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# Observation Methods

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# 2

## Observation Methods

Malgorzata Ciesielska, Katarzyna W. Boström,  
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### 2.1 Introduction

Observation is one of the most important research methods in social sciences and at the same time one of the most diverse. The term includes several types, techniques, and approaches, which may be difficult to compare in terms of enactment and anticipated results; the choice must be adapted to the research problem and the scientific context. As a matter of fact, observation may be regarded as the basis of everyday social life for most people; we are diligent observers of behaviors and of the material surroundings. We watch, evaluate, draw conclusions, and make comments on interactions and relations. However, observation raised to the rank of

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a *scientific method* should be carried out systematically, purposefully, and on scientific grounds—even if curiosity and fascination may still be its very important components.

In this chapter, we discuss the main characteristics of three types of observation that can be used in different ways and to some degree even combined. In *participant observation*, the researcher strives towards an “immersion” in a specific culture, preferably for a longer period of time, in order to acquire an insider understanding of this culture either as a (marginal) member or as a visitor. In *non-participant observation*, the researcher tries to understand the world, relationships, and interactions in a new way, without prevalent categorizations and evaluations. In *indirect observation*, the researcher relies on observations done by others (e.g. other researchers), on various types of documentation, recordings, or on auto-observation.

In the first part of this chapter, we discuss common features of different observation techniques and some essential elements in the design of a study based on observation methods. We also consider some possible roles an observer may take and be ascribed and how to document the observations in the form of notes. In the second part, we discuss different approaches to direct and indirect observation. Chapter 3, by Barbara Czarniawska, is dedicated to direct non-participant observation, often referred to as *shadowing*.

## 2.2 Observational Research Design

### 2.2.1 Research Aims

The choice of method must always be adapted to the initial research problem and the scientific context of the study. Observation can be either the main method in a project or one of several complementary qualitative methods. At the outset of a research project, it may give an inspiration for interesting scientific topics. Impressions and experiences from a long-term observation may help to revise a research problem, which in turn can create a need for additional methods and theoretical perspectives in order to better explore it. For example, starting a project with

direct non-participant observation, a researcher might discover that some aspects of a certain subculture—for example, that of boxers, nurses, or musicians—can only be fully understood by an active involvement in their reality, experiencing firsthand their daily lives and sharing their joys, concerns, and successes.

### 2.2.2 Access to the Field

It is an extremely important task to identify and define a specific “field” for observation. In ethnology and anthropology, the prevailing tradition was that the area of research is an equivalent of a physical place—for example, a tribal village or a town quarter. Correspondingly, in organizational research and economics, it could be a company, a bank, or any other institution. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) remind us, settings (e.g. the office) should not be confused with cases. Within any setting there may be several different contexts (e.g. frontstage and backstage) requiring different kinds of behavior as well as several interesting cases for research. In today’s global, mobile, and multimedia-transformed realities, it gets even more complicated. The inhabitants of a village or employees of a company may have extensive contacts with the “outside” world; Internet communities often do not have any connection with any physical place. In order to understand, for instance, the players in online games, a researcher may try to combine participant and indirect observation: auto-observation of game playing, observation of other players, asking them for explanations and comments, becoming a member of the game subculture, and so on. Naturally, if it is methodologically justified, the main area of observation may be a specific locality where interesting events and interactions usually occur, but often the research problem requires a “multilocal” or “translocal” fieldwork where a researcher can follow people, objects, a specific symbol, a metaphor, a story, or biography (Marcus 1995).

