic, detailed accounts that feature local particulars and variations (Emerson, 2009: 536). This means that ethnographers have to become equipped in minutely describing sequences of events, actions, and spatial arrangements. Describing in such detail immediately begs the question, 'when do I have enough detail?' In the same way, the focus of participant observations should be understood in relation to the research question and the wider context, decisions of which details should be included in the descriptions should be made in relation to the research question and in reference to aspects of the wider context that are necessary to include in order to make sense of what is observed. A common strategy is to start out with general descriptive observations to get to know the field. Only when the field becomes more familiar can you decide to focus on a particular aspect that is then described in relation to other events and contexts. Finally, when the context is clear and you, the researcher, are familiar with local meanings and behavioral cues, you can identify detailed aspects to make selective microscopic observations of one person, interaction, meeting, or place, and record these in written, photographed, and recorded fieldnotes.

Diary

The second type of note keeping is the **diary**. Ethnographers differentiate between their diary and their fieldnotes so that the personal experiences and initial interpretations are not mixed up with actual observations. In their diary, ethnographers write down their first impression and personal experiences or senses (smell, feelings, tastes, etc.). It is important to not ignore emotions in the diary, because these experiences provide informative resources and points of reflection about the field.[4] In the diary researchers can also write down their initial interpretations that, although prematurely, relate the observations to theory.

Logbook

The last document that ethnographers keep is a **logbook**: this lists everything the researcher has done, where, when, and with whom. The logbook provides a basic overview of the whole research process. It also provides a place to reflect on the ongoing fieldwork and techniques, to write down successes and failures of the methodology as well as insights on unfolding relationships with people in the field. The logbook offers important input for any methodological chapter in a thesis or paragraph in an article. I will return to the importance of this in the final section of this chapter.

Logbook

What follows is an excerpt of a thick description of a quarterly meeting about the Schouw, office Municipality, November 2014.

Fieldnotes:

At the entrance we (three citizens and I) receive a visitor pass to enter the building. Once inside we go up the stairs to the room that was announced in the email. The room is light and sterile and we sit around a square table with 10 chairs. The three citizens and I on one side, two civil servants and the consultant who does the statistical analysis of the results of the Schouw on the other. One civil servant starts by stating that they are currently working on three topics: how to spread tourists, the physical structure of the neighborhood, and the use of public space. These topics, in his perspective, "go beyond the everyday nuisances of dirt, wrongly parked bikes, hotdog vendors, and crowdedness".

Diary:

By making the above statement the civil servant is positioning (Harré & Langehove, 1999) himself above the everyday experience of the citizens. He invites them to speak about issues in more abstract and general terms, but in doing so, he diminishes the everyday experience of the citizens and makes them seem of less importance. Since this is the very beginning of the meeting, it creates a tension between the topics that are observed in the Schouw (everyday forms of nuisance) and the interests of the civil servant. Furthermore,

4 An influential work that reveals the importance of diary notes is the classic literary non-fiction work by Claude Lévi-Strauss called 'Triste Tropique', in which he used his diary notes to reflect on his fieldwork expeditions in the interior of Brazil (Lévi-Strauss, 1955).

since the ritual of entering the building gave us an embodied experience of being a visitor in the space of the civil servant, the clash between the formal topics he introduces and the informal experience of the Schouw seems deepened.

Fieldnotes:
The citizens smile, two change their position from arms crossed to a more open posture. One responds by emphasizing that they would like to discuss the way the information in the Schouw is used in making policies about those topics. They add two things; first, the spread of tourists and the use of public space are one and the same topic and it is the most important form of nuisance in they experience: "Crowdedness makes us prisoners in our homes. At the weekends we leave the city. At the same time, this is not included in the Schouw so we would like to discuss how we could include it?" Second, they think that municipal enforcement agents, who are in charge of controlling livability, should cooperate more with citizens to know what is going on and what to focus on. "Based on the outcomes of the Schouw we know exactly where and when the problems arise on an average night."

