

How to do social science research on blockchain in energy applications

Volume 2: Phronetic, unintended, self-ethnographic field work as a method

SIG group meeting, March 9, 2018



field studies



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Field studies involve collecting data outside of an **experimental** or lab setting. This type of data collection is most often done in natural settings or environments and can be done in a variety of ways for various disciplines.



en.wikipedia.org

[Field Study: Definition & Research - Video & Lesson Transcript | Study ...](https://study.com/academy/lesson/field-study-definition-research-quiz.html)
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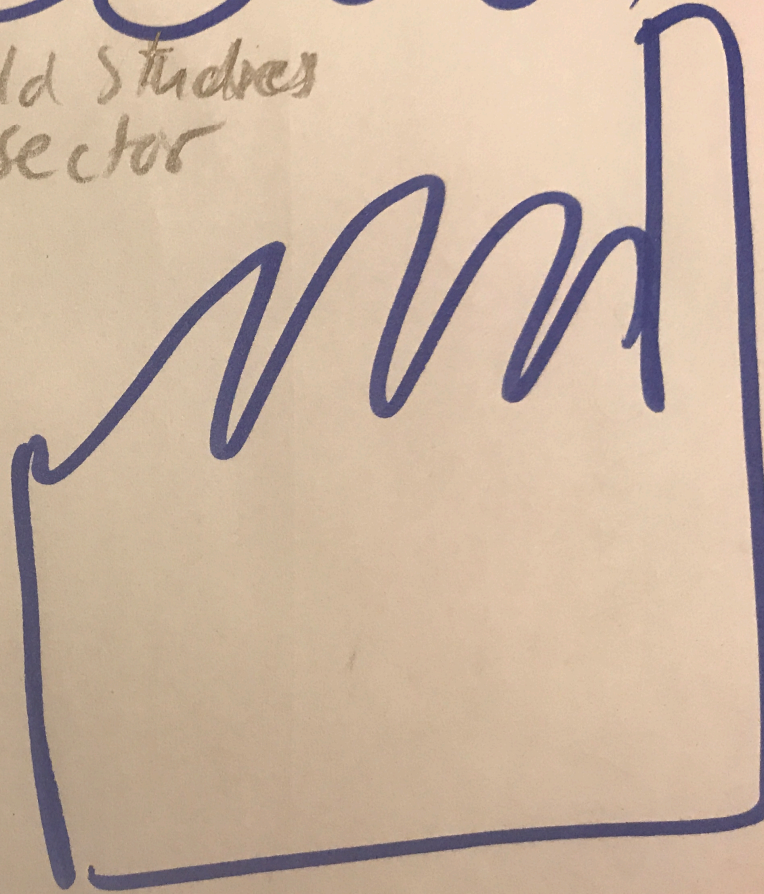
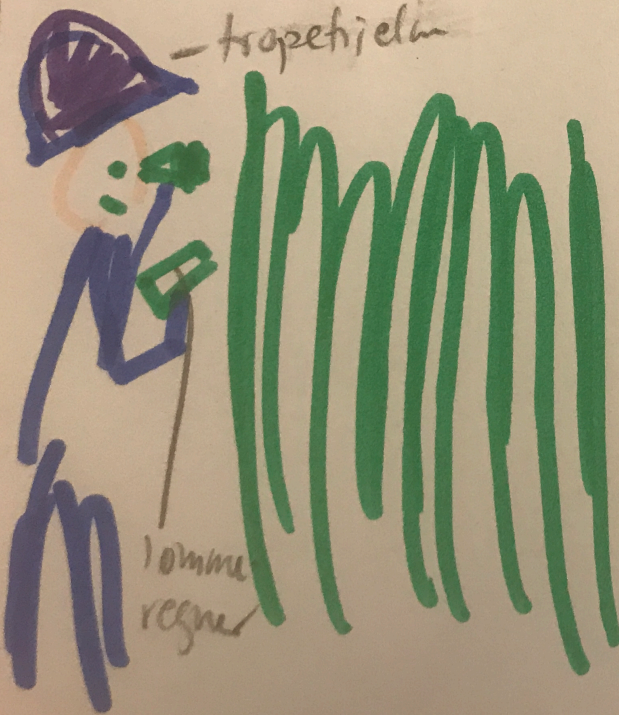
Field research



Field research or fieldwork is the collection of information outside a laboratory, library or workplace setting. The approaches and methods used in field research vary across disciplines. [Wikipedia](#)

method

Economist doing field studies
in the energy sector



- Notes on last time: Why was it so important for me to find a “disciplinary” home, that is, a theoretical foundation?
- I’m scared.

