

PRACTICAL MANUAL

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PRACTICAL MANUAL

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DISCLAIMER: All methods and techniques presented here are discussed keeping in mind the assignment to be done after going through this practical manual

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After going through this manual, the learner will be able to:

- Describe research design for urban research clearly;
- Identify methods and techniques to conduct urban research; and
- Familiarise oneself with the exact way of doing urban research.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This course on urban anthropology exhibits to us mostly about how anthropology broke out of its traditional outlook of working only with tribal and rural societies. It was a major shift and more than a shift it was the inclusion of the urban along with the established tribal and village studies. Keeping in view of the vital ideas and concepts explored in urban anthropology, the course has provided you with a categorical explanation on the various aspects that urban anthropology covers. To recapitulate, the course begins with the meaning, aim and scope and newer avenues in urban anthropology; basic concepts related to urban, urbanism, urbanisation, pre-industrial and post-industrial etc., have been covered. The course takes into consideration discussions on the contributions of the Chicago and the Manchester schools of thought, along with how network analysis and extended case studies can play vital roles in the study of the urban. It discusses anthropological approaches like the concept of Folk-Urban Continuum and its placement in the Indian context; identifies concepts including semi-urban, peri-urban, towns and two-tier cities; describes the emergence and expansion of urban areas as well as the urban way of life; examines the different challenges and problems of urban life; explains the meaning of diversity and differences in cities etc. This course on urban anthropology also covers the concept of migration; changing dynamics of kinship, family and marriage in the city; decipher religion, caste, ethnicity and class in the urban context; and finally looks into the kind of research that has been done in urban anthropology and the kind of possibilities that can be explored in terms of investigation of the urban.

This unit is your manual which guides you to conduct research in urban spaces. It attempts to make you comfortable with how anthropological research is possible and doable in urban settings even though conventionally anthropology has a background of studying tribal and rural settings. Let us move to our sections in this unit and make you learn about the kinds of methods you can use in the field to conduct research of the urban.

1.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

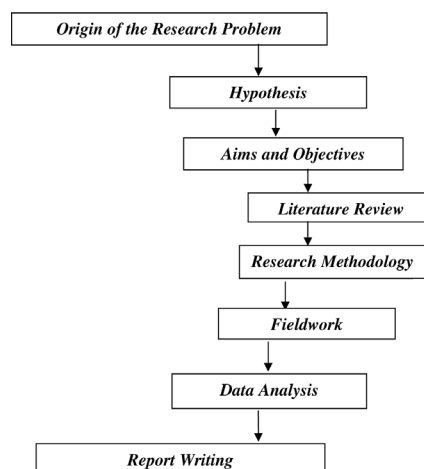
Research design can be seen as an intricate plan which is made in preparation for collection of data in any research. It is also called a blueprint of a research. Its main aim is to answer the research questions posed by the researcher. In fact it is this design that helps researchers/ students to better their skills by using the best suitable methodology for their research. To define research design, Caliwan states that it is “any organised inquiry designed and carried out to provide information for solving a problem” (2014).

The research design has two purposes. i. it helps you to frame a research outline based on the kind of research you propose to do and ii. It makes you design a step by step framework on how you will proceed with your research.

We have already dealt with this portion in our course on Research Methods (BANC 110). Please read the portion on Research Design from your Practical Manual to proceed.

To recapitulate though, there are many kinds of research design namely, descriptive, explanatory, experimental, survey, cross sectional, semi-experimental, review etc. Depending on the kind of research to be done, a research design will be formulated. Research can be qualitative or quantitative in nature. Qualitative research is one which is descriptive in style meaning that it is majorly a narrative and does not necessarily allow to be defined by quantitative research. Its main agenda is to comprehend why something occurs in a particular way. Whereas quantitative research is conducted through surveys, censuses, polls etc. It is basically interested in collecting an accurate form of data in the context of numbers, like for example, how many people voted for a particular political party. While qualitative research is conducted among a small sample, quantitative research is conducted among a large sample group which may be random. It uses the help of statistical method to reach its results.

In anthropology, the steps of a research design may look something like this:



The steps of a research design are nothing but the methods and procedures that will be or are taken into consideration to collect and analyse measures of variables stated in a research problem. The first step in a research design is the research problem and its creation itself. It starts with the designing of a research proposal once the problem or topic is formulated (See Practical Manual from BANC 110 for more detailed information).