The civil servant nods and responds, "Yes, we should start a participation monitor."

One of the citizens says, "The city feels like a festival terrain without any control. We don't need another monitor, we already know what is going on and when and where the issues happen, we could just work together."

Diary:
While the civil servant is trying to listen and provides the citizens with space to talk, they seem to not have the same conversation, their responses mismatch. The citizens want answers about what is going to happen with the Schouw results, practical steps of including crowdedness in the Schouw, and more and better-informed enforcement agents at night. The civil servant's responses remain abstract, he does not respond to the question of including crowdedness in the Schouw. And in response to more cooperation between citizens and enforcement agents he proposes to establish a formal tool for doing research instead of using the practical knowhow of the citizens around the table. The meeting, although well intended, seems to end in more frustration on both ends.

Representing and interpreting ethnographic data

The next stage of doing ethnographic research is to move from fieldwork to 'thick description' that represents observations in written text and interprets findings to reach an analysis. Ethnographic data may consist of everything from verbal **transcripts** of interviews, other physical artefacts such as photographs or lists, to the memories and impressions of the ethnographer (Pool, 2017: 282). Ethnographers thus come back from the field with a wealth of data that needs to be represented in a coherent narrative and interpreted in a credible and convincing analysis.

Representation and interpretation often happen via an iterative process that moves back and forth between concepts and empirical observations (see for example the chapter by Federico Savini and Daan Wesselman). Grounded theory scholars start out with empirical findings and build up their analyses by using insights from the field (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Others have hypotheses or existing theories that they apply to their empirical material. No matter which method of analysis the researcher uses, interpretation always moves back and forth between representation and interpretation.

Interpreting meaning is difficult because meaning is often contested. People give contradictory meanings to events, places, meetings, others, and even the self. Different people apply different meanings to the same thing, but people also often contradict themselves. Instead of deducing one truth, the goal of ethnographic writing is to allow conflicting realities to exist side by side.

It is therefore important to analyze the unit of analysis from various perspectives and by using various data sources (**triangulation**). Relying too much on observations alone runs the risk of inferring meaning from the behavior of people. Meanings, background experiences, and emotional currents cannot be directly expressed and are not readily visible in particular interactions (Emerson, 2009: 537). Thus, researchers need to not only observe but also talk to people about what they are doing with others and how they experience these interactions. Ethnographers thus combine participant observations with formal and informal interviews (see chapter 5) and document analysis (see chapter 6).

Conversely, participant observations complement research based on interviews because people often do things differently from what they say they do. There is an attitudinal fallacy in inferring situated behavior from verbal accounts (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). Therefore, ethnographers do not simply draw conclusions about people's behavior based on what they tell us (for instance in an interview or **survey**), but observe and participate in actual behavior (participant observations).

Interpreting data

I was interested in understanding the various ways in which citizens, public officials and other stakeholder negotiate ownership. To operationalize the negotiation of ownership I used De Certeau's theory about the 'practices of everyday life' (1984). This theory helped me to differentiate 'tactics' of ownership that are usually more ad hoc and improvised from 'strategies' by which ownership is practiced through more formal and planned interventions. To understand how these practices affect the meaning of space I used theories of space like Lofland's theory of the parochial realm (Lofland, 1998).

The strategic practice of the Schouw represents a strategy to create ownership by producing knowledge of where, when, and how the experience of ownership by citizens is jeopardized. The meeting in which the outcomes of the Schouw are negotiated with public officials reveals that, although the Schouw is supported by the municipality, the local and everyday knowledge creates a mismatch with general policy terms that public officials use. The difficult negotiation of local and conventional knowledge leaves citizens in the dark about the impact their strategy had on local policies.

Figure 3.1: Tactics of ownership (photo by author).

To reclaim public space, citizens can only resort to the domain of tactics where they must utilize the 'gaps and circumstances that open in the sphere of control and create surprises' (Certeau, 1984: 6). They do so by tactically appropriating public spaces in the neighborhood, for example, by placing flowers in a circle on the sidewalk to informally designate and claim space (see figure 3.1).

