

Challenge of Inclusive Methods Under the Covid Pandemic

Chisaki Fukushima (Phd Cand.),
Centre for Rural Economy, School of Natural Environmental Sciences,
Newcastle University, U.K



Introduction

My project investigates how people perceive and control risk which requires an understanding of cultural values. Qualitative data production such as participant observation, living in the community, learning the local language and building relationships over prolonged periods, allow me to determine what matters to other people. ‘Inclusive’ methods embrace the aspiration to be included in the ‘native’ community and see the world the way they see it. ‘Involvement’ means building trust relationships, taking responsibility as a community member and prioritising the physical safety of the people with whom I work. Covid19 is a significant barrier to fully adopting the ethnographic methods I intended. This poster addresses some of the work-arounds that became necessary not only to protect my informants from possible health risks, but also to ensure that I was not *seen* to be posing a health risk to local people.

Participant Observation

Inclusiveness in Participant Observation includes a tension between two potential contradictory factors:

- The researcher must decide what information and which informants to include in the field data collection.
- The informants/community must decide whether to include the researcher and provide the opportunities to participate and observe.

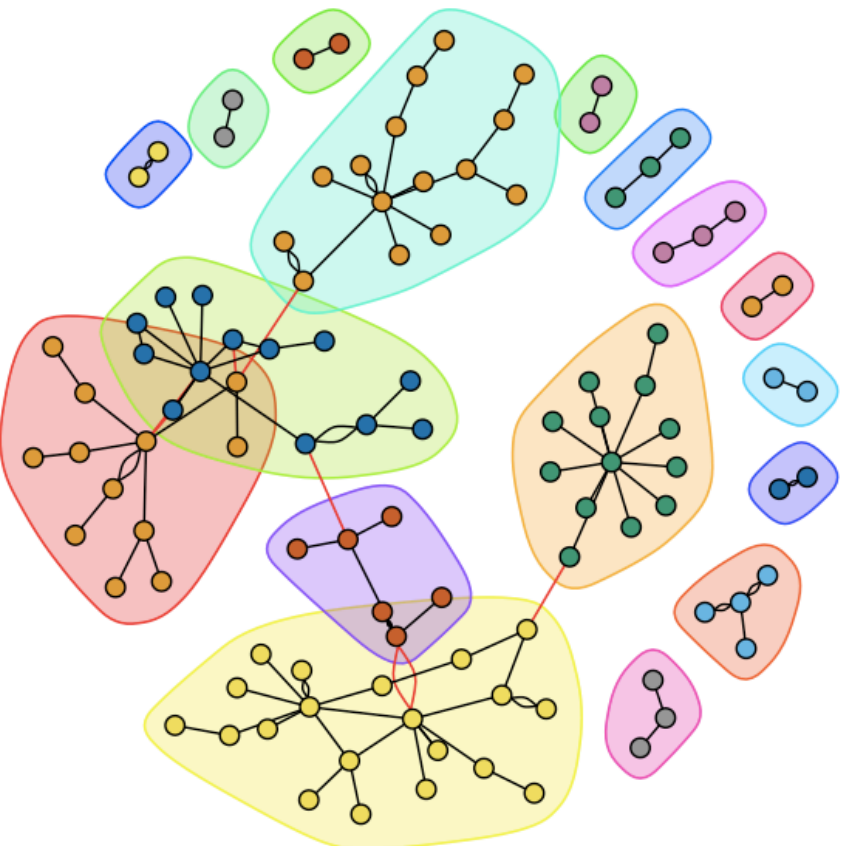
The first concept of inclusiveness is about research ethics, which shape the fairness of your data. In a village study, interviewing one or two individuals cannot characterise the whole attribute. The second point is about the power/debt relationship of researcher and informant. It is a part of participant observation that the researcher seeks immersion in the local values and relationships which are not necessarily fair or the same as the researcher’s.

