

Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Spring 2012

**11.234: Making Sense:
Qualitative Methods for Planners and Designers**

Units: 2-4-6

Prof. Lawrence Vale, with Visiting Prof. Sam Bass Warner, Jr.

Office: 10-485, x3-0561

Instructor: Christa Lee-Chuvala

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11a.m.-12:30 p.m. in Room 10-401

This class surveys the use of qualitative methods in urban design and planning practice and research. It is intended chiefly for Ph.D. or 2nd-semester MCP students with an interest in improving their abilities to measure and understand the relationship between physical design and social change. Our aim is to help students develop methodological and analytical skills that will be useful in both research and professional practice.

While we will draw examples from a wide variety of research and practice situations, this year--as the major focus of the class-- we will collectively attempt to “make sense” of the phenomenon of urban community gardens in the Boston area. These places, located in approximately 150 formerly vacant lots throughout the neighborhoods of the city, have frequently been celebrated for their positive contributions to inner-city community life. Many have argued that community gardens have been an important urban development phenomenon in a wide variety of ways: as sources of food production; as catalysts for community organization, self-help, and local empowerment; as tools for securing tenure over contested land; as sources of social and psychological support networks; as affirmations of ethnic solidarity and diversity; and as techniques for making cities more healthful and attractive places. Despite the clear appeal of such assertions, these claims have rarely been subjected to close critical scrutiny. Our goal is to identify, examine, and measure the variety of ways that community gardens do-- or do not--contribute to a sense of community

To ask the question: “How do community gardens contribute to community?” raises difficult questions about the meaning of “community” and its measurement. A wide variety of qualitative methods are needed to make sense of such a complex urban phenomenon. In this class, we will identify and discuss appropriate methods, and attempt to combine them into a coherent research design that can be carried out this spring.

QUALITATIVE METHODS

We will cover a long list of qualitative methods through readings and discussions based on the literature about good research practice. The forms of data collection that we will

discuss include: observing environments and physical traces, observing environmental behavior, asking questions, using focused interviews, administering standardized questionnaires, using written archival materials, and using visual materials including photographs maps, and various other new media. In addition, we will consider the use of case studies and methods for analyzing data.

Readings and Classroom Discussions

There are three required texts for all students in the course. One is John Zeisel's *Inquiry By Design: Tools for Environment-Behavior Research* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006). The second is Laura J. Lawson., *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005). Finally, we will read substantial parts of Robert Weiss, *Learning From Strangers* (New York: The Free Press, 1994). All three should be available at the MIT Coop. Other readings will be available on the class Stellar site.

The structure of the class is based on four elements: (1) reading and classroom discussions about the various qualitative methods, (2) study of the research methods used in selected classics from the community design research literature, (3) student fieldwork exercises that use the various methods to make sense of community garden environments, and (4) a final case study write-up describing and analyzing a particular community garden environment, drawing upon the variety of qualitative methods we have discussed and including a reflective account of your own experiences as an investigator.

Classics in Environmental Design Research

The class will be punctuated by a set of sessions called "Appendectomies." How often have you read the results of a research project but skipped reading the technical appendix describing the methodology? We have selected several recent or classic books from the community design research literature, and we will focus on the appendices in order to appreciate better the use of the various qualitative methods and the way that various authors have made sense of communities. Each doctoral student (plus additional volunteers) will be responsible for reading *one or two* of the selected books in its entirety all students will be responsible for reading the appendices. Students are encouraged to identify additional books with compelling methodological appendices for inclusion.

Exercises and Case Study Write-Up

Each student will complete a series of eight exercises plus the case study write-up described above. The exercises will be brief, intended to illustrate quickly and economically the use of the various methods. These exercises must be handed in on a regular basis at the beginning of the session at which they are to be discussed; they provide a "ticket of admission" to the class discussion. Regular participation is required.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

7 February

Introduction: Making Sense of the Elephant
What are Qualitative Data? and What are Communities?

Handout: Rebecca Solnit, "Who am I Where?" (from *Infinite City*, 2010)
Distribution of Maps and Data about Community Gardens in Boston/Cambridge

9 February

Making Sense of "Garden Personalities"

Guest Speakers: Sam Bass Warner and student teams from last year's class

Laura J. Lawson., *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005): Part III, Gardening for Community-1945-present, pp. 205-302.

Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *To Dwell Is to Garden* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), pp.30-40.