Other tactics are informal signs in windows that instruct tourist behavior (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Tactics of ownership (photo by author).

While the Schouw offers knowledge that seeks to have a long-term effect on policy, these tactics provide an immediate physical experience of ownership. These acts of placemaking (Friedmann, 2016) communicate to visitors that this is a parochial domain – something in between the private and the public that brings together a sense of 'commonality between neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located in communities' (Lofland, 1998: 10). The parochial exists in between private spaces that are characterized by 'ties of intimacy among primary groups members who are located in households or personal networks' (Lofland, 1998 10) and the public that is 'inhabited by persons who are strangers to one another or who 'know' one another only in terms of occupational or other non-personal identity categories' (ibid: 9). The tactical spatial practices create a space where ownership is renegotiated and directly produce a parochial space. These tactics, however, are not supported by the municipality and when enforcement agents see the flowers they ask citizens to take them away. To them, these practices jeopardize the public meaning. They ignore the in-between meaning of parochial spaces.

Reflectivity and positionality

Credibility & verification

Ethnographers' deep engagement with the field allows them to develop knowledge from within the city that reveals how meanings are produced, how inclusion or exclusion takes shape through everyday interactions, how power is discursively practiced, and more importantly, why these processes unfold the way they do. Ethnographic data is by nature not replicable nor generalizable, nor does it claim to be, because the goal is to understand the how and why of a certain phenomenon or process. The deep engagement with the field requires deep reflection on the relationship between the researcher and the field, particularly because these aspects of research aid or interfere with data collection (Ocejo, 2013: 7).

Recent debates address three ways of ensuring transparency to strengthen ethnographies' verification (see Pool, 2017; van de Port, 2017). First, ethnographers must be transparent regarding the process of fieldwork: providing information about the number of people they worked with, the number of observed meetings and spaces, the timespan and strategies of fieldwork. Second, final reports should give more voice to the people in the field by generously providing quotes, original utterings, or observations. Third, the final analyses must make clear where the argument of the researchers and the analyses coincide with the voice and interpretations of people in the field, and where it doesn't, demanding that researchers be transparent about the method of analysis.

The trustworthiness of the data increases with honest reflections on the process of fieldwork, its failures and successes. The diary can be a place to provide input for such reflection and the logbook might show how the data was collected. To increase credibility further, the diary could reveal how interpretations are embedded in empirical data via quotes and observations, and where and how theories can be applied to empirical observations, or where and how concepts should be extended and adjusted to make sense of complex realities.

Reflection on ethics

Ethnographies' intimate nature also requires special reflection on ethics. Ethical guidelines are developed in order to protect the wellbeing of participants and researchers. Specific ethical considerations need to be made in relation to each particular project, but for the purpose of this chapter I categorize the two most important: procedural ethics and ethics regarding the intimate relationship with others and the self.

In general, the guidelines for procedural ethics are the same as for any type of qualitative data. Procedural ethics include informed consent, anonymity of people and situations, confidentiality and privacy agreements, the safeguarding of information, identification of conflicting interests, and preventing potential misuse of data (see for further reading Atkinson, 2009; Bourgois, 2007; Johnson, 2014).

Ethics regarding the intimate relationships with others and the self should help researchers to make ethical decisions before and during fieldwork. Ethical challenges that may emerge during ethnographic fieldwork can range from becoming too close or remaining too distant from people in the field, having to deal with a culture shock, or concerns about personal safety.[5] All of these might affect the ability of the researcher to collect trustworthy data, and therefore demand reflection. Although the best advice is to discuss these issues with supervisors or peers who are familiar with the particular field, I want to pay attention to two general ethical challenges that are particularly important to ethnographers.

