

EXPLORING LOCAL WISDOM: THE ROLE OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH, A NARRATIVE REVIEW

MENJELAJAH KEARIFAN LOKAL: PERAN ETNOGRAFI DALAM PENELITIAN KEBIJAKAN PUBLIK, SEBUAH TINJAUAN NARASI

Tri Fitriani Puspitasari^{1*}, Nanang Suko Sadono², Muhammad Royhan³,
Suhartanto⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Gajah Mada, Yogyakarta

*Email Penulis Korespondensi: trifitrianipuspitasa@mail.ugm.ac.id

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Abstract

Ethnography, as a qualitative research method, plays a crucial role in understanding the social and cultural dynamics of a community. This study aims to explore how ethnography can uncover local wisdom and provide valuable insights into the development of public policy. By employing an ethnographic approach, researchers become directly involved in the everyday lives of the community, allowing them to capture the meanings and values underlying social actions. Through a narrative literature review analysis, this article provides depth demonstrating that a deep understanding of the local context not only contributes to the validity of proposed policies but also strengthens community engagement in governance processes. Thus, ethnography serves as a bridge between theory and practice, ensuring that public policies developed are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

Keywords: Ethnography, Local Wisdom, Public Policy, Qualitative Research, Narrative Review.

Abstrak

Etnografi sebagai metode penelitian kualitatif memiliki peran penting dalam memahami dinamika sosial dan budaya suatu komunitas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi etnografi dalam menggali kearifan lokal dan memberikan wawasan berharga dalam pengembangan kebijakan publik. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografis, peneliti terlibat langsung dalam kehidupan masyarakat, memungkinkan mereka untuk menangkap makna dan nilai-nilai yang mendasari tindakan sosial. Melalui analisis naratif literatur review, artikel ini berisi paparan mengenai pemahaman mendalam tentang konteks lokal, tidak hanya berkontribusi pada validitas kebijakan yang diusulkan tetapi juga memperkuat keterlibatan masyarakat dalam proses pemerintahan. Dengan demikian, etnografi berfungsi sebagai jembatan antara teori dan praktik, memastikan bahwa kebijakan publik yang dihasilkan lebih responsif terhadap kebutuhan dan aspirasi masyarakat yang dilayani.

Kata kunci: Etnografi, Kearifan Lokal, Kebijakan Publik, Penelitian Kualitatif, Review Naratif.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a narrative review in which the author gathers several research questions and then searches for answers within journals on SAGE and JSTOR, with the strong reason that SAGE and JSTOR are international journal portals that extensively discuss research methods from various parts of the world (Nicolosi, 2022; Keiser, B., 2011).

In recent years, the study of public policy has increasingly recognized the value of contextual and culturally grounded approaches to understanding social phenomena (Maxwell, 2019). Among the various qualitative methods, ethnographic research has emerged as a powerful tool for uncovering the lived experiences, meanings, and local wisdom that shape policy practices and outcomes (Pacecho-Vega, 2020). Ethnography allows researchers to move beyond abstract policy frameworks by engaging directly with communities, observing real-world interactions, and interpreting the cultural logics that underpin policy processes (Capellaro, 2016).

Although ethnography has deep roots in anthropology and sociology, its relevance in public policy research has grown substantially (Clemens et al , 2020). As governments and development agencies confront complex societal issues, such as gender inequality, environmental sustainability, and community resilience, understanding how policies are perceived, negotiated, and implemented at the local level becomes crucial. Ethnography offers an interpretive lens through which the local wisdom and cultural dynamics influencing policy success or failure can be better understood (Durnova, 2022).

However, despite its growing importance, there remains a limited synthesis of how ethnography has been conceptualized, applied, and debated within the field of public policy. Many studies employ ethnographic elements without clearly defining their methodological grounding or discussing their epistemological implications. This lack of conceptual clarity makes it challenging for researchers to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and appropriate applications of ethnographic methods in policy studies (Capellaro, 2016).

By systematically reviewing literature from SAGE and JSTOR databases, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of ethnographic approaches in public policy research. It contributes to methodological discussions on how ethnography can enrich policy analysis, bridge global frameworks with local realities, and promote culturally responsive policy design.

