

Proposal for AIFRIS 2023

Axis 4 - Actors of social action, research and training around emerging practices: experiences and knowledge sharing

Emerging practices in social work fieldwork

How to integrate emerging practices into social work research and training? How to train in emerging practices?

From the field diary to the smartphone: data collection tools for a multi-site ethnography

Within the framework of a multi-site ethnographic analysis of the unemployment activation policy for untrained young people in French-speaking Switzerland, it was necessary to think about and implement the tools for recording observations in different places and at different times. Thinking about the emerging practices of the multi-site ethnographic survey practice was necessary not only for practical reasons of recording and organising the observations but also for monitoring the progress of the field survey, analysing the themes and linking them. Generally equipped with a field notebook, the ethnographer notes down his or her descriptions, ideas, initial reflections or the links between observations and readings. With the development of digital information and communication technologies (DITC), the tools for data collection and research practice have been transformed and multiplied. In the context of our survey, the smartphone has gradually replaced the notebook, becoming central to the research practice and penetrating our work in a way that goes far beyond an object for finding one's way, making contact with respondents or recording interviews. As Niels Van Doorn (2013) little work in qualitative sociology has yet dealt with the uses of Tnic, especially in the process of data collection, its methodological implications and on the process of ethnographic research¹. By discussing how we have moved from the classic field notebook to the smartphone, we will interrogate its methodological and epistemological implications in the production of data and, therefore, knowledge. Traditionally, when we started a field study, we had a notebook and a pen to record our observations and thoughts. The organisation of the field notebook can take different forms and be adapted to the object of study. As proposed by Stéphane Beaud

¹ A reflection on this subject is developing in history (Heimbürger & Ruiz, 2011) and in anthropology (Favero & Theunissen, 2018). For sociology, the mobile ethnography approach developed by Monika Büscher and John Urry (2009) proposes some reflections on this subject, without, however, the methodological issues and their implications having been the subject of in-depth reflection, as Birgit Muskat et al. (2018). In the Francophone context, to our knowledge, apart from works in history, no one discusses the uses of the smartphone in fieldwork, although it is possible to hypothesise that they are common and developing in research practice.

and Florence Weber (2017), one way is to separate the use of the double page: one contains the ethnographic descriptions, while the other contains the initial reflections. At the beginning of our fieldwork, in the measure of evaluation of academic skills and psychological abilities (EVAL), we chose to organise our logbook in this way and started to transcribe our observations: During the individual interviews between a young person and a guidance counsellor (COP), during the meeting between the EVAL teams and that of the Regional Placement Office, during the collective sessions presenting the measure to the young people and the school tests, then we recorded our observations on the same day, either in one of the offices of the COPs or the same evening at home. Note-taking, which can be frenetic or intriguing to the outside eye, did not seem to bother the COPs. In this environment, note-taking and writing were not particularly problematic, unlike sitting in the waiting room chairs². Writing is an integral part of the work of the UCCs, who are used to writing. They write reports about young people, make notes in files or write emails. Moreover, their academic training has led them to develop a certain comfort with the practice of writing. In fact, it even seemed expected that we would write, as our presence was justified by the production of a research paper. Indeed, whenever a COP's personal desk was free, everyone encouraged us to use it for our research work. Although we adopted this way of recording our observations at the beginning of our fieldwork in the EVAL measure, we quickly revised this method of recording observations, particularly during the individual interviews between the COPs and the young people, by setting up an observation framework and memorisation techniques.

While the COPs were not bothered by our note-taking, we were questioned and embarrassed by it, especially during the individual and closed-door interviews between the COPs, the young beneficiaries and ourselves. Indeed, after attending interviews while taking notes, we felt a certain unease. There were two of us observing, listening and taking notes on what the young people said and how they described themselves. Although the objectives of note-taking were different from those of the COPs, they were not necessarily obvious at first glance, especially to the young people. We therefore felt that we were reinforcing, or even intensifying, the process of evaluation and scrutiny to which each young person must submit. We therefore decided to abandon the notebook and replace it with an observation grid, as a mnemonic tool.

² The attitude that most disturbed one of the COPs was that we were sitting in the waiting room, i.e. adopting the position of the "young person". While we were sitting in the chairs, in the middle of the space surrounded by the COP desks, one of them, who from her desk saw us sitting, stood up and asked us "what are we doing here and why are we sitting here? At that moment there was no one in the waiting room. By voluntarily sitting down in the waiting room, we sought to verify the role of the chairs and their layout. This technique, known as breaching (Garfinkel & Barthélémy, 2009) The aim of this technique, known as breaching (Garfinkel & Barthélémy, 2009), is to generate a disruption of activities in order to reveal the norms that structure them. Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1998) used this technique in his *Asylums* survey by voluntarily sitting on a chair usually occupied by a patient to test a hypothesis. We wanted to test the chairs that look comfortable, but from which it seems rather difficult to extract oneself once settled. We hypothesised that this specific choice was not only to make the place welcoming, but also to pacify people by neutralising them and signifying the position they should take. The virulent reaction of the COP tends to confirm the hypothesis. Without being occupied, the waiting room has a specific role exclusively for the beneficiaries. It also reveals our position in this field as a trainee-student and not as a young beneficiary. Finally, this attitude counterbalanced the role we were supposed to play by giving the impression that we were lounging.

