Workshop on

Political Ethnography

28 and 29 April 2011

Badia Fiesolana, Seminar room 4
European University Institute, Florence, Italy

Please register with Monika.Rzemieniecka@eui.eu

Lecturer: Ward Berenschot, Leiden University

While playing a relatively marginal role within mainstream political science, ethnography has the potential of uncovering the workings of power in ways unrivalled by other research methods. Ethnography is a research method that prioritizes real-time, close-up observations of social life through a relatively lengthy immersion of the researcher in the studied scene or institution.

Highlighting the contribution of ethnography to the study of politics and power, this interactive workshop discusses the theoretical and practical dilemma's involved when designing and conducting an (political) ethnographic study. After a discussion of number of theoretical approaches that can inform such ethnographies, the seminar aims to help students deal with the manifold challenges of doing fieldwork and of analysing the resulting material.

Provisional Workshop Programme

28 April
9:30 - 11:00

Session 1 - Introduction: Why political ethnography?
This session introduces political ethnography and the different ways in which it can contribute to the study of power. The session discusses the advantages and drawbacks of using this research method.

Literature:
11:00 - 12:30
Session 2 - Theoretizing political ethnography: three approaches
Using three ethnographic studies of a relatively similar topic, this session highlights how three distinct theoretical approaches - an interpretivist approach, a relational approach and a 'contentious politics-approach' - can inform and shape an ethnographic study. While comparing these different approaches, this session highlights the interaction between theoretical preferences and a researchers' questions and answers.

Literature:

Recommended Literature:

14:00 - 17:30
Session 3 - Doing ethnography: challenges of organising, documenting and surviving fieldwork
Fieldwork is more an art than a craft, as there are no specific guidelines to follow. This session, however, discusses some common challenges. Touching upon the challenges of selecting informants, gaining access, self-presentation, following a research-plan and maintaining mental health, this session aims to show how successful fieldwork depends on striking a good balance between conflicting interests.

Literature:

29 April
9:30 - 11:30
Session 4 - After ethnography: the challenges of analysing fieldwork-material
How not to get lost in the mountain of research-material gathered during fieldwork? Harking back to the theoretical approaches discussed during session 2, this session discusses some strategies for turning research material into academic texts.