Timeline & Work-Arounds

The chart below is the fieldwork timeline reflecting the response to the Covid outbreak earlier this year 2020.


Feb-May	June-July	August
The initial outbreak and quarantine: the people’s response, particularly toward the outsiders, was so significant as to conduct the research in person. I modified the research sources to the less person-basis archival and observational research, studying the underlying social structure (kinship ties: see the below diagram Social Network Analysis) by employing the land registry and other historical records.	Re-addressing and normalisation of the guideline: the targeted population became used to the habitual everyday precaution. I got to know a few potential informants who is willing to chat in person. Some snowball sampling helped identifying problems and producing semi-structured questions. Individual life histories were collected to provide the longitude view of the local history.	Deregulation and diversified reaction: as the restriction eased, more people are open to be acquitted and join the research my movement range, and the larger samples are collected based on the semi-structured open-ended interviews. Not only by what the informants said, however, the representation of quantification and classification delineate their knowledge. Analysis of individual result is fed back to the informant and discussed for the understanding of representation.

Observation & Archive



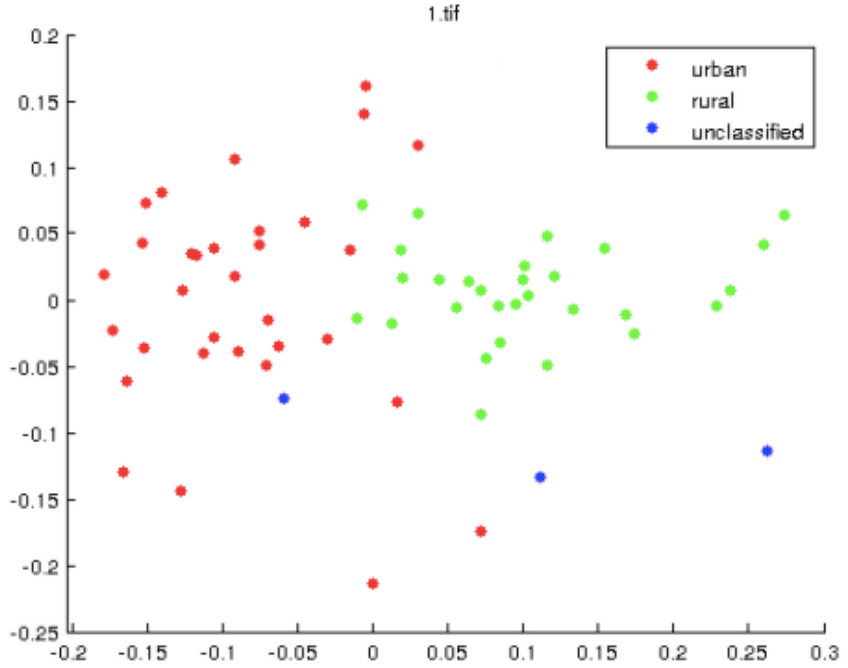
Research on social background and structure.

Building Rapport & Collaboration



Life Histories: semi-structured in-depth interviews over several sessions. Transcription, audio recordings and field notes.

Data Collection



Participant Observation, Free Listing & Pile Sorting. Analysis and feedback to the informants.

Discussion

In my participant observation research, the principle challenge in the context of Covid19 came as a result of my outsider status. Under less extraordinary circumstances, while I may not have been embraced immediately and welcomed into people’s persona lives, I would not have been viewed as a potential source of a deadly virus. I therefore had to develop rhetorical formulas for explaining the purposes of my research, but also to reassure my potential informants that I had taken all necessary precautions to prevent the transmission of the virus. This led to an unwelcome *reinforcement* of my outsider status. Wearing a mask is what *outsiders do*. *Insiders*, particularly household members, do *not* wear masks together. So I had to reconcile the need to protect my informants (by wearing a mask) with my desire to be accepted and included as an insider (by not wearing a mask). In the end, it was not entirely resolvable, but that is perhaps a far more common fact in participant observation than we care to admit.