A narrative review is used because it offers many advantages for the author to explain the context and conceptual evolution. This approach is ideal for understanding the history and development of ideas, such as how ethnography evolved from anthropology towards public policy studies. A narrative review offers an opportunity to explain paradigm shifts and the social contexts that shape the direction of research. (Skelly et al, 2019).

Through ethnographic studies, researchers can address various public issues related to policy practices affecting indigenous peoples and local communities, who are often overlooked in policies that do not involve their own voices of the communities themselves. Ethnographic research methods have a very strong bias towards the community and do not consider their existence solely on quantitative numbers.

METHODS

The author compiles a list of questions and seeks answers to the research questions by browsing through SAGE and JSTORE journals to gather answers. In a narrative review, the author can ask questions first and search for them through various literature from credible sources, and answer the research questions with a more detailed narrative. This method is also known as a systematic review with a narrative review model (Ahmad, 2025).

In elaborating the answer, the author can provide guidance in the form of a narrative review checklist as a guide that all aspects of the research question have been answered (Ahmad, 2025).

Selection of articles: To address the research questions, journal articles were selected from two major academic databases: SAGE Journals and JSTOR. Both databases were chosen because they provide extensive collections of peer-reviewed articles in the fields of social sciences, anthropology, education, and public policy, where ethnographic research is commonly discussed.

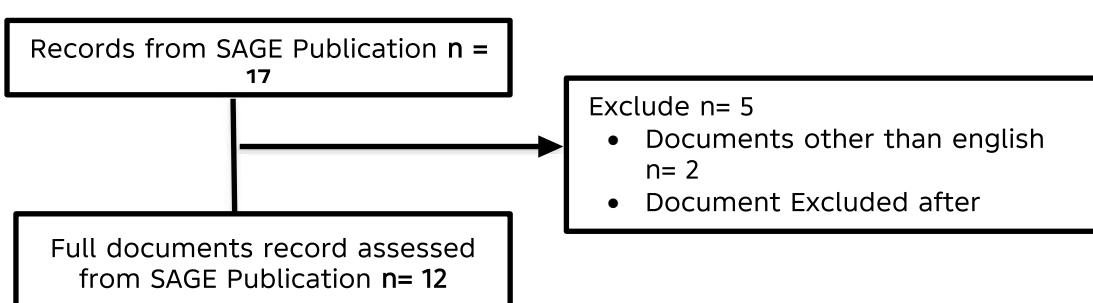
Search Strategy

The search was conducted in October 2024 using a combination of keywords related to the main research questions. The thematic grouping allowed for narrative synthesis, highlighting how ethnographic research is conceptualized, practiced, and debated across disciplines.

Table 1. Research Questions (Rand Corresponding Analytical Focus and Article Keywords)

RQ	Focus	Article Keywords
RQ 1	Definition of ethnographic research	definition, meaning, conceptualization
RQ 2	Historical development	origins, evolution, anthropology, Chicago School
RQ 3	Importance of ethnography in public policy study	significance, contribution, relevance
RQ 4	Strengths and weaknesses	advantages, limitations, validity, bias
RQ 5	Situations requiring ethnography	applicability, context, and fieldwork necessity
RQ 6	Types of ethnography	realist, critical, auto-ethnography, digital ethnography
RQ 7	Research areas and techniques	observation, interviews, participant observation, data analysis
RQ 8	Ethnography in public policy	policy process, implementation, governance, decision-making

By using the narrative review checklist, the author makes the analysis process more transparent and reduces the risk of bias.(Pautasso, 2019).