Problem & Research Question

- **“Decentralized energy & the decentralized web – energy democracy at last? Redefining energy**
- markets at the interplay of the digital transformation and the energy transition in the Danish and German blockchain & energy debate 2016 – 2018.”
- How can blockchain technology facilitate decentralized electricity markets and rebalance the power structure between prosumers and incumbents? Will blockchain technology live up to the promise of decentralizing governance structures and shifting the power balance, or will it help cement existing structures?

Locating myself in the SEP group

- “what are we doing here”? The interdisciplinary nature of the SEP group
- Sustainable transition and a “phronetic” approach is the frame

On dissolving a “writing blockage” by identifying experience as academically valid and relevant

- How could I, after all, start writing anything about blockchain in the energy sector “academically”, if all my knowledge was based on – well, my experience?
The word “self-ethnography” was the first “saviour term”.
- It allow me to confess: Yes, I actually experienced something myself, my empirical basis is primary, not secondary data. What a revelation to an economist.
- Then, the term “narrative turn” and was the second revelation. Because, still, just because I experienced it, it wouldn’t explain why I had a strong meaning, value judgements and ethical considerations (nuclear discussion on twitter with Jason) which I – as I thought – have to disguise somehow, in order to “let observations speak” and “let data emerge”.
- The combination of the two, the narrative turn and the notion of fieldwork, ended up framing my choice: Writing a self-ethnography about blockchain in the energy sector. S
- Narrative research, that is, using the self in research, is truly phronetic: It is only through the self that one perceives a problem, it is through the self that one senses power, because it evokes/invokes a feeling – namely that of injustice.
- (and turning my back to the positivistic objectivism to the narratively truthful)

I'm refocusing on method and leaving the questions on theoretical "Überbau§ for later"

Some quotes on Theory / Method

- Beyond Method:
- After Method:
- Sociology as an art form
- Dialogue with Frede and reference to "there is no such thing as practical as good theory"
- Conclusion: Instead of focusing on "finding a disciplinary home"), Focus on doing (method) first, add theory along the way as an interpretative tool

Characteristics of my work:

- Problem oriented: Let's call that phronetic

Power oriented: Who knows something about power?

- The usual suspects:
Flyvbjerg, Foucault, Marx etc.

Who knows something about power?

- But minorities and repressed people know something about power, too, and they know it “phronetically”. What about inspiration from gender studies, (post)colonial studies? Especially the latter points back to the ethnographic method as such, which helps close the circle
- Smith calls it “Institutional sociology” – a perfect term for an “institutional economist” 😊

Additional advantage of Smith over Flyvbjerg:

- She points to a methodology: ethnography

The link back to ANT /STS:

- Smith → Haraway on cyborgs

Deciding for ethnography: It comes in all shapes and sizes

Classifications by van Maanen:

- ...

...

...

Structural

...

-

In the added section of his book:

- **Advocacy**

- **→ fits with phronesis**

Deciding for self-/auto-ethnography (or, "Unintended ethnography")

