

Ethnographic Research
COST Action: From Sharing to Caring

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Troyes

Ethnography

- Ethnography is the firsthand personal study of a local cultural setting.
- Ethnographers try to understand the whole of a particular culture, not just fragments (e.g. the economy).
- The early ethnographers conducted research almost exclusively among small-scale, relatively isolated societies, with simple technologies and economics.

What is Ethnography?

Ethnography is a methodology which involves immersion in the social world: watching, listening, talking and participating.

The researcher's observations and experiences form the data.

“Thick description” (Geertz)

“The exclusive and immediate goal of ethnography, as of all social research, is to produce knowledge”

Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1986)

- From participant observation to “writing”
- Ethnography as process
- Partial truth
- Experimental
- Ethical
- Reflexivity
- Dialogical mode
- Co-authorship

Ethnographic Research Design

■ Ethnographic Research Methods

A. In-situ fieldwork

- Participant Observation
- In-depth interviews
- (Or) focus group discussions

B. Online fieldwork

- Online platforms observation = discourse analysis
- Online interviews (via Skype, Jitsi, email)

Ethnographic Research

- Research design: problems, cases, samples in fieldwork
- Access
- Field relations
- Insider accounts: listening and asking questions
- Documents
- Recording and organizing data
- The process of analysis
- Writing ethnography
- Ethics

(Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983) Ethnography. Routledge)

Ethnographic Process Design

research
planning



entrée



data
collectio
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interpret
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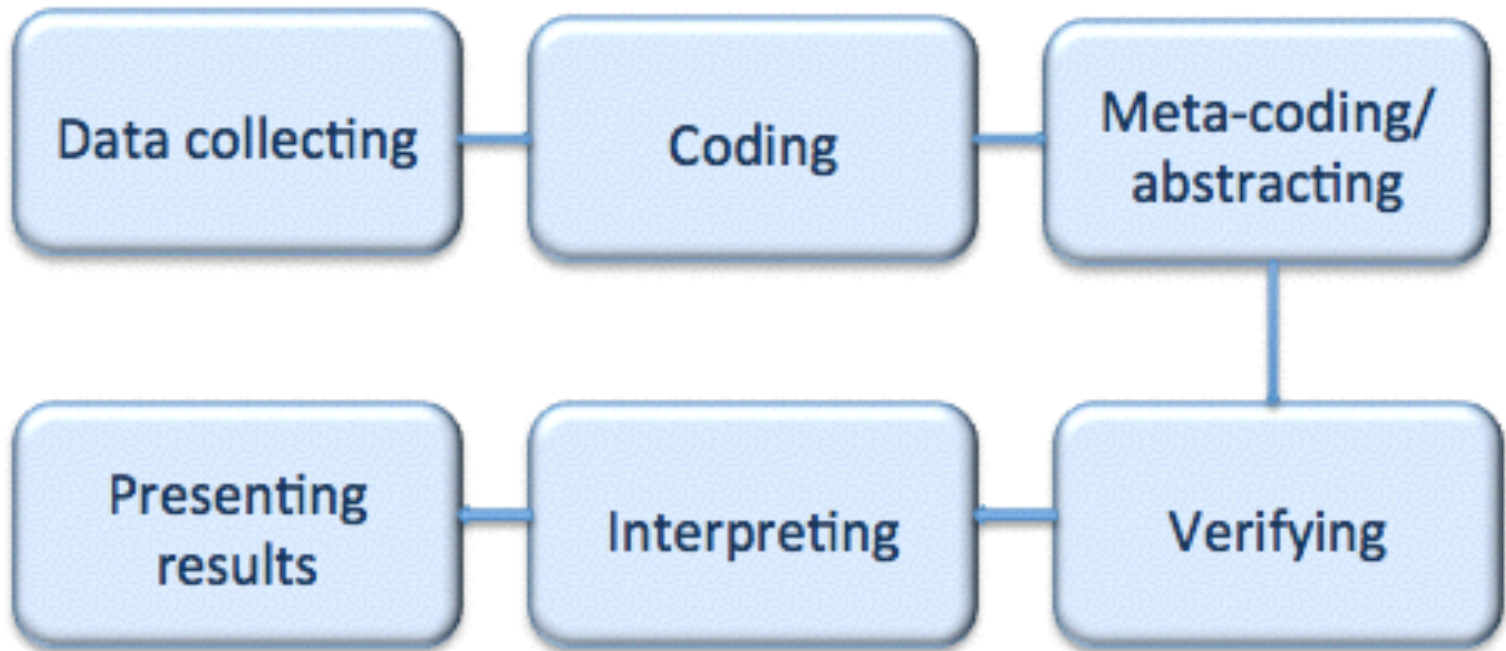