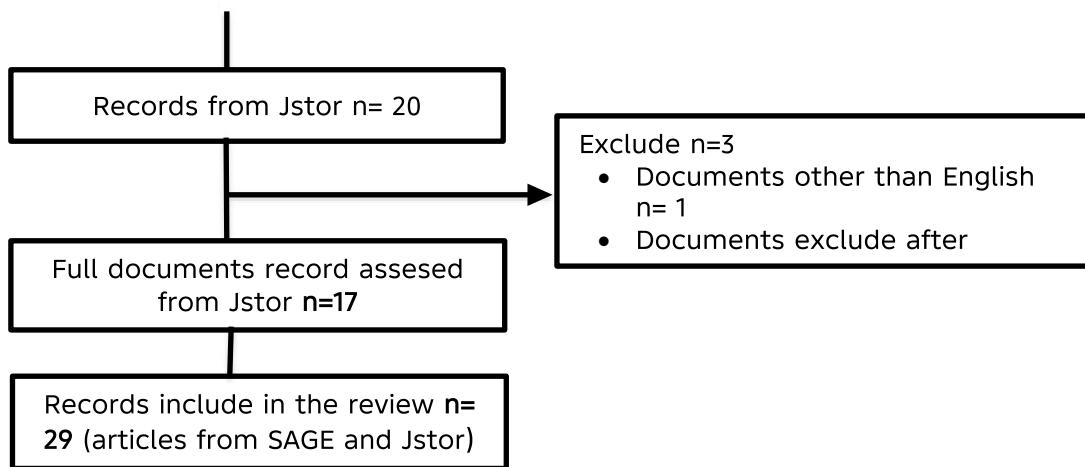


Figure 1. Study Selection Flowchart

DISCUSSION

Definition of Ethnography

According to Brewer (2000), ethnography is a fundamental social science research method that falls under qualitative research. Ethnography is characterized by full researcher involvement, an in-depth exploration of community culture, and a requirement for rich and detailed data presentation. It is a study of human groups in their natural settings, where researchers engage directly without imposing external interpretations.

Cresswell (2017) defines ethnography as a qualitative research design in which researchers describe and interpret the values, behaviors, beliefs, and language adopted by a group or culture.

Ethnography can be categorized into two types based on the researcher's position:

1. Realist Ethnography – The researcher remains behind the scenes, relying on informants who are deeply embedded in the cultural environment. This approach aims for objectivity and minimal researcher bias.
2. Critical Ethnography – The researcher actively participates in and advocates for the community, often engaging in social justice efforts. This approach acknowledges the inherent subjectivity and advocacy role of the researcher.

The primary task of ethnography is to uncover and describe phenomena organized within human cognition (Spradley, 1997). Since culture exists in human thought, ethnographic research seeks to decode these cognitive structures through various methods, including domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and thematic analysis. In summary, ethnographic research is a qualitative method that examines the natural life of a specific group to study and describe its cultural patterns, including shared beliefs, language, and perspectives.

History of Ethnography

According to Vidich and Lyman (1982), the historical development of ethnographic paradigms can be categorized into several periods:

Table 2. Ethnographic Paradigm Periods Analyzed from Document Sources

No	Period	Time Frame	Description
1	Colonial Ethnography	17th – 19th century	Ethnographic research conducted by Western scholars, missionaries, and colonial rulers, often archived in church records at local and national levels.
2	Ethnography for American Indians as Others.	Late 19th – Early 20th century	European Americans sought to document and explain the cultures of Indigenous peoples they encountered. These writings often used derogatory terms such as "savage," "primitive," and "heathen" to justify European claims over Indigenous lands.
3	Etnografi "Civic Other"	Early 20th century – 1960s	The field of qualitative community research expanded to include American communities beyond Europeans and

No	Period	Time Frame	Description
4	Ethnography of Assimilation	1950s - 1980s	<p>Native Americans.</p> <p>Americans and African Americans began conducting research on their own communities, shifting the perspective of ethnographic inquiry.</p>
5	Ethnography Today	Mid-1980s – Present	<p>Modern ethnography encompasses a vast range of themes, limited only by the diversity of contemporary human experiences. The observational scope of ethnography has expanded alongside the increasing variety of modern lifestyles.</p>

Ethnographic research has its roots in anthropological studies that examine cultural practices in specific locations. It has evolved into a fieldwork-based approach focused on understanding cultural developments within communities. Ethnographic paradigms follow two key principles:

1. **Emic Perspective** – Researchers collect and analyze data from the viewpoint of the local population, known as *the native's point of view*.
2. **Non-Judgmental Approach** – Researchers refrain from imposing external opinions or judgments on observed realities, prioritizing exