

Participant Observation 3 – Restaurant or Café

Find a restaurant or café to visit. After you arrive, make yourself comfortable and order yourself a nice treat. Plan not only to eat or enjoy your beverage, but to observe what is going on around you. But don't just "look" at it, absorb it, stare at it until the details sort themselves out. 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 are...

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

Consider drawing a simple map of the restaurant.

Using the questions below, observe and record as much as you can about the restaurant.

Questions to open your eyes:

Concerning signs/symbols/space:

1. Observe the symbols (size, images, concepts, themes)
2. Note the colors (intensity, variety, arrangement)
3. Notice shapes (curves, straight lines, complexity)
4. Study the use of light (as decoration, as illumination, intensity)
5. Pay attention to the music (style, volume, variety, themes, vocal, instrumental)
6. What kinds of art/decorations are on display?
7. Notice the style of the architecture. What are the themes?
8. Describe the furniture (style, usage, quality).
9. Describe the attire. Who is in uniform? Describe the uniforms.

About behaviors:

1. Notice ways of serving the food (who is served first, order of items served, attitudes)
2. Observe the greeting of customers (language, friendliness, interaction space)
3. Note the ways of dismissing customers (language, attitude, interaction space)
4. How do the people use/guard/share space?
5. Describe the people (gender, age, ethnicity)
6. What kind of discussion and interaction takes place between customers?
7. What are people doing while they are there (besides eating)?
8. What kind of order is there? How is order established?
9. What jobs/tasks/roles do you notice among the employees?
10. What generational roles or norms do you notice?

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. What would you say is acceptable behavior and etiquette? What kinds of behavior appear to be unacceptable?

2. Who are recognized as leaders in the setting? Why are they seen as leaders?
3. Who is honored/respected? Who is disrespected/marginalized?
4. What traits do people value in others?

Toward a Hypothesis:

1. What does the restaurant communicate about the cultural values of the people there?
2. What functions is it fulfilling now?
3. What are some of the chief ways that the restaurant and reveals the cultural characteristics of the people?