After observing a few interviews and discussing with the COPs how each interview should be conducted, we drew up three outlines according to their specificities. During the interview, we sometimes noted a few elements on this grid, but most of the time we took a moment after the end of the interview and the debriefing with the COP to fill in our observation grid and to write down the events that had marked us in the situation. Moreover, while our objective was to observe the relationship between the young beneficiaries and the COPs and its effects in the transition and orientation processes, it soon became apparent that the main issue of this measure was the evaluation instrument, what it produces and its uses by other organisations and professional groups in the active unemployment policy. Thus, it is not so much the relationship between the young people and the UCCs that influences the content of the report, but rather the uses by other professional groups and the need to protect one's professional identity, values and ethics, which determine the way in which the results of the three tests are reported. This is not to deny the role of the relationship, but it takes on less importance in relation to other issues, particularly professional ones. Our note-taking and the use of our notebook therefore focused on observing the relationships and discussions around these issues.

When we began our fieldwork in the two activation programmes specifically dedicated to young people (PAJ), we were equipped with our notebook and pen, which we quickly exchanged for our smartphone. First of all, the fieldwork in the two PAJs implies active participation that is not just listening, as in the EVAL measure, which makes it difficult to take notes *in situ*. As in the undercover surveys, we often took notes under cover, especially in the toilets (Arborio, 2008; Benquet, 2013). However, most of the time, we transcribed our notes and memories that same evening on our computer using the 'DayOne' program - a personal journaling application, available for smartphone and computer. With the use of commercial applications that record the notes taken and update them on the different devices simultaneously, note-taking on a smartphone has gradually replaced the field diary. With a smartphone it is less necessary to go and hide in the toilet to write in a notebook. Indeed, in both activation programmes, the use of mobile phones and smartphones was not forbidden. Young people and professionals use them at break times or during certain activities. In this sense, if we took out our smartphone to write a few notes, it seemed less incongruous than frantically taking notes in a notebook, as we experienced.

..In situations where note-taking might appear more legitimate, such as in team meetings where we are gathered around a table, it quickly became apparent that apart from the secretary, who is responsible for taking notes in order to draw up the minutes of the session, no one writes during these meetings. To be more precise, while some people have a pen and notebook, they do not necessarily take notes and more frequently make drawings. Although at first we tried to ignore this and pretend that we were not doing anything different from the other people present, we were not able to hold this position for very long, especially as our note-taking did not go unnoticed at all and even aroused suspicion. At the end of a team meeting, one of the professionals present asked us why we were writing down everything that was said, insisting that

it was not necessary. We therefore took the option of writing down when it might not raise suspicions or when it was expected, especially during the job interview simulations with a volunteer, where we were subsequently required to record the important elements in the logbook of the young person's file. Thus, as Van Doorn (2013) taking notes on the smartphone proved to be a very convenient means of camouflage that allowed us to blend in with others and not accentuate our particular position by carrying a notebook and pen. As such, the smartphone fits in the back pocket of a pair of trousers with no problem and allows us to be hands free, not having a bag with us all the time, while still having easy access to our smartphone³.

This change in note-taking modalities is accompanied by a change in our position as a participating observer, which becomes closer to an observant participation (Soulé, 2007). Our engagement and participation was characterised by taking on activities, including observing the mock interviews and, more generally, taking on the costume of the trainee. Engaging in activities led us to develop a sensitive memory, incorporated through the body, emotions, sensations, smells, sight, which, according to some authors, is richer than that written in notebooks or on audio tapes (Blondeau 2002 cited by Soulé, 2007, 134). In this respect, the smartphone as a 'sensitive technology' fully participates as a form of mediation of the sensitive experience, capturing the moment and the sensations through photos, notes, recordings and allowing them to be recalled *a posteriori*, by looking at the photos, reading the notes or listening to the voices in the recordings⁴ (Van Doorn 2013)

While we were already using the smartphone for its function as a recorder for interviews, during the ethnographic fieldwork in the two activation programmes, it was also transformed into a notebook, but also served as a camera, in addition to its function as a phone and for sending/receiving messages. Thus, when reconstructing the field practice, we realised that our smartphone had taken on a much larger role than that of a simple note-taking device, dictaphone or address book. In the words of Niels Van Doorn (2013), the smartphone has not only become an indispensable component of fact gathering and storage, but "our ethnography has been intimately informed by the incorporation of our smartphone into field activities that converges diverse media and methods into a single technological object⁵." The author identifies six functions to her smartphone in her qualitative investigation: recorder, note taking, directions and maps (GPS), calls, SMS, and photo and video taking. Let us begin by presenting the use of the smartphone as a recorder, which initiated the process of incorporating the phone into field practice.