ensuring
ethical
standard



research
represen
tation

Ethnographic Study – Data Process



Research Ethics Strategy

Federal Guidelines – Consent Form

- 1) Fair explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purposes;
- 2) Description of the attendant discomforts and risks reasonably to be expected;
- 3) Description of the benefits reasonably to be expected;
- 4) Disclosure of the appropriate alternative procedures that might be advantageous to the participant;
- 5) An offer to answer inquiries concerning the procedures;
- 6) An instruction that the person is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time without prejudicing the status of the participant.

Multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork

Focus on cultural processes that are not contained by social, ethnic, religious or national boundaries.

The ethnographer follows the process from site to site, often doing fieldwork in sites and with people who traditionally were never subject to ethnographic analysis.

Multi-sited Ethnography

As George Marcus describes it, “multisited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” as ethnographers trace “a complex cultural phenomenon . . . that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it.”

- A multisited ethnography also offers the possibility of juxtaposing more than one place and more than one point of view, thereby bringing to light connections among them that would otherwise remain unsuspected or undetected.
- Paul Rabinow, "Reflections on Fieldwork in Alameda," Making PCR

Netnography

- **Netnography = InterNET + EthNOGRAPHY**

Netnography is doing Ethnographic study online

- Internet – source of information for users' product choices & design of product e.g. peer-to-peer platforms
- keep record of interactions
- For researchers, netnography provides culturally-grounded understanding of:
 - language
 - meanings
 - practices

The Stages of the Ethnographic Study

- Follow the community
- Follow the artefact
- Follow the metaphor
- Follow the story
- Follow the life
- Follow the conflict
- Follow the line (Follow the rhizome)

Reflexive Fieldwork

- Fieldwork is viewed more as a dialogue, a co-production between the ethnographer and the native informant.
- Reflexivity explores “the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research.”
(Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, p. 228).

Collaborative Ethnography

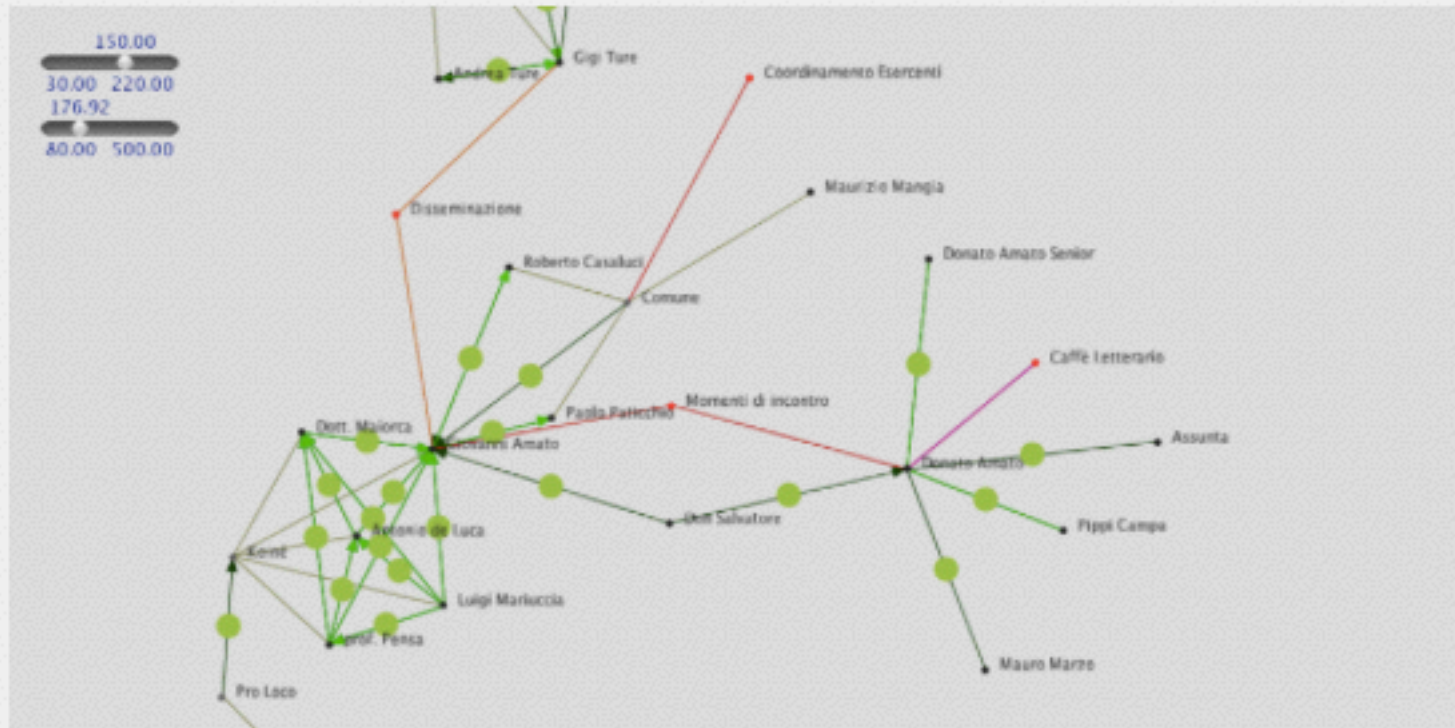
- ...an approach to ethnography that deliberately and explicitly emphasizes collaboration
- at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it—from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, and, especially, through the writing process...yields texts that are co-conceived or co-written with local communities of collaborators and consider multiple audiences outside the confines of academic discourses, including local constituencies...

