

ADVANCING ETHNOGRAPHY BY MAKING VISUAL RESEARCH ACTIONABLE

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The public nature of ethnography and the ways in which this research is shared, is reaching critical importance and carries new implications for the field. Ethnography in the public context invites, for better or for worse, a greater degree of interpretation from people and will be entrenched by the same political and media pressures of other publicly relevant information. Open information is followed by increased interpretation, mixing and innovation, as people reshape the data to fit their own needs and match it to new frames of thinking. This means that ethnography going public translates to ethnography that people are acting upon. This paper, will be an exploration of how researchers can put forth information that is accessible and actionable for others and asks how we might be able to create a space that is informative, facilitating, inspirational, and ethical.

Particularly in this open, more publicly relevant context, ethnographic description must be paired with the effective sharing and communication of ideas. Ethnography is traditionally reported in written documents that, at best, have descriptive photos of the research subject. Yet, in recent years with greater access to information via the web and rapid adoption and greater accessibility of tools to manipulate and display information, there is increased opportunity to convey information in a more rich and dynamic environment. Now more than ever ethnographic reports must extend beyond linear narrative by utilizing new technologies, and mirror the rich, multi-dimensional realities that the ethnographies themselves attempt to represent.

While collaboration does exist in the social science community, the emergence of transdisciplinary collaboration to incorporate the likes of programmers, designers, and media specialists has not been fully developed. Furthermore, ethnographers are not trained communicators: it is one task to understand information yet it is quite another to share it with others. The benefits of exploring communication strategies for ethnography can extend beyond simply conveying information in a clear, visually digestible way. It actually can lead to a higher degree of depth and detail that is conveyed in a visual vehicle. It is widely documented that research helps us provide a deeper look into people's needs and dreams, however the next challenge is making it salient and usable. By providing case-study examples and identifying key themes developing in these areas, we will investigate new tools for communicating ethnographic information.