After defining the field, the next step is getting access. It is not only an initial problem of “breaking the ice” but often has to be constantly renegotiated throughout the study, especially if the observation involves the researcher’s prolonged physical presence. Even when a formal

permission from the management of an institution has been obtained, a researcher can still encounter informal *gatekeepers* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), who may obstruct the study or try to steer and supervise the research process in order to ensure that the institution in question will be shown in a positive light. Some employees may refuse to cooperate or even to participate in a study at all—a wish that must be respected. On the other hand, a researcher may also encounter informal *sponsors* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), showing a kind interest in the project. Those might prove invaluable for securing a continuous access to the field, facilitating the researcher's work, sharing their local knowledge, using their social contacts, and offering a symbolic recommendation. There is, however, a potential risk that this generous assistance might imply some expectations, for example, of their overseeing the research process or a researcher's loyalty.

### 2.2.3 Sampling: What? Who? Where? and When?

Compared to other qualitative methods observation is characterized by a relatively low level of control over the field of study. The researcher adapts to the context and interaction and tries not to influence the course of events and to exert minimal influence on the environment, thus often facing unforeseen situations. In the beginning of the observation, before trying to narrow the focus according to the selected research problem, it is good to learn as much as possible about the field. James P. Spradley recommended in his now classic book, *Participant Observation* (1980, p. 78), that especially in the initial period, we should take into account many dimensions of any social situation. Researcher should pay attention to the physical place, the actors present and connected with the situation, their activities and goals, the acts, the events, the physical objects, the sequencing over time, and emotions felt and expressed. Patty Sotirin (1999, p. 18), when sending her students on an assignment to investigate what is considered to be a “good” communication in the workplace, proposed they observe: (1) territory, (2) stuff, (3) people, and (4) talk. Inspired by those authors, as well as Arvastson and Ehn (2009), we propose a list of aspects that might be useful for choosing what to observe in a typical organization study:

**1. The Management of Time and Space** How is time organized? Who makes decisions regarding this, who supervises that the decisions are followed? What is the rate of various kinds of activities and events? How is the space organized (e.g. city planning, a building's architecture, the layout of the supermarket, the interior design)? What is the design of different zones, and are there any zones available only for the privileged? What types of activities are promoted at different times of the day and in different places? As institutions, groups, and individuals tend to mark and protect a space they regard as their own: who gets less/more and how are territories and borders marked? Are there any tension and conflicts due to time and space management, and do they take form of disobediences, transgressions, subversive actions?

**2. Objects** What are the physical objects present—for example, tools, machines, furniture, food, decorations, signs, images, telephones, computers? What is used and how? How do things look, sound, smell, and taste? What might different objects indicate and symbolize? What is private and what is common/shared? Who controls access to objects and their use?

**3. Social Actors** How do people look like and behave in a given space and time? What is the status of different people? What social categories seem to emerge and what are the relations between the categories and the movements between them or within, for example, a specific professional group? Is there a variety or rather a homogeneity of appearances and behaviors?

**4. Interactions** What do people do, and how? What nonverbal behavior may be observed? What do they say (also on the phone or by e-mail), formally and informally, and how (e.g. the vocabulary used, the emotional charge of it)? What topics are talked about, in what tone, in different contexts? What emotions are expressed, in different contexts? Are there any technical or colloquial words and phrases characteristic for the group? Who communicates with whom, how, when, and where? How are differences in power expressed, reproduced, negotiated, or

challenged? Observation of one's own feelings and reactions—not as sources of truth, but as sources of knowledge and reflection—has an additional analytical dimension. A researcher should ask him/herself: Why did I consider it appropriate to behave in this way? What was my spontaneous reaction to what I heard or saw, what could be the cause of this, and how could my reaction have affected the further development of the situation?

**5. Routines, Rituals, Episodes** What are routine chores? What are more rare, unusual, or unexpected ones? What kind of ritual behaviors, both officially recognized and informal, can be observed? During observation of a specific episode: what happens? In what context? How do people behave, what do they do, say, how do they express emotions? Does it seem to change or confirm the relationships and hierarchies within the group? How is an episode commented upon, discussed, evaluated? How do these comments and discussions vary in different constellations, or over time?