P2P Ethnography

- **P2P Ethnography**, as Ethnography, can be defined as a qualitative research design aimed at exploring *cultural phenomena*. Different from Ethnography, its aim is not to produce field studies or case reports, but **to establish continuously available, accessible, participatory, performative and collaborative processes which allow gaining understandings about the knowledge and the systems of meanings in the lives of a social group, and its interactions with other ones.**
- **P2P Ethnography represents a participatory, performative approach, in which research and understanding require gaining awareness of one's position within the relational ecosystem (from cultural, emotional, aesthetic, perceptive, cognitive points of view) of the observed social group, and to establish or modify relations and interconnections both within the group, outside of it, and in-between, in fluid, dynamic, possibilistic ways.**

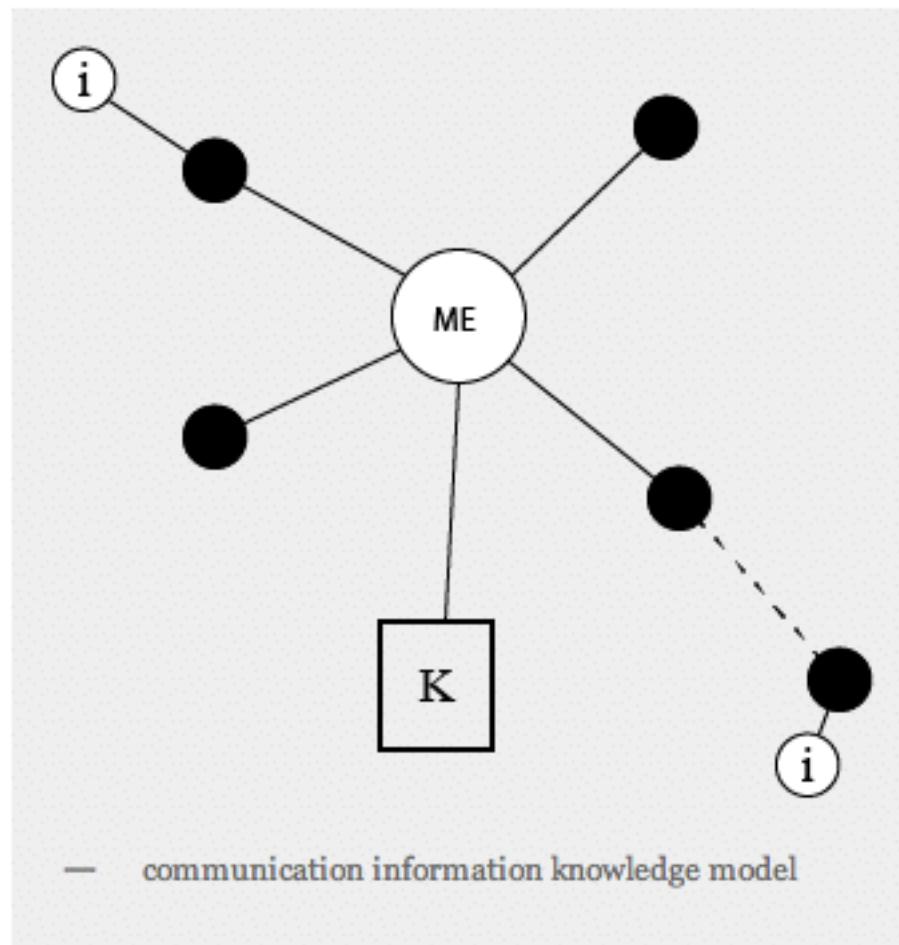
(adapted from AOS)