- Riemer
- Alvesson
- The one on jazz: Becker: Outsiders
- Being hospitalized

Making the “turn” and “crisis” of ethnography work for me

- The crisis of legitimacy
- The crisis of representation

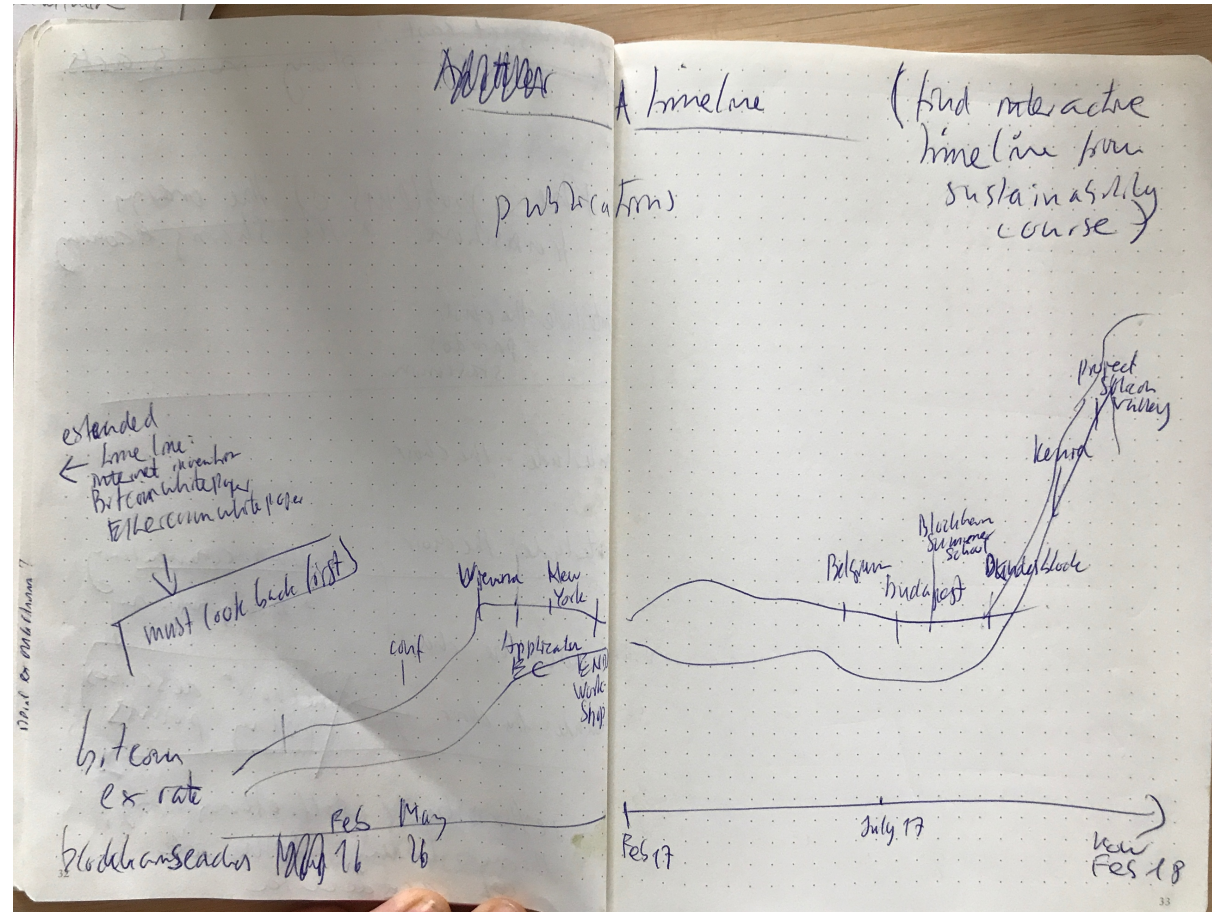
- The narrative /literary turn
- The biographical turn