As we cannot be in several places nor observe around the clock, a recurrent dilemma is the choice of situations that will enhance our understanding of the case without missing any vital material. This seemingly trivial issue is often a source of immense frustration in the field. Even a careful and attending observer has access to only one situation at a time and may miss something interesting in a different location. Besides, we all need to rest and relax; both the researcher and the people in the field might want some peace and quiet. Inevitably, this results in a continuous choice of who, what, where, when, and how to observe? It is important to narrow the field of observation based on criteria that correspond to our research problem. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) propose a selection in relation to the dimensions of time, people, and context.

**Time** An observation is a process that may take several weeks to several years, depending on what we study. During time, things happen. Economy goes up and down, people revise their attitudes, the dynamics of human relationships change. It might be worthwhile to strategically select some observation periods, for example, to decipher what times of

the day or days of the week stand out as particularly rich in information. At a hospital, it may be rounds or changing shifts. At school, specific lessons or events. In a company, meetings, events, but even coffee breaks. Periods of “delving” in the field should be interposed with working on documentation (notes, photos, relevant documents), analytical reflection, and writing.

**People** Another dimension is the diversity of the community. In order to create a detailed and fair picture of the life of, for example, an institution, we should observe interactions of people of different ages, genders, positions, and scopes of responsibility and at various levels of both the formal and informal hierarchy.

**Context** As mentioned before, a context does not necessarily coincide with the physical locale; in a firm, some negotiations and decisions might occur at different places than in the office. It might be also an idea to observe both the “frontstage” and the more informal “backstage” of a community or institution. For example, teachers generally have different standards of behavior and speech in relation to students in the classroom, to the parents, to other teachers at a formal meeting or having coffee during a break. To observe the behavioral repertoire in all its richness, it is vital to have access to contexts where there are different standards of behavior.

## 2.2.4 The Observer

Each observation presents different challenges. Even very experienced researchers may have problems with upholding a balance between being “inside” the community and analyzing it from the “outside”, from a distance. Drawing on Fangen (2001) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), we distinguish three main types of the observer.

**Completely Participating** observer tries to blend into the studied environment and to appropriate the group’s lifestyle, customs, and even the way they perceive reality. Such immersion may be extremely helpful to understand a particular group, but may also result in loss of



analytical attitude. Anthropologists talk about the famous risk of “going native”, with total acculturation, when the researcher begins to identify with, for example, a certain political, religious, or ethnic community. However, sometimes the research problem requires taking this kind of risk, for example, in order to gain access to tacit, embodied knowledge. As noted by Katrine Fangen (2001), the ideal is not complete participation, but the degree of participation that gives the best possible data.

**Partially Participating** observer is one of the most popular roles. One takes part in the interactions, but not in the type of activity that is specific to the studied environment—for example, production of equipment or patient care. The ideal is to learn the norms, values, and rules of behavior, without being a burden for the group.

**Non-participant** observer observes without any involvement into human interaction in the field. This role may not seem to give a full understanding of the social reality, but, as we mentioned earlier, the researchers adjust their roles depending on requirements of the specific case. There are times when the role of non-participant observer has strong advantages, such as at rallies, concerts, shopping centers, and airports.

An observer may choose to take on different positions in the field: try to remain neutral, be engaged, or take sides. For many decades, a “neutral” attitude towards the observed groups and organizations was perceived as a self-evident norm in the social sciences. It was not only about showing respect for the community’s standards of dress and interaction patterns, but also about a more profound political and ideological “neutrality”. On the wave of criticism of positivist ideals, especially in the postmodern approach to the social sciences, there has been a still ongoing discussion whether the researcher can ever be “neutral” in the sense of indifference to the studied people and observed situations. Researchers are thinking and feeling human beings, engaging in relationships with others, nurturing more or less crystallized political and religious views and preferences and thus always “situated” in their research and their production of knowledge. If the studied community is in conflict with other groups or if there are strong conflicts within the group, the researcher may be forced to take a stand for one of the parties.