Register :

³ This means wearing trousers, having pockets, and not having a smartphone that is too big so that it can fit in a pocket without disturbing movement.

⁴ Moreover, Pink (2009) also reflects on various media technologies that are frequently employed during fieldwork, such as the digital (video) camera, stressing the interplay of the senses engaged by these technologies as they modulate the temporality and spatiality of this mutating entity called "the field."

⁵ my own ethnographic research has been intimately informed by the incorporation of my smartphone into fieldwork activities, which converged various media forms and methods into a single technological object.

We used our smartphone to record all our interviews. This choice proved convincing in the long run for different reasons.

First of all, a smartphone, placed on the table with the screen facing downwards, is very easy to forget for most of the interviewees. Indeed, although the use of the smartphone to record the interview may have surprised some of my interviewees, once it is placed on the table face down, everyone forgets about it insofar as the vast majority of people have a smartphone and are not surprised to see it on the table. Conversely, in our experiments, a recorder, however small, always reminds the interviewee, and the interviewer, of the particularity of the situation⁶. Secondly, using the smartphone as a recorder also served as an icebreaker. Taking out my smartphone to record had the advantage of intriguing my interviewer, which was an icebreaker at the beginning of the interview, and allowed me to start a conversation about how it works, especially with people in management positions. This was a way of 'imposing on the big guys' (Chamboredon et al. (Chamboredon et al., 1994). On some occasions, this also involved reflections by the interviewee on the role of social media and its effects on young individuals. In these moments, the smartphone performs different actions simultaneously: it induces, conducts and records our conversations (Van Doorn, 2013). Last but not least, the smartphone's microphone is powerful enough and of good quality to successfully capture and modulate the sounds being recorded. Thus, when we conducted interviews in cafés, we did not encounter any difficulties in transcribing them.

Making calls and sending messages

We also used our smartphone to contact the institutions, mostly by email. The phone and messaging functions were mainly useful for communicating with the young beneficiaries. While the smartphone can be a very useful data collection and storage tool, it is also a communication tool that allows us to set up appointments, but is not limited to this. We mainly used it to set the place and time of appointments with young beneficiaries. This was usually done by SMS, rather than by phoning them. A second use was the exchange of messages, which was initiated by some young beneficiaries. With mobile technology, the boundaries of the field are no longer limited to the time we decide to visit the AYPs, nor to the set and scheduled times of the interviews. The people in the survey can make it their own by deciding to contact us for advice, to continue a discussion or to ask us to go for a drink. Our smartphone made it possible to continue the survey relationship beyond the spatio-temporal framework defined by the survey and the institution's settings⁷. On a few occasions, young beneficiaries contacted us by phone and messages, including via the 'Whats'app', to ask for advice, ask questions or discuss their situation and the strategies to adopt. For example, there have been occasions when a young user, while shopping at the supermarket, was in a hurry to apply for an apprenticeship and phoned us for advice on her application. Between the fruit and vegetable aisles, we found ourselves discussing the company

⁶ The question arises as to whether or not the interview situation should be completely forgotten.

⁷ Through the intermediary of the smartphone, interstices can be created in the device, places, spaces, relationships that are at the same time the product of the device, but from which it is absent-

to which this young woman wanted to apply and giving her some advice. As such, this instrument of mediation and communication allows for the establishment of bonds of trust and proximity through the transitional mechanism of the active unemployment policy, but which goes beyond it through the interstices that are created in places, temporalities and relationships that are outside the mechanism. Moreover, in these cases, the respondents are no longer just people whom we ask to tell us about their experiences or whom we observe, but also participants who appropriate the survey device in order to do something else with it, and they take part in the production of knowledge, which is often referred to as mobile ethnography (Cresswell, 2012, cited in Muskat et al., 2018).). Thus, in different situations, our smartphone was embedded to serve as camouflage, as discussed above, but also to increase and foster social proximity with the participants (Büscher & Urry, 2009; Muskat et al., 2018; Van Doorn, 2013). In fact, the smartphone reconfigures the boundaries between fieldwork and the private sphere, but also the space-time of the survey, which is no longer limited to the moments and spaces defined by the researcher. In this sense, the smartphone is an instrument of multi-sited or mobile ethnography that draws new lines of territorial research, in our case of the device by going beyond it.

