



Fieldwork Methodology

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Potential topics

- ▶ Site selection
- ▶ Entry
- ▶ Focus
- ▶ Approaches and techniques
- ▶ Internal conflicts
- ▶ Managing information
- ▶ Ethics
- ▶ Withdrawal
- ▶ Career and institutional context

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•Potential topics

- Selection
 - Scholarship vs. Media hype
- Entry
 - How do I make contact? making contact
 - Establishing a relationship
 - How much do I reveal about my role?
 - Who do I contact?
 - How do I select informants and events (sampling)
 - Initiation, request, formal or informal, extent of involvement
 - requests/needs; problem-solving
 - Lower North Shore
- Focus: What information do I collect?
 - Challenges from community members: Hussar
 - What are useful research questions
 - How do I manage competing objectives (e.g. scholarship and community objectives)
- How do I do it?
 - Which are the most appropriate techniques to use?
 - How do I record the information?
 - How do I analyze the information?
 - Survey for activism: Penticton
- How do I deal with internal conflicts and crises
- How do I manage information in a responsible manner
- How do I appropriately withdraw from the community

Sampling strategies for small samples

- ▶ Formulate your research questions as questions
- ▶ Answer those questions (with minimal research)
- ▶ Design the research so you can be wrong

Strategic comparisons are key

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- Any empirical research is immediately confronted with a sampling issue.
 - What data should I select? Where will I find it?
- For field methodology this most often means developing a sampling strategy for a small number of places (e.g. N=1 or 2).
 - Because of high cost in terms of time and resources along with the challenges of engaging with others.
 - Therefore, spend more time on the framing of the questions and strategy in order to increase the chance that you will learn something.
- Spend more time on identifying what you wish to learn.
- Formulate them as questions (with a question mark at the end).
 - Examples:
 - What are the main factors that contribute to community changes?
 - What kinds of changes?
 - Over what periods?
 - Why does it matter?
- Answer your questions as best you can – with minimal research: ask your colleagues and friends, google.
 - Include a list of reasonable answers with which you don't agree.
- Example:
 - What kinds of factors have driven community changes in Canada?: economic, capacity to function, urban proximity, social cohesion, sustainability
 - Over what periods?: Since WWII (last 70 years)
 - Why does it matter?: Will help communities to better position themselves for the future by knowing what are the major factors affecting their futures.
 - What are the main factors?: globalization, economic uncertainty, local social institutions, climate changes.
- Design your sample so that you can be wrong!
 - Otherwise it's not worth doing the research.
- This means designing it to maximize the chance that opposing positions will be supported.
 - If they fail to be supported, then this makes a stronger case for you.

		Globalization	
		High	Low
Capacity to Act	High		?
	Low	X	

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- Example

- Hyp: Globalization has a significant impact on a community's ability to act and therefore sustainability.

- [*] Looking only at communities with high impacts of globalization and finding their ability to act is low makes only a weak case for your claim – since we don't know the effects where globalization is low.

- [*] Looking at communities which are relatively isolated from globalization and finding they have a higher ability to act makes a much stronger case.

- Looking for the cases where globalization is high yet the communities have high capacity to act [*] and those cases where globalization is low yet the communities have low levels of capacity to act [*] become even more important in the long run. Why do these unexpected cases exist? That's where the breakthroughs in understanding often occur.

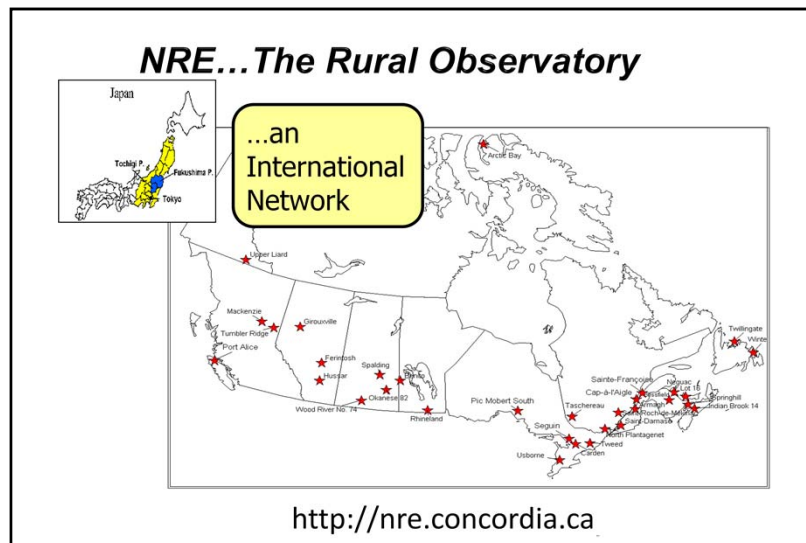
- Collecting data about the competing hypotheses is also critical – in order to eliminate them.

- Comparison is key to learning – so make your comparisons strategic.


			High Capacity		Low Capacity	
			Lead	Lag	Lead	Lag
Global Exposed	Fluctuating	Adjac	175	27	46	15
		Distant	251	13	124	44
	Stable	Adjac.	4	26	8	19
		Distant	5	16	18	30
Local Exposed	Fluctuating	Adjac.	4	5	4	9
		Distant	12	16	5	13
	Stable	Adjac.	12	100	7	45
		Distant	15	99	16	56

Example: The New Rural Economy Project Sample Frame

- This was a national project with a focus on community change.
- Wished to collect a sample of Canadian rural communities to work with over a long period of time.
 - Follow closely their past and present conditions and changes.
- Focused on Census Subdivisions: closest to the smallest centres of local decision-making: municipalities.
- Select on CSDs then follow the local activities, networks, and perceptions to define the appropriate regions.
- Identified 4 likely factors driving community change: globalization, economic stability, proximity to large urban centres, institutional capacity.
 - 5th added (leading and lagging on elected economic indicators) to appease our funders (not good strategy to select on the outcomes we wished to investigate).
- Sample procedure
 - Identify all rural CSDs using available information
 - Randomly selected one site from each cell
- Took it to our regional partners and discussed:
 - the accuracy of the classification from the basis of their knowledge
 - existing research activities related to the selected sites
 - strategic opportunities arising from the selection
- If changes were warranted
 - make substitutions from within the same cell
- This serves as the basis for our 'Rural Observatory'
- NOTE: The diversity of rural Canada
 - 706 Leading CSDs
 - 533 Lagging CSDs
 - Index based on National standards – yet makes clear that not all of rural Canada is in decline






- Generally positive response from site people
- Several unable to respond because of burnout – part of our research learning
- Actively involved with 21 sites – (S) plus 2 from Japan
 - A Rural Observatory
 - They participate in research
 - Annual Workshops
 - Exchanges e.g. C-J
- Reflects our long-term commitment to the sites
- Significant advantages to learning
 - For us
 - For sites



References and links

- ▶ Spradley JP. The Ethnographic Interview. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers; 1979.
- ▶ Yin, Robert K. Case Study Research: Design and Methods. Revised. Newbury Park: Sage Publications; 1989. 166 p.
- ▶ <http://nre.concordia.ca>
- ▶ <http://billreimer.ca/tipsandtools>



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