

Participant Observation 1: Your Neighborhood

Take an exploratory walk around your neighborhood (within a few blocks or more if you can). You may have walked your neighborhood many times already. But this time, walk with the purpose of specifically noting the layout, the objects, the people and activity that you encounter. Take nothing but your eyes, ears and notebook or electronic device (to be used only for recording your observations).

Take your time as you take it in. Spend at least 30 minutes observing. Your goals in this exercise are...

1. **Observe** and **describe** your neighborhood without being judgmental or presumptuous.
2. Identify your own feelings and attitudes as you make your observations.

Questions that may help to open your eyes.

Do not take these questions with you, but think about them before you set out to do your observation.

1. What buildings or other objects stand out in the neighborhood?
2. What do you notice about the architecture?
3. How do the people use/guard/share space?
4. What kinds of art or monuments are on display?
5. What do people do in your neighborhood?
6. Do you see anything that indicates who is in charge?
7. In what ways is the area separated?
8. Is the neighborhood primarily residential? Commercial? Something else?
9. How do people interact with each other? Is there a consistency in that? What kinds of behavior appear to be unacceptable?
10. How do people greet one another? When do they not greet each other?
11. What is considered proper attire? Who is in uniform? Does attire distinguish the people of specific occupations? Identify an individual's economic level?
12. How would you describe the pace of life?

Write it down.

It is important to write down notes of your observation, both to remember as well as to help prevent inadvertent interpretation. Your memory will interpret and remember what it deems as important. So writing down simple notes as you observe, or immediately after, is very important. But at this point don't analyze, don't sort. Just write!

You may want to draw a simple map that shows roads, geographic features, shopping areas, residential areas, parks, places of worship, recreational areas, gathering places, restaurants, schools, and anything else that appears to be significant. Your map does not have to be perfect to be helpful. In all likelihood the process of making a map will reveal helpful things about the cultural setting.