### 2.2.5 Notes Taking

The most important principle of taking notes is to realize the fact that this is a selective endeavor (Emerson et al. 1995, 2001), for example, when a multisensory experience of a specific event is reduced to a written record, in which only some of the situation's features may be put forward. Moreover, each description already contains an element of interpretation of what is important. Is it crucial for our results what we choose to emphasize, downplay, or ignore in our records? There is no perfect way to create notes from the field, but here are a few guidelines:

- It is not possible to observe everything at once, so try to decide what the main goal of your observation is.
- Make notes on a regular basis to avoid subsequent reinterpretation of what happened.
- Note the details: the initial impressions of appearances, reactions and behaviors, sounds, smells, and so on.
- It may be easier to focus on your own feelings instead of reactions of the observed people; however, the latter should be the center of your attention.
- Try to understand what the event means for the observed individuals and communities, but making your notes, do *not* ascribe motifs to the observed behavior (e.g. to someone's display of emotions).
- Describe rather than make judgments. Avoid quick and unjustified generalizations and stereotype typifications.
- It is preferable to record and transcribe speech than simply summarize the topics of conversation.
- Your notes should address your research topic. The selection of the material depends on both the research problem and the views of the researcher of what may be important and interesting.

## 2.3 Observation Techniques

Observation may be *direct* or *indirect*. Direct observation is when observer is looking at the events happening in front of his/her eyes in the moment of them occurring. Indirect observation is remote, relying on

observations of others or recordings of past events in the form of documentation, videos, and so on. Depending on the active or passive role of the observer, direct observation may be *participant* or *non-participant*. The summary and comparison of those four types of observation can be found in Table 2.1, although they rarely occur in their pure form. Therefore, in the following sections we discuss them in more detail and provide examples of participant direct observation, direct non-participant observation and indirect observation.

### 2.3.1 Direct Participant Observation

Direct participant observation is a classical research method and still highly appreciated in ethnography and other qualitative studies. It is used to gather data about a wide variety of cultural backgrounds—from tribal groups to international business.

Direct participant observation is a time-consuming method, often tiring and stressful, but incomparably useful in studying behaviors in situ. This type of observation gives a researcher the ability to collect data about social practices—what and how people are doing—in a context that is natural to them. By participating in the life of the community, the researcher simultaneously observes and documents his/her interactions while being part of the community life, often taking on local customs, language or slang, idiosyncratic behaviors, and preferences. Direct participant observation can provide invaluable information on the topics which subjects are reluctant to talk about during the interviews, because they perceive them as difficult, too sensitive, controversial, or perhaps considered as obvious (Pripps and Öhlander 2011). Observation can also indicate the similarities and the differences between what is explicitly presented or spoken and the actual practice, giving access to tacit knowledge (D'Eredita and Barreto 2006). This method was used by Bowden and Ciesielska (2016) to study a Flodden Ecomuseum project. During this study, one of the authors was professionally involved in the project, which allowed for full participant observation of the seven Steering Group meetings during which detailed field notes were written up. However, as a full

**Table 2.1** Comparison of the four main types of observations

Type	Participant	Direct	Indirect	Non-participant
How?	Observing from an insider perspective, as an active participant of a group or organization. It requires full cultural immersion (although only temporarily) while sustaining analytical mindset	Active observing of events unfolding in front of our eyes to record behavior in the environment where it naturally occurs. Usually requires some immersion in the field of study but not necessarily in the culture itself	Research through collecting information, for instance, in the form of videos or written descriptions of events. Also, self-ethnography, remembering events and environments in order to analyze them	Observation from an outsider perspective without interacting with subjects of an observation. The researcher may take the position of an "alien" from a different planet or reality in order to achieve a distance from the well-known
When?	Useful when insider's point of view is important and to gain access to tacit knowledge	In-depth understanding of a social group or an organization but from an external/independent point of view	Useful when direct observation wasn't possible when the events naturally occurred	Useful when observing a well-known reality, for example, a public place, and there is a need for regarding it from a totally new perspective

Source: Adapted from Ciesielska et al. (2012, p. 51)

participant, it was difficult to differentiate between the role of the researcher and the role of the professional as sometimes those roles had to be performed at the same time.