Human Ecosystems



— an example human ecosystem visualization tool

COMMUNICATION / INFORMATION / KNOWLEDGE



P2P Ethnography: Prototype Protocol 4 stages

Stage 1: perceived organisational models

- Who interacts with who?
- Who is responsible for what?
- Who is related with who?

Stage 2: Communication/Information/Knowledge

- Who do I communicate with?
- Who delivers me information and knowledge?
- To whom do I deliver information and knowledge?
- Where does the information and knowledge that is delivered to me come from?
- Where is it headed?
- Am I the (wo)man-in-the-middle for information and knowledge of some sort?
- What are the knowledge references which I use?
- Are they human? Websites? Texts? Oral?
- What knowledge do I produce?
- Are these types of flows unidirectional, bidirectional, a-directional?

P2P Ethnography: Prototype Protocol 4 stages

Stage 3: Missed opportunities

- What interaction/information/knowledge would I like to have?
- What would I need?
- Who has this information or knowledge?
- How/when/where would I like to have it?

Stage: Knowledge sharing

- What knowledge do I produce?
- Do I plan to share it, transmit it or make it accessible/available/usable in some way?
- Using which tools, technology, media?
- Dedicated to whom?
- Interoperable with what?
- Within which knowledge ecosystems?

P2P Ethnography Toolkit

- Polyphonic understanding
- Micro-histories
- Third Infospace (*the inclusive space of communication, information and knowledge based on a multitude of co-existing self-expressions and self-representations).

Designing a P2P Ethnography

- Multi-sited Ethnography
- Collaborative Ethnography
- Rhizomic Ethnography
- Polyphonic fieldsite

Ethnographic Research Framework

spaces



Collaborative Economy

practices

actors

Initial Questions – Country Reports

- What is the type and model of collaborative economy that is used/represented in this case study?
- Who are the key stakeholders in in this case study (e.g. government, local authorities, non-profit organisations, businesses, social innovation, grassroots initiatives, groups, individuals etc.)? What is then the ecosystem of collaborative economy in this case study? Is it a top down or bottom up initiative?
- How sustainable is this case study? What are the mechanisms and strategies implemented to secure its sustainable future?
- How is technology implemented in this case study? What are the technological tools used to support it?

Ethnographic Research: Generic Themes

- General description of case study
- Space/location e.g international, transnational, national, regional
- Actors/Stakeholders: government, local authorities, NGOs, startups, grassroots initiatives
- Activities: how 'case study' is used
- Technology: collaborative platform, social media, plug-ins

Ethnographic Research: Collaborative Economy Themes

- Definitions
- Legislation: national level and transnational level
- Decision making practices
- Usability
- Impact on national/local economy-society
- Stakeholders
- Commerce
- Consumers: collaborative consumption?
- Profit/budgeting
- Management, maintainance
- Sustainability
- Barriers/obstacles
- Business partnerships
- Funding/crowdfunding
- Currency options eg. Bitcoin, faircoin
- Participation
- Labour: digital labour, precariousness, employment opportunities, affective labour, workers' rights, legislation
- Cultural values: national e.g. sharing values, gift economy
- Accessibility, inclusivity, digital literacy/divide
- Licensing: e.g. Creative Commons
- Open source?

Ethnographic Research: Keywords

- Trust
- Ownership
- Collaboration
- Participation
- Attribution
- Risk
- Conflict
- Failure



- Why do users use Airbnb instead of traditional accommodation and/or other P2P websites?
- What are the most commonly perceived risks of using Airbnb?
- Which elements of Airbnb profiles or listings do users find most important in deciding whom they can trust?
- What are the mechanisms by which Airbnb engenders trust among its users?