Ethnographers usually develop intimate relationships with people in the field. Often, this means that they become so familiar and friendly with informants that they start to identify themselves with their grievances and struggles.[6] In such moments, it is important to reflect on your relationship with 'the other'. Ask yourself, 'Am I able to represent all sides of the story or did I become an advocate for one group?' If the latter, that does not by itself pose a problem; it does, however, change the aim of the research and the kinds of claims that can be made based on the findings. The ethnographer's role as an advocate has to be transparent in the research plan (see the discussion on applied ethnography in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1994: 253).

I am a citizen of Amsterdam with an existing local network. On the one hand this puts me in a privileged position to do fieldwork, on the other hand it requires me to reflect on my own positionality in doing this research and to be transparent about the process of data collection and analysis. To balance my positionality as a citizen, I had to do more work engaging with the perspective of municipal actors and owners of companies catering to tourists. It goes beyond the confines of this chapter to include materials from all interview transcripts; what I present here is a selection. To create equal opportunity for all parties to discuss their perspective on ownership publicly, my team and I organized a public debate where all parties engaged in a dialogue about the neighborhood's future.

5 Some urban fieldwork may pose safety concerns; if that is the case, researchers should always include this in their fieldwork plan and discuss their safety among peers. For further reading on safety related questions in ethnographic fieldwork, see Lindegaard, 2017; Rodgers, 2007.

6 For further readings on blurred boundaries between ethnographic fieldwork and personal life see McLean & Leibing, 2007.

Another important ethical concern is the commitment not to 'glamorize', 'exotify', 'objectify' or 'orientalize' (Said, 1978) people in the field. Staring at people who are different from ourselves is not what ethnography is about. Many of my students confuse participant observation with obscurely gazing at 'others' in the street. This type of covert observation, however, does usually not lead to helpful insights that inform a research question. At best, it produces superficial descriptions of behavior without any contextual or analytic purpose; at worse, it deepens stereotypes, reifies cultures or identity, or is straightforwardly racist. Ethnographers preparing for fieldwork should reflect on these aspects of their research and make a comprehensive fieldwork plan that is sensitive to reification and stereotyping and prevents it.

Conclusions

Researchers preparing for fieldwork are encouraged to read existing ethnographies related to the topic or case study they intend to study. In this chapter I discussed possible units of analysis and the preparation of fieldwork via a fieldwork plan. When entering the field, researchers can rely on strategies of note keeping that differentiate between fieldnotes, diary, and logbook. Finally, ethnography is all about finding your voice in order to understand, analyze and communicate about the city from within.

The excerpts presented here reveal how citizens and public officials use different definitions of 'public' space, resulting in contrasting practices to produce ownership. To residents, the publicness of the space in the Red Light District is jeopardized by the large amount of visitors, and their tactics of placemaking offer an informal response with immediate effect. Public officials cannot accept these tactics because in their view they claim public space and turn them into private spaces. The parochial meaning of public space is overlooked in that view, as is the importance of public familiarity that refers to a sense of belonging in a locality through the distant recognition of familiar faces in public space and local neighborhood shops (Blondeel, 2006).

While residents are trying to (re)develop public familiarity through their tactics, the local government approaches ownership as a management problem. Formal interventions aim at reducing criminal activities and managing crowds of tourists by spreading them more equally over the city. Although public officials recognize the impact of nuisance and crowdedness on livability and provide support for the Schouw, they are unable to embed local knowledge into formal policies and interventions. Even though they intend to include the knowledge of citizens, it seems difficult to translate small, contextual, and detailed knowledge into strategic policy making.

Recognition and support for the efforts of citizens are no longer enough in the context of growing nuisance, dirt, crowdedness, and the overall lack of public familiarity and parochial space. Citizens need tangible interventions that empower them to regain ownership over their living environment and strengthen the identity of an urban community over an exotic tourist attraction. From 2019 onwards, strong interventions have banned short term rent of apartments in the area and sought to support neighborhood functions. Further research will shed light on how these policies impact the negotiation of ownership in the district.

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