Related fields: Techno-anthropology and
social anthropology

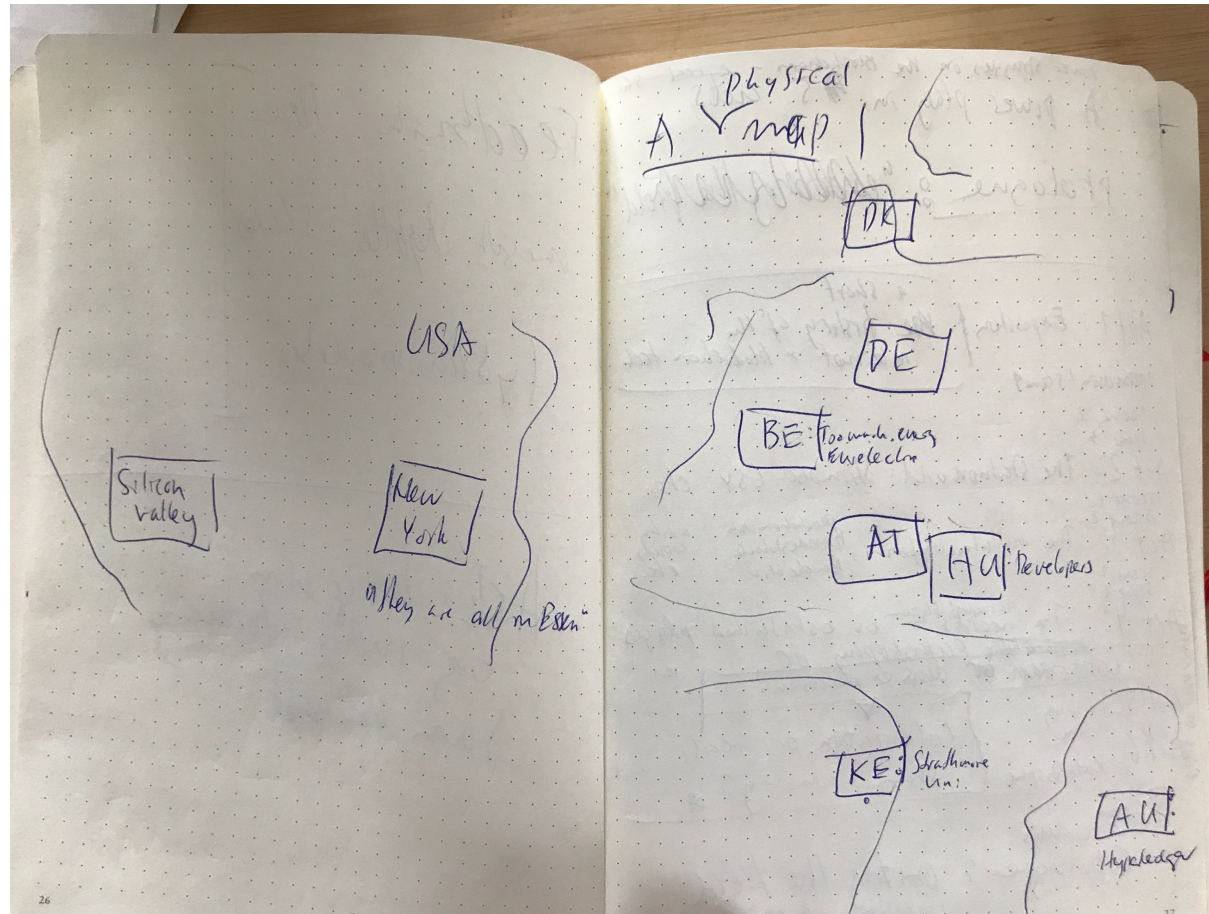
Modes of representation:

- Working the phones
- Article on publishing an auto-ethnography

Illustrating my field worked as a time line



Illustrating my field work as a map



a short
 Act 1: Exposition of the history of the
 internet & blockchain tech
 exposition / scenes

scene 2

scene 3

Act 2: The Startup world: Stran Dao, GSY etc.

scene 1

scene 2

Act 3: The institutionalization: Blockchain labs, Biondes blocks, Knowledge etc.

scene 1

scene 2

Act 4: The need for a ^{Bilderberg Belgium} is established plays

~~large ending~~ catastrophe or
 colonization or dens ex machina?

Act 5: Losing order

Act 6: Katastrophe

Colonization or real
 Sherry economy?

The problems of the
 transition & the show

interlude: the choir
 parados
 stasimon

interlude: the choir

interlude: the choir

academic

x theory

interlude: the choir

interlude: the choir

the choir's
 policy

So if the problem of “how to do” ethnography (field work) is solved and done with; how to write one, then?

Some inspiration

- Affluence without abundance
- **Working the phones**
- Hooked on markets
- The B&O ethnography
- Becker: Outsiders (“unintended” ethnography)
- Holt: an autoethnographic writing story

A reflexive writing style

Problems:

- Anonymity or not? If not: How to to be sued?

Making policy recommendations

- “Die Kurve kriegen”
- Could I link back to EnergyPLAN? To Viking Link? To ... Etc.?

Conclusion: What comes out of phronetic, unintended, self-ethnographic field work?

- Is my work a “*phronetic, institutional advocacy self-ethnography in transformation research*”?

PS: Evaluation criteria and evaluators

- From auto-ethnography book