14 February

Making Sense from Beginning to End: Selecting Cases

Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th Edition (Beverly Hills: Sage, 2008), "Introduction" and "Conducting Case Studies: Collecting the Evidence," pp. 2-23 and 98-125 (*Please read if you did not read this in 11.233*)

Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias and Related Issues," *Paradigms and Sandcastles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 89-130. (*Please read if you did not read this in 11.233*)

Vinit Mukhija, "N of One plus Some: An Alternative Strategy for Conducting Single Case Research." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 29, 4 (2010), 415-426.

Exercise #1 Assigned: "Seeing Without Visiting"
Due: Tuesday, February 28, in class.

21 February --No Class (Monday Classes meet instead)

23 February

Making Sense Through Archival Materials

Zeisel, *Inquiry by Design*, Chapter 13 “Archives.”

Joseph Heathcott, "Reading the Accidental Archive: Architecture, Ephemera, and Landscape as Evidence of Urban Public Culture." *Winterthur Portfolio* 41, 2 (December 2007).

Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 81-110.

Recommended:

Eugene Webb, et al., *Nonreactive Measures in the Social Sciences*, second edition (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), Chapter 4, “Archives I: The Running Record,” and Chapter 6, “Archives II: The Episodic and Private Record.”

Kathryn J. Oberdeck, “Archives of the Unbuilt Environment,” *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 251-273.

28 February

Discussion of Exercise #1

Excerpts from Jeffrey Hou, Julie Johnson, and Laura J. Lawson, *Greening Cities, Growing Communities: Learning from Seattle’s Urban Community Gardens* (University of Washington Press, 2009): pp. 17-23 “Research and Literature on Community Gardens;” pp. 41-42 “Citywide Planning;” pp. 80-92 “Thistle P-Patch;” pp. 107-122 “Bradner Gardens Park;” pp. 176-179 “Multicultural Expressions through Design” and “Too Much or Too Little Design?” and pp. 183-184 “Hybrid Public Space.”
(optional) pp. 49-61 “Seattle’s Community Garden History”

Exercise #2 assigned: “Categorizing: Documenting a Neighborhood with a Thematic Map,”

Due: Tuesday, March 13, in class.

1 March

Making Sense of Visual Materials: Maps and Representations

Guest speaker: Annette Kim

Lisa Peattie, *Planning: Rethinking Ciudad Guayana* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), Chapter 6, “Representation.”

Rebecca Solnit, *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* (University of California Press, 2010), introduction (“On the Inexhaustibility of a City” and excerpts).

Jeremy W. Crampton and John Krygier, “An Introduction to Critical Cartography,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 4, 1 (2006), 11-33; available at <http://www.acme-journal.org/vol4/JWCJK.pdf>

Annette Kim, *Sidewalk City* (excerpts).

6 March

Making Sense of Physical Traces

Zeisel, *Inquiry By Design*, Chapter 8, “Observing Physical Traces.”

Allan B. Jacobs, *Looking at Cities*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), “Clues,” “Seeing Change,” and “Observing the Unknown.”

Dolores Hayden, “Decoding Everyday American Landscapes,” *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004): 7-16.

Anne Whiston Spirn, “Restoring Mill Creek: Landscape Literacy, Environmental Justice and City Planning and Design,” *Landscape Research* 30, 3 (July 2005), 395-413.

Ronald Lee Fleming, “Questions to Ask a Space,” *Places*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Summer 1990, pp. 12-13.

8 March

Making Sense of Visual Materials: Photos

Guest speaker, Anne Whiston Spirn

Jon Wagner, “Introduction: Information in and about Photographs;” John Collier, “Evaluating Visual Data,” and John Collier, “Visual Anthropology,” in

Jon Wagner, ed., *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979).

Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (1942), Introduction, and browse through the photographs in the rest of the book.

Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Eye is a Door* (excerpts).

Exercise #3 assigned: "Photographs as Judgments":
Due: Tuesday, March 20, in class

13 March

Discussion of Exercise #2

15 March

Making Sense Through Interviews

Zeisel, *Inquiry By Design*, Chapter 10, "Focused Interviews."

Robert S. Weiss, "Respondents: Choosing Them and Recruiting Them," and "Preparation for Interviewing," from *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 15-59 (*Please read if you did not read this in 11.233*)

Recommended:

James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), "Locating an Informant," and "Interviewing an Informant," pp. 45-68.

H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1988), "Unstructured and Semistructured Interviewing" and "Structured Interviewing," pp. 203--240.

DUSP Plaza conversation on recording phone interviews.

Exercise #4 Assigned: "Interviewing the Garden Coordinator"
Due: Tuesday, April 10, in class.