1.2 RESEARCH OF THE URBAN

We must proceed with the knowledge that urban spaces are unlike tribal and rural locales and hence require a particular kind of investigative methodology to conduct research meaningfully. Research in urban anthropology mainly concentrates on researching the urbane and hence the spaces including the inhabitants of the city become the main protagonists in such research. Urban spaces being very diverse and not compact, is not universal and requires various ways to research different concerns related to the distinct urban worlds. Though diverse in content, urban anthropology's aim is to decipher the processes of urban life and urbanisation in a holistic manner, which is the hallmark of anthropological studies. The different lessons that you have read through in this course, become your theme or your focus of research. Hence concerns like migration, religiosity, rural-urban continuum, economic conditions, social relationships, protests, urban behaviour, transforming cultures etc. and much more become your matter of investigation. When we aim to investigate the urban, we cannot avoid the extensiveness of urban life and thus try to study this space by trying to position it into culture reserves. Research on urban spaces should not be only to bring out the theoretical understanding that we have of the city but these studies should be such that, they provide pragmatic perception to everyday urban encounters. We should bear in mind, that with the urban spaces transforming at a rapid speed due to their dynamic nature, their associated theories and methodologies do not remain the same.

To know how it all started, urban research in anthropology was advocated by major American anthropologists, A.L. Kroeber and Franz Boas. Even though in today's time, urban research methods constantly change with the changes in urban ways of life, the ideas and methodologies promoted by these stalwarts, still remain influential. Urban anthropological research broadly resorts to anthropological ethnographic investigation where the main methodology is qualitative fieldwork research. Hence the characteristic features like intensive, immersive fieldwork, collection of in depth data, use of 'multiple field techniques using participant observations, note taking, open interviews, case studies of significant situations, audio and visual recordings' to create thorough ethnographies (Prato & Pardo, 2013, p. 94) are followed.

Activity

Do a photo project on images depicting concerns from urban anthropology.

Participant observation which is considered one of the key methods of doing anthropological research, a convention taken forward by Bronislaw Malinowski, is also important in urban ethnographic research. Blended with other qualitative methods, this helps in understanding social experiences as closely as possible. Bernard (2006), puts forward that to achieve first-hand information, a researcher

may completely involve herself/himself into the everyday dealings of a culture, but he advises that the researcher has to at the same time, withdraw from this scenario of involvement to frame the collected material from an unbiased perspective. Hence here what the researcher has to bear in mind, is that notes are to be maintained carefully throughout the process of data collection, nuances of the respondents are to be carefully observed etc. so as to not solely succumb into being a participant entirely, using a combination of methods can keep the researcher afloat and balanced. This has to be kept in mind, when you intend to proceed for any investigation related to urban spaces or otherwise.

Before moving on to the next section, where we will discuss about the various methods that you can use to conduct research in urban anthropology, let us briefly try to understand what urban ethnography is. We then move forward to understand how fieldwork is to be conducted in urban spaces.

Urban ethnography is nothing but where ethnography is used as a method to conduct research in any urban space. The product that is created in terms of written or visual documentation also becomes your urban ethnography. Needless to say, to conduct ethnographic research you will use, a variety of qualitative methods and the product will contain what Clifford Geertz called as “thick description”.

As anthropology demands, fieldwork is a must in research work, which is what makes this subject unique. So, it is unavoidable a method is urban anthropology. However, urban spaces are a different ball game altogether. Here, like a singular rural or a tribal space allowing intensive fieldwork over a period of time without break, this is not absolutely possible. Urban spaces keep evolving and with it the ways of conducting fieldwork needs to too. In place of a continuous process, fieldwork can be done in breaks or profoundly if needed, conducted online (as is the requirement right now due to the on-going pandemic). Thus what we observe and you need to bear this in mind categorically that fieldwork will involve modifications distinct from the conventional kind to facilitate research in urban areas. Research on urban areas and urban phenomena also allows multi-sited fieldwork, helping you to learn about global and local processes together.

Activity

Conduct an anthropological analysis of gradual change of any urban locality since 10 years.

It is pertinent to choose your research locale carefully in an urban space to conduct your fieldwork. As the population and area is huge, we have to consider a sample area and size which should fit the research problem to be studied. It will not be humanly possible for you to conduct any research pertaining to any urban concern on your own if you think of taking an entire city into your gamut of study. Hence the small sample you choose will actually assist you to work on any problem related to gender, migration, ethnicity, political notions, social lives, schools, banks, hospitals, art, virtual spaces etc. and much more. This choosing of a small representation of a bigger concern in an urban space, is what Foster and Kemper (2009) call as the first and most important step in fieldwork of the city.

