

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 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. 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.

For your notes, 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.

Questions to open your eyes:

1. What buildings or other objects stand out in the neighborhood?
2. What does the architecture communicate?
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. Who is in charge?
7. In what ways is the area separated?
8. Is the neighborhood primarily residential? Commercial? Something else?

Questions to stimulate your thinking: Now you are invited to do some inductive thinking. Using the evidence you see, try to build some tentative generalizations about the people and their culture patterns.

1. Why do the people come to or pass through this area?
2. What is acceptable behavior and etiquette in the neighborhood? What kinds of behavior appear to be unacceptable?
3. How do people respond to authorities such as traffic officers?
4. Who are recognized as leaders in the setting? Why are they seen as leaders?
5. How do they greet one another? When do they not greet each other?
6. What is considered proper attire? Who is in uniform? Does attire distinguish the people of specific occupations? Identify an individual's economic level?
7. Are the people deeply religious? Why do you say so?
8. How would you describe the pace of life?

Toward a Hypothesis:

1. What function(s) is the area fulfilling?
2. What would you say the people there value based on your observations?
3. What are some of the ways that the area reveals the cultural characteristics of the people?