20 March

Discussion of Exercise #3

22 March

Making Sense Through Key Informants

Appendectomies: *Street Corner Society* and *There Are No Children Here*

William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1993 [original1943]), pp. 279-373.

Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 307-09.

27 March VACATION

29 March VACATION

3 April

What is a Community? (Christa Lee-Chuvala)

Ray Oldenburg. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of the Community* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 1999), Chapter 1: The Problem of Place in America, and Chapter 2: The Character of Third Places.

Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78, 6 (1973), 1360-1380.

Robert J. Sampson, 1999. What "Community" Supplies. In *Urban Problems and Community Development*, ed. Robert Ferguson and William and DickensWilliam, 241-292. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press.

Recommended:

Barry Wellman, Barry, "The Community Question." *American Journal of Sociology* 84 (1979), 201-31.

5 April

Making Sense Through Mixed Methods

Robert S. Weiss, "Issues in Interviewing," from *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 121-150.

Appendectomies: *There Goes the 'Hood and Favela*

Lance Freeman, *There Goes the 'Hood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), "Appendix: Methodology," 211-217.

Janice Perlman, *Favela* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), "Preface" and "Appendix 1: Research Methods and Challenges", xiii-xxiv, 341-354

10 April

Discussion of Exercise #4

Making Sense By Observing: Professional Settings

Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1990), Chapter 6, "Fieldwork Strategies and Observational Methods," pp. 199-244.

Exercise #5 assigned: "What happened at the Gardeners' Meeting?"
Due: Tuesday, May 1, in class.

12 April

Making Sense Through Questionnaires

Zeisel, *Inquiry By Design*, Chapter 11, "Standardized Questionnaires," and Chapter 12, "Asking Questions: Topics and Format."

Recommended:

H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, "Questionnaires and Survey Research," pp.241- 270.

Appendectomy:

Clare Cooper, *Easter Hill Village: Some Social Implications of Design* (New York: Free Press, 1975), pp. 281-324.

Exercise #6 Assigned: "Interview Protocol"
Due: Thursday, April 19, in class.

17 April PATRIOTS' DAY HOLIDAY

19 April

Making Sense of Public Housing

Appendectomies:

Susan J. Popkin et al., *The Hidden War: Crime and the Tragedy of Public Housing in Chicago* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), "Research Methods," pp. 191-198.

Lawrence J. Vale, *Reclaiming Public Housing: A Half-Century of Struggle in Three Public Neighborhoods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), "A Note on Literature and Methods," pp. 415-419.

Discussion of Exercise #6

Exercise #7 assigned: Observing Gardens and Gardeners
Due: Tuesday, May 10, in class

24 April

Making Sense by Participating

Appendectomies: *Tally's Corner*, and *Black on the Block*

John Lofland, David Snow, Leon Anderson, and Lyn H. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, fourth edition (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2006), "Getting In," pp. 33-53.

Elliot Liebow, "A Field Experience in Retrospect," from *Tally's Corner* (Boston: Little Brown, 2003), pp. 151-166.

Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 15-21.

26 April

Making Sense by Participating in Public Housing

Guest Speaker: Erin Graves

1 May

Discussion of Exercise #5

Making Sense by Observing: Environmental Behavior

Zeisel, *Inquiry By Design*, Chapter 9, “Observing Environmental Behavior.”

H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1988), “Direct, Reactive Observation” and “Unobtrusive Observation,” pp. 271-289 and 290-315.

3 May

Making Sense of Community Dynamics

Appendectomies: *The Urban Villagers*, and *The Levittowners*.

Herbert J. Gans, “The Participant-Observer as a Human Being: Observations on the Personal Aspects of Field Work.” (1968)

Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1982), “On the Methods Used in this Study” and “Postscript to Appendix,” pp. 396-417.

Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners* (New York: Free Press, 1967). Appendix: The Methods of the Study (pp. xxxiii-xli and 435-451).

8 May

Making Sense of Behavior in Public Space

Appendectomies: *City: Rediscovering the Center*, and *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York: Doubleday, 1988). Introduction, pp. 1-7.

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961): “Introduction” and Chapter 22, “The Kind of Problem a City Is.”

Video: “The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces” (excerpt)

10 May

Making Sense Right from the Start: From Data to Story

Discussion of Exercise #7

Robert Weiss, “Analysis of Data,” and “Writing the Report,” from *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 151-206.

Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th Edition (Beverly Hills: Sage, 2008), “Analyzing Case Study Evidence,” pp. 127-162.

Discussion of final report

15 May

Discussion of Garden Cases I

17 May

Discussion of Garden Cases II

Final Case Write-ups due Thursday, May 17 (last day of classes).