For ethical, methodological, and practical reasons, participant observation is rarely used in disguise, as it requires the observer to pretend to be a regular member of the group and thus to record data in secret (Kostera 2007). In academic research, it is maintained that people have the right to know that their behavior is watched and analyzed and that they have a right to object or opt out. It is also considered that if a researcher tries to acquire socially significant knowledge, the disclosure of the truth will not radically change the behavior of respondents. But hiding the dual role of participant observer is not only ethically questionable but also can be dangerous in certain environments (e.g. criminal ones) or in a situation of heightened conflict (e.g. ethnic or religious).

### 2.3.2 Direct Non-participant Observation

This type of observation is particularly popular in organizational studies. By applying a direct non-participating observation, a researcher has opportunity to get closer to the field of research while retaining the position of an outsider or a guest (Kostera 2007). This separation clearly defines researcher's identity and role but leaves plenty of possibilities to implement the role. Some researchers prefer to stay in the background and minimize the interference, allowing people to almost forget about them and let the organizational life to have its established rhythm, thus designing good conditions for standing aside and taking notes. Others prefer to act as a nosy but friendly cousin from abroad, a role that allows you to ask questions, even about things that are obvious to participants. This approach facilitates gathering narratives and gossips about a group or organization and facilitates access to otherwise silent knowledge.

It is worth remembering that even when skillfully "blending into the background", the researcher continues to participate in the everyday life of the community, becoming part of their context as a person of a certain age, gender, social position, and with a particular political or research agenda. Even if the researcher only wants to observe, he or she may be caught up in the morning's coffee break conversation, asked to help with a malicious photocopier, or invited to a corporate dinner party. In fact, we can influence other people simply by our own presence.

It is paramount to establish a trusting relation to help the people to feel comfortable and get on with their daily routines. Keeping distance at all costs rarely helps in gathering material and it is important to tune in to the social situation in order to better understand nuances of interactions. Just like participant observation, this method requires self-reflection on the researcher's own behavior, reactions, thoughts, feelings, and how their presence could influence any given situation.

### **Example 2.1 Mobile Everyday Ethnography, Based on Wolanik Boström and Öhlander (2015)**

In the beginning of 2000, Sweden experience a severe shortage of physicians and hundreds of Polish doctors and dentists were recruited to different places in Sweden. In 2012, we (Katarzyna and Magnus) did a week's fieldwork in one of the recruiting companies in Poland, on their intensive course preparing the doctors for the move. During the course, the doctors lived for almost six months (Monday to Friday) in a guarded complex of modern buildings in a little town in Poland; it was a kind of dormitory of recently redecorated, comfortable flats with an option of being served all the meals, to save time for studying for the final tests. There were common rooms for lunch and coffee and a computer room where tourist posters of beautiful Swedish spots decorated the walls. We got an opportunity to stay on the premises, to participate in both lessons and small talk during lunches and coffee breaks. We also got plenty of opportunities to talk to the staff about the organization and teaching, and to the individual doctors about their motifs to move and their expectations on life in Sweden. We experienced the setting's atmosphere as one of intense and purposeful learning. The doctors were trained in Swedish medical vocabulary, legal framework, administrative procedures, and so on but also in sociological and ethnological analyses of the Swedish society, culture, and mentality. For example, the little library in the coffee room harbored some Swedish classics, several well-known Swedish criminal novels, and some ethnographic pieces. One of these books, *The Rat in a Pizza* (Kilintberg 1986), about urban myths in Sweden, was actually used during a lesson we were attending, and as ethnologists and folklorists, we were asked to comment on the topic. The fieldwork was thus a blend of non-participant observation as visitors and participant observation in the ascribed and rather unexpected role of tutors and "experts" on Swedish culture. The impressions from this short observation study put us on an important track for the need of a deeper investigation of how the Polish doctors who were already established to Sweden were using the concepts of culture and mentality, and resulted in our article on "mobile everyday ethnography" (2015).