Taking photos, making videos and using GPS

We also used our smartphone to take photos of the different places where we conducted the survey. We used the photo function of our smartphone primarily as a form of virtual memory so that, when we were analysing, we could remember elements of the layout of the places and describe them. Thus, as a technological mediation, past experiences are extended into the present through the visual inspection of photographs or when listening to the voices recorded at the time of the interviews, reminding us of the moment of the interaction, the atmosphere, the feelings. This virtual proximity made possible by technology leads us to reconsider the spatio-temporal differentiation that characterises the data collection phase and the analysis phase.

As mentioned earlier, we rarely used the GPS function of our smartphone in the survey, but it could have been activated to simultaneously view and keep track of the spatial and temporal traces of the cross-sectional ethnography we undertook. This was partly possible *a posteriori* thanks to the note-taking applications we use which identify the places and date they were taken. By carrying out a cross-cutting ethnography in a device while moving from one place to another, the smartphone has the advantage, not only of not being cumbersome, but also of being able to contain in a single place all the facts collected in various spaces and temporalities, as well as with various social actors.

A posteriori, as is done in mobile ethnography (Büscher & Urry, 2009; Muskat et al., 2018) We could also have asked the young beneficiaries and the professionals to record their movements within and outside the city. This methodological procedure would have allowed us to objectify, in space and time, the relationships within the institution, between the institutions and the time spent in each of the places, i.e. the transversality of the system. In addition, we observed that the young people constantly move around the Semos, between floors, between workshops and between

professionals, in order to escape the control of the system and to create spaces for themselves. In a co-construction of data, it would have been possible to objectify our observations by tracking their movements in the organisation, by equipping people with sensors and by using mobile applications. In other words, new technologies allow us to operationalise the methodological principles defended by Deleuze, following Foucault, for the study of the device. They offer, in any case, important and fruitful methodological openings, which could be developed in the study of devices and public action. Finally, these technologies lead us to question the boundaries between the private and public spheres, but also between scientific disciplines. Indeed, they lead anthropologists to collaborate with engineers and designers to design applications specific to ethnographic practice, or even, for example, the 'ethnoall' application (Favero & Theunissen, 2018). The use of the smartphone forces us to question how technologies transform relationships and analysis, when these are mediated by technological processes.

To conclude this section, these elements lead us to question the role and epistemological implications of new information and communication technologies in the production of knowledge. As an assembler object, it plays not only a role of storage and collection of observed facts, but also of analysis, i.e. as a producer of data. Some applications allow you to take notes, take pictures, draw, record internet links or articles. From these elements stored in a smartphone or on a computer, links are established between notes, between photos and places, between bibliographical research on the internet and notes stored in the applications. In this sense, they produce data and analyses according to their own programming logic, and thus show correspondences. As a machine endowed with a certain intelligence, whose programming has been done by others without one's knowledge of its logic, the collection of data with a smartphone can influence the researcher's analysis and production. It is therefore not a question of replacing the field journal with the smartphone, but of making them complementary tools. The first makes it possible to classify, sort, categorise and organise all the heterogeneous data recorded in the smartphone. In this respect, the field diary is a safeguard against the risk of endless accumulation of data and a reminder of the aim pursued through the field survey. Moreover, by multiplying the possibility of collecting data, the smartphone can give the impression of achieving exhaustiveness and of granting the smartphone the virtues of objectivity in the face of the researcher's subjectivity. In other words, the smartphone does not replace the work of analysis and the researcher, but is first and foremost a tool that can, in certain conditions and research contexts, facilitate the work.

The use of the smartphone makes the boundary between our different roles - researcher, teacher, private sphere - more opaque insofar as, as we have shown, these different spheres are mixed in the smartphone. It is a hybrid space in which a significant amount of both private and professional information is aggregated. This tends to contradict the fallacious assumption that professional and private spheres are distinct and separate in research practice (Van Doorn 2013). This dimension was most evident in the use of the send and receive function. Moreover, we can collect much

more information and data with these devices, which raises the question of their place in the negotiation of access to the field and the role to be played by them and what to tell our interlocutors. In the end, important methodological and ethical questions arise, particularly concerning the management of research data, its storage and its free access (Nada, 2020).

What are the emerging practices in the use of digital technologies by social workers in relation to their missions and their capacities to appropriate them? To what extent do digital technologies make sense and fit into the practices of social workers? What are the beneficial and problematic effects of digital technologies on social workers' ability to access these tools, particularly in terms of the knowledge and skills required to use them? If digital technologies become established in social work, it will be necessary to confront the types of practical, ethical and identity-related questions that they generate (Mazet & Sorin, 2020; Meyer, 2014) as well as recognising emerging practices by integrating them into social work knowledge and training.

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