Rapid Ethnographic Assessment: A Data Collection Case Study

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Presentation Overview

- Introductions

- Overview of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment (REA)

- The Case: Wayne State University Student Center

- Using REA to Enhance Ethnographic Evaluation and Research Methods

Ethnography

- **Characteristics**
  - Scientific Immersive investigation of:
    - a People and their Culture
    - Their experience and sense-making of their world
  - 12 to 18 months
  - Methods include:
    - Interviews
    - Participant Observation

Rapid Ethnographic Assessment

- **Overview**
  - Origin
  - What it is (unique characteristics)
  - What it isn't
  - Why use it?
  - When is it appropriate ?
    - Formative Phase of Research and Evaluation Projects
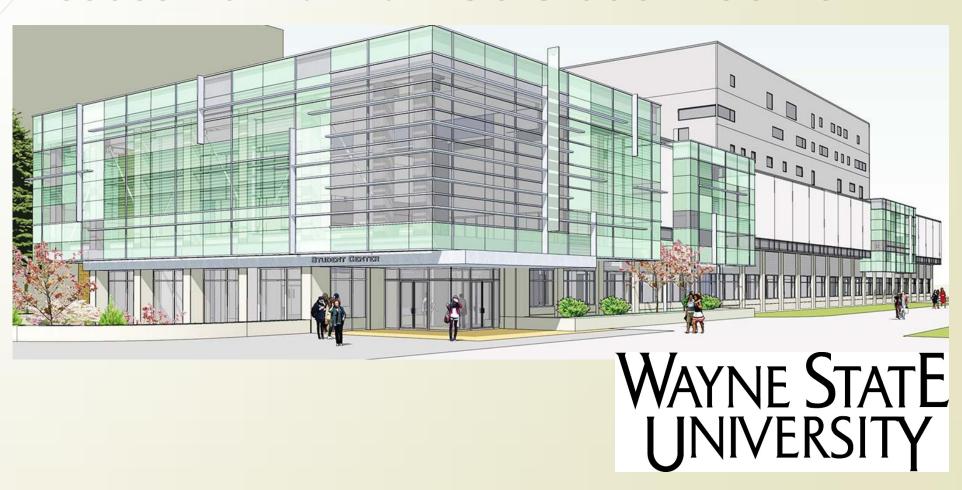
Rapid Ethnographic Assessment

- **Original Context**
  - Anthropology, other disciplines, community members with knowledge of local population & area
  - Used to provide U.S. and international organizations with info on emerging crises
    - refugees, disease outbreaks, natural and human-made disasters; need for rapid economic development
  - Technical assistance provided to strengthen local infrastructure
  - Added evaluation component to determine intervention impact

RATIONALE

- Can be used in:
    - Rural and urban areas
    - Homo-and heterogeneous communities
- Key features:
    - Triangulation
        - Data collected from many sources, using numerous collection methods
        - Continuous check for data reliability, validity, scope & Interpretation
        - Aids in determining optimal intervention methods, and intervention evaluation
    - Interdependent parts
        - Methods used (1) interactively, not sequentially; and (2) in combination with each other

The Case:
Assessment of the WSU Student Center

Research Question & Why REA?

- Q: To What Extent Does the Wayne State University Student Center Meet Student Needs?

Why Use Rapid Ethnographic Assessment?

Aim 1

- **Specific Aim A: What is a (student) need?**

- **Methods**
  - Archived Materials / Texts
  - Key Informant Interviews
  - Student Intercept Interviews
  - Focus Groups

What your students say…

De Andre

- In a renovated student center, I'd like to see more things to do at the underground …with more games and activities

Alayna

- I'm looking for technology…
  …with Mac Computers and flat screens everywhere

- Please add more security cameras for safety

Aim 2

- **Specific Aim B: How were student needs determined?**

- Methods
  - Archived Materials / Texts
  - Key Informant Interviews
  - Student Intercept Interviews

What your students say…

Jessica

- I don't go to the student center because it's outdated and not inviting

- The Food Court is too crowded

- I need more cozy 'little spots' to sit

Amir

- For me, add a healthier variety of food
- We need more sustainable features like water bottle filling stations

Aim 3

- Specific Aim C: To what extent does the
  - (1) building itself;
  - (2) internal spaces; and
  - (3) services contribute to meeting student needs?

- Methods
  - Observations / Photos
  - Focus Groups
  - Archived Materials / Texts
  - Key Informant Interviews
  - Student Intercept Interviews

Socialization

Design & Aesthetics

Methods: Summarized

- **Intercept Interviews**
  - 48 Students (15 pilot interviews)
  - Randomization – every 4th student

- **Key Informant Interviews**
  - 4 Graduate & 1 Undergrad
  - 5 Administrators
  - 4 Professionals
  - 4 Staff
  - 1 Alumnae Representative

- **Participant Observation**
  (14 on prospective student tour)

- **Focus Groups**
  - #1. 4 students
  - #2. 5 students

- **Texts**
  (newspaper articles; materials from architect, planners, administrators)

- **Photographs**
  (specific dates and times to analyze busiest times)

Analysis

- **Assumptions**
  - Everything about a space or building has a social meaning
- **Theory**
  - Anthropological theories - space, place, embodiment, culture
- **Coding**
  - Initially established codes – **access, food, safety/security, gender, social, design/space use, amenities**
- **Collaborative, Interpretive Triangulated Data Analysis**
  - Data reviewed and aggregated during detailed debriefing(s)
  - **Common Questions**
  - Emergent codes and themes - **modernity, sociability, transformation, pride, "real campus"**

Methods: Photographic Analysis (Examples)

October 5th: 12 noon
(Facing Starbucks)

October 13th: 3:59pm
(1st floor study area)

October 19th: 4:15pm
(Food Court)

Mixed Use Space?

Reporting, Conclusions & Recommendations

- **Reporting**
  - **Written & Visual**
  - **MORE THAN METAL & GLASS:**
    AN ANALYSIS OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT and STUDENT NEEDS in the RENOVATED WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT CENTER

Last Word & Considerations:

- YES!
- Opportunities
  - Space & Amenities
  - Student Use & Behavior
  - Non-student Users
- Challenges
  - Food
  - Safety

Using REA to Enhance Evaluation & Research Methods

- **Encourages use of variety of data sources beyond the usual…**
  - Data can be captured in a range of settings
- **Allows for deployment of all, and diverse team members**
- **Supports rapid assessment, intervention, evaluation cycle**
- **Enhances rigor**
  - Cross-checking through triangulation

Our Reflections: Method Strengths, Challenges

Strengths

- Easy to use for a variety of projects
- Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used simultaneously
- Can be used with a number of theoretical models, frameworks

Challenges

- Rapid Process
  - Challenges teachings of slow methical research
  - Thorough knowledge of all data nearly impossible
  - Difficult to gather info from all key informants, all data sources
  - Only stakeholders and users interviewed

Q & A