### 2.3.3 Indirect Observation

Indirect observation in a narrow sense means the use of a one-sided mirror, a hidden camera or voice recorder to record or observe events in which the researcher does not participate. In the broader sense, indirect observation is also a set of methods that allow you to get information about past or present situations that you did not have direct access to. Equally rich sources of information about the life of a community or organization can be material evidence, video recordings, or written materials. In the following sections, we give examples of the use of various techniques in indirect observation.

**Physical Trace Evidence and Field Visits** Bernard (2000, p. 408) describes indirect observation as looking for “archaeological residue of human behavior”, but this method can be used not only to study remains of artifacts from the past but also to assess current social behavior. According to Eugene J. Webb et al. (1966), neither interviews nor questionnaires, nor direct observation of participants, nor even a combination of different techniques can provide such data that would allow for an adequate description, analysis, and understanding of how social systems work especially if sensitive problem is in focus. For example, rubbish bins speak a lot about our culture and behavior. Primarily because rubbish bins do not hide or try to show itself in a better light as it often happens in face-to-face interactions (Rathje and Murphy 1992; Rathje 2001). Rathje is known for his “Garbage Project” conducted at the University of Arizona which included large samples of household waste (Hunt 1985). The rubbish bins contents allowed interesting observations on real trends, as it was noted that what people report verbally about their consumption in not always confirmed by their household waste. One of such cases was the consumption and depletion of beef during a shortage in 1973. Because of the crisis, researchers expected to see much less meat dumped in the trash. It turned out that, for a number of reasons, it was completely opposite. Firstly, people used to buy larger quantity of inferior quality meat when it was available, but often they did not know how to properly store it and more of it ended in the bin. Secondly, poor quality meat had more fat, which was trimmed and disposed (Bernard 2006).

**Audio and Video Recordings** Covert recordings are primarily associated with social work, psychology, and criminology research. One of the most commonly used methods is continuous monitoring, used to assess workplace conditions, interaction between employees and employer, teachers and students, police and civilians, or career and patients in hospitals. It is worth mentioning that audio and video recordings are also used in ethnology in the study of animal behavior (Bernard 2006). There are, however, serious ethical concerns relating to this method, because often participants are not informed about the research being conducted nor have the opportunity to express consent or objection. In addition, this method produces vast amount of data that is difficult to analyze and especially for continuous monitoring it is necessary to sample the watched or listened material.

**Auto-observation** Tom D. Wilson (2002) identifies indirect observation with self-observation of the subjects. The auto-observation can be facilitated by the researcher during an interview, or via a completed questionnaire or diary. Interview is probably the most commonly used indirect observation technique and one which gives the most flexibility in understanding human behavior and circumstances (Nelson 2008). Although it usually requires a face-to-face meeting or even a telephone conversation, the topic of interviews usually includes descriptions and opinions about past or current events in which the researcher did not participate directly and would like to know about. The questionnaire can be considered a special case of self-conducted, structured interview. For example, Malgorzata Ciesielska (2008) uses retrospective tales of interviews with Polish entrepreneurs to confront the content and style of their statements with the American ethos “from beggar to millionaire”. Since the period from 1989 to the present has been studied, the best sources of data were the entrepreneurs themselves, openly talking about their approach to business, experience, trial and error, dreams, and failures. More about interviews in Chaps. 4 and 5.

**Documentation Analysis** It is also called archival studies and relies on the use of various types of texts and documents. There are many research approaches to text analysis; the most classic are content analysis and



narrative approach. Content analysis focuses on themes, keywords, and codes in texts. Narrative analysis, apart from a systematic explanation of what the text says (e.g. the prevalent themes), also covers the form and style in which stories and events are narrated.