There are many pitfalls that you face while conducting fieldwork in the city. This has been discussed in detail in Unit 13. However just to recapitulate, they are:

- i. The physical expanse of the city;
- ii. The heterogeneous population and their routines;
- iii. Rapport establishment;
- iv. Lack of proximity with respondents;
- v. Availability of respondents.

However these challenges can be effectively dealt with and you as a researcher can seek innovative and new ways to conduct research. You may adopt new methods or mould a conventional method according to the need of the hour.

1.3 VARIOUS METHODS

In this section let us discuss about some of the methods you will be using when you will be conducting urban research. These methods will help you in creating small to big projects, either for practice, for your assignments or at a later stage if you end up working for any research organisation investigating urban concerns. Eames and Goode (1977) say that the central focus of urban anthropological investigation is on how ethnographic methods can capture concepts in a holistic and procedural way. Keeping this in mind, some of the important research methodologies of the urban are (portions reproduced from Unit 13):

- 1) **Myth Debunking-** Eames & Goode (1977) call myth debunking to be a sophisticated scientific research method mainly useful in urban research studies. According to them, this method helps in challenging the generalised urban myths and assists the researcher in generating in-depth ethnographic data. This research methodology comes handy when the researcher's focus is to prove or reject a commonly discussed assumption that has a dependent and independent variable. This method in urban anthropology helps in "testing the universal assumptions about urban life using cross cultural data to refute myths and stereotypes" (Eames and Goode 1977: 262). Any general assumption that circulates in the social sphere about urban living and depicts a cause-effect relationship can be tested using this method. For example, in general understanding we assume that urban dwellers are unhealthy because their street food consumption is high. Here, health of the urban dweller is an independent factor while street food consumption is a dependent factor. A study of food consumption in an urban setting using myth-debunking methodology can shed light on this matter at length. Similarly, there can be many such hypotheses that could be studied using this research method.
- 2) **Case studies-** Another important research method in urban anthropology is case studies. As the term *case* reflects, this method stresses on only one unit of analysis that can be a particular event, specific institution, or even a single person. Using case studies method a researcher can generate detailed data highlighting the uniqueness of a particular context. Several cases when analysed thematically present a comparable set of data that potentially helps

in studying the underlying cultural patterns, similarities and differences between them. Through these comparative case studies, the processes of generalisation of results become easier. For example, a researcher studying the social impacts of corona virus outbreak interviews a vegetable vendor in an urban locality. The data generated from this particular interview becomes a case study for the research.

- 3) **Network analysis-** Urban anthropological studies increasingly use network analysis methodology to study city life. This methodological experimentation provides a systematic approach to the anthropological study of urban communities (Wolfe 1978). It uses the variable concepts like linkages, centrality, range, flow etc. to define and trace the social relationships in urban setup. With the networks becoming a natural object of study in urban contexts, this methodology serves as an important focal point in the upcoming urban research to deal with wide range of topics including job recruitments, health services, elections etc. This method works under an assumption that the city life unfolds itself in the form of networks, which are distinct from the kinship groups or clans as observed by anthropologists in their studies of tribal or rural areas.

The above methods highlight some of the direct methods that can be utilised by you as methods during your fieldwork. It has already been pointed out above that while researching the urban, diverse groups of people are met with who occupy different social and economic positions. The communication established with these people, say a local politician, or a vendor, or a private school teacher, may be brief and long term relationship with them may be difficult to develop. Many a times, you may encounter people who are vastly knowledgeable and may want to read and comment on your findings and analyses. Sometimes relationships with such kind of people may move beyond the fieldwork period with being connected to them through the internet. These may of course enhance your anthropological investigation but you should handle such situations with much sensitivity.

Moving ahead, some other methods that you can make use of are auto-ethnographic method where you can research yourself and your lived experiences in context to the culture you live in. The auto-ethnographic method can be of immense value to studying any urban concern as your lived experiences coupled with anthropological know-how can bring out important knowledge.

Similarly urban research sometimes like conventional research requires the use of statistical methods. This you can do by collecting surveys, analysing social media posts or policy documents or online news etc.

