Thinking and Doing Ethnography in Service Design

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Appropriating Ethnography to Service Design

- The ethnographic approach needs to be appropriated when used in a Service Design context
  - Appropriated in relation to the origins in Anthropology
  - Exemplified through two case studies

- Rigour = To be able to perform studies at a level in which the methodological choices are clear as well as acceptable to outside observers
Ethnography

- Originated in Anthropology
- First fieldwork done 1898
- Malinowski revolutionized the field
- Chicago-school started to use of ethnography in Sociology
- Sociology used ethnography at home instead of remote countries as Anthropology had done
- Suchman was one of the first to do Design Ethnography
- Has been a part of Service Design since the early days of the discipline
Malinowski’s standards

- Live with the studied objects to be able to study all aspects of life for an extended period of time
- Be able to speak the local language
- Participant observation: Do what the studied objects do as well to the best of your ability, whilst observing them
Case studies

- Walking quiz: Sweden
  - Study in worn-down neighbourhood with many elderly inhabitants
  - Access to large group of inhabitants through a social club with elderly members
  - **Friction**: Limited time with informants and all at once

- Co-creative workshops: UK
  - Regeneration project built on a community-led vision to transform Cornwall’s most derelict urban area and the oldest UK tin mine into an inspirational cultural landscape
  - **Friction**: To perform ethnography for built environments that have not been built yet
Walking Quiz

- Well known activity, often held in connection to club activities and social gatherings
  - The goal is to answer a number of questions along a set path
  - Questions always have three alternatives
- The Walking Quiz was used as a quantitative survey on attitudes surrounding living in the neighbourhood
  - Example: ”Do you feel safe enough in the neighbourhood?”
  - The quantitative part yielded very high response rate ≈ 76%
- To gather qualitative data as well, the design team took on various roles during the Walking Quiz
  - Follow-up interviews after the Walking Quiz had been finished
  - Contextual interviews as the question’s were answered
Walking Quiz & appropriations

- A way of interacting with a larger number of informants in a limited time than would have been feasible otherwise.
- The Walking Quiz was performed in a familiar context and situation for the informants, which answers up to the criterion that ethnographic studies should be made in field.
- Questions asked were based on preliminary interviews and other preparations in the local environment, corresponding to learning the local language.
- The preliminary interviews and the division of work tasks during the Walking Quiz were all ways of maintain the highest possible rigour in the work, whilst creating empathy.
Co-creative workshops

- We created fictional situations, grounded in actual practices and performed by actual stakeholders in those situations and observed these ethnographically.
- Co-creative workshop organised on the artists’ spaces
  - To learn about their actual practices, we interviewed artists in their own studio (ethnography through guided tours).
  - For the co-creative workshops, architects staked out planned spaces for artists on the actual site.
  - We invited four artists to bring some materials, tools and work, and take possession of an imagined studio for an afternoon.
  - Four different groups of future visitors of Heartlands were asked to visit the make-shift studios and have conversations with the artists about their work.
Co-creative workshops & appropriations

- The brown field situation was firmly rooted in existing practices of the artists in their own studios, corresponding to learning the local language.

- Although in an field, visits were as normal visits to artists’ workshops would be, thus creating a full-time cycle.

- By documenting both situations on the same blog\(^1\) it allowed researchers and architects to compare practices of the artists in their own studio with behaviour on the brown field.

- Despite being fictional, the situations in the co-creative workshop were set up in a systematic way that allowed researchers and architects to trace back practices of the artists on the brown field to behaviour in their studios and workshops.

\(^1\): bas.blogs.com/artatheartlands/
Rigour in ethnography for Service Design and Malinowski’s heritage

- Being able to speak the local language
  - Prepare the fieldwork properly!
- Participant observation: Do what the studied objects do as well to the best of your ability, whilst observing them
  - Participation as efforts to participate in the experience of the informants, in particular their ‘customer journeys’
- Living with the studied objects to be able to study all aspects of life for an extended period of time
  - Services are aimed at certain parts of life, we need to find ways to focus our ethnographic endeavours on these parts
Conclusion

- The ethnographic approach needs to be **consciously** appropriated when used in a Service Design context.