**Netnography** It is also referred to as virtual ethnography (Hine 2000; Kozinets 2015) and has much in common with archival research. It involves tracking and analyzing the material on the Internet. A particularly important area of application of this method concerns online communities and groups working together through the network. One of the precursors of netnography is Robert Kozinets, who defined it as a written description of cyberculture web, grounded in methods typically used in cultural anthropology. A similar method was used by Ciesielska (2010) and Ciesielska and Westenholz (2016), exploring communities of open source software developers working on GNOME and [Maemo.org](http://Maemo.org) projects. In both cases, we were dealing with geographically and demographically dispersed groups where most of the work and discussion took place on the Internet fora and IRC channels. Therefore, a large proportion of the material came from rich network resources treated as any other source of data that allows for a dense description and in-depth analysis of the surveyed social groups.

## 2.4 New Directions of Observational Research: Sensory Ethnography

The word “observation” is in many ways misleading. During an observation session the researcher does more than just simply observe. Observation is not only intellectual activity but also highly physical and sensual. The concept brings to mind primarily the sense of sight and hearing—looking, watching, listening (sometimes including eavesdropping)—but it may also involve taste, smell, and touch. One technique can be a systematic exploration of a given environment with different senses by asking: What odors are characteristic at different times, what is their intensity? Does the smell of freshly brewed coffee, for example, signal a work break, relaxation, and some gossip? What is the temperature of the rooms and

outside? Is it dry, or does it feel damp? What is the structure, surface, temperature of different objects?

In recent years, the whole idea of doing ethnographic fieldwork has been subject to innovative ideas, experiments, and insights into how the researcher interacts with the field and is both affecting it and affected by it. One example of this is “sensory ethnography”. The concept is used in several different ways (Nakamura 2013), but perhaps the most well-known is the one by Sara Pink (2009/2015). Pink challenged the traditional fieldwork methods by suggesting a broader understanding of how to collect data. To fully comprehend experiences and the ways humans gear into everyday life, the observer has to use a wider set of senses, in the same way as the studied subjects do. Observation should thus include smell, touch, and taste in addition to the more common techniques hearing and vision.

Sensory ethnography makes it possible to recognize that each object of study as well as each fieldwork has profoundly unique aspects. To be able to grasp the specificities of a field, the researcher has to use several methods for collecting data, ideally mixing and changing methods depending on empirical findings of the ongoing study. In one way, sensory ethnography could be seen as a way of improvising in the field in order to be able to fully understand a specific empirical phenomenon. One example of this can be found in a recent study by Maryam Adjam (2017), analyzing memory work of refugees who escaped from Estonia to Sweden during World War II. Adjam notes that the memories take many different forms or modes of existence, such as personal narratives, master narratives, photo collections, physical objects, art installations, museum exhibitions, memory walks, dialogs, strong or fuzzy feelings, and vague notions. Using a mix of methods, including observations, she shows that a reminiscence is constantly formed, rewritten, and diversified when it travels through all those different modes of existence.

Another aspect is how the researcher as a person is affected by the field. The concept of dirty ethnography (Silow Kallenberg 2015) or dirty anthropology (Jauregui 2013) describes researcher’s feeling of dirtiness from exploiting persons in the field, observing them in vulnerable states or doing observations in circumstances where existential questions and deep emotions are put to a head. This is especially relevant in studies

about places such as care units or prisons (Drake and Harvey 2014; Silow Kallenberg 2016). More about emotions in qualitative research in volume 1, Chap. 10.

## 2.5 Conclusions

Observation is one of the most important research methods, used in a range of research strategies (case studies, ethnography, etc.). In this chapter, we discussed the main types of observations and observer's roles, as well as practicalities of conducting observation research. At the same time, we have shown that you do not necessarily have to personally observe or participate in the life of a community or organization in order to be able to conduct social research, including organizational research.

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