Innovative means are mostly tried out as methods to do urban research, which can be seen for example in Heather Horst and Daniel Miller's 2005 work, where they made use of mobile phone contact list in urban Jamaica to map people's social networks. Similarly you may make use of Facebook posts of any particular activism, for example the *#metoo* movement and draw upon them to build an anthropologically significant analysis. Even lyrics of songs used in hip-hop or heavy metal music may be studied by you to understand the social meaning hidden in them and the nuances they wish to portray. These may help you to build knowledge on how issues like racism, queer politics, poverty, etc. are viewed in society and how they keep evolving, positively or negatively.

Visual methods can also assist you to cover areas like urban landscapes, urban skyscrapers, urban slums, urban institutions and you may display meaning through photographic images and video documentaries.

These points discussed above are few of the many ways you can conduct urban research. Below we will talk about three more important methods which are part and parcel of urban anthropological research.

- 4) **Studying up:** Any society we will observe is made up of people who either dominate or are dominated. There is hardly any equilibrium in society. Urban research conventionally was viewed as the study of the middle classes and the elites. To understand the process of inequality or domination, it is required that people high up the ladder are investigated and interviewed too. It was Laura Nader (1972) who used the term to study up in order to research the powerful in society. She emphasised that only studying the “underdogs’ or the “marginalised” will not bear results. The privileged groups needed to be studied too. Sherry Ortner (2010) too talks about studying up and mentions that it actually means studying sideways where actors like lawyers, politicians, policy-makers, corporate leaders, scientists- people who hold important social positions. It is at the same time to be kept in mind that it is at times difficult to get access to these powerful protagonists/players of society. They do not mostly have the inclination or the time for research interviews. Ortner (2010) suggests a way out for this. She says that researchers may conduct interface ethnography where you may conduct participant observation in a broader area where you remain in the periphery while observing the protagonists who possess the centre stage. For example observing actors at a film festival or politicians at political debates but from afar.
- 5) **Mobile methods:** An interesting method in urban research is the mobile method. Mobility here is movement in and around the city which display the hierarchies that exist. It is not just simple movement from one point to the other but can bear meaning for a researcher who interprets and makes sense of it, which can show varied contexts and positionality (Cresswell, 2004). Hence you will not alone research physical movement, but concentrate on aspects like blocked movement, immobilisation, forms of dwelling etc. You can through this method, research the everyday ordinary practices, nuances, conversations and experiences of your respondents in different contexts. As they are not fixed in one locale, this method helps in understanding what such mobility and positionality in dispersed urban landscapes contain. Hence to investigate urban life, this method comes in very handy. You can either make use of participant observation or unstructured interview while tagging along with your respondent. This method along with helping to understand movements, and spaces across the city, it also helps to know about the larger structures that organise this movement (Büscher et al., 2011). Another way of conducting the mobile method is by asking your respondents to maintain a diary where they can write their daily narratives. These you can discuss with them. Such discussions can inform about events the respondent encounters but are not able to explain articulately. This hence allows ‘to uncover how... mobilities are choreographed, sensed and made sense of’ (Haldrup, 2011: 69).

Activity

Conduct an anthropological analysis of 10 nuclear households in an urban space and find out the reasons for being structurally isolated in terms of kinship, networks and joint family.

- 6) **Mental Mapping:** Urban spaces and how people associate themselves to the urban landscape, these can also be researched by use of maps. This means the making of maps. This method is known as mental mapping or cognitive mapping. Here respondents are asked to draw maps of specific areas like one's neighbourhood or one's city. Respondents can be told to mark important areas, like institutions, facilities or landmarks which are significant to them. Bjørn Sletto (2009: 445) mentions that, 'maps are representational objects intimately implicated in projects of place-making, and therefore they are tools of power'. Map making method is a method which helps you to draw out different experiences and ideas of urban spaces.

So these are some of the methods and processes that you can make use of while conducting research on urban spaces. These ever evolving methods along with the ever evolving urban sights, give you an idea of how conventional methodology can be innovatively moulded to cater to the requirements of research.

1.4 SUMMARY

We have hence in this manual tried to provide you with the know-how of how to conduct research in urban anthropological sites and their concerns. This unit takes you through a detailed explanation on what has been covered in this course on urban anthropology, how urban anthropological research is different from conventional anthropological research. This unit herein talks about how as urban spaces evolve all the time with its diverse in movement inhabitants, research methods also need to be shaped and re-shaped accordingly. The field too hence needs to be approached accordingly. The various methods discussed above will guide you in conducting your investigations of the urban carefully and with clarity. Few activities in this unit will assist you to practice these methodologies and enhance your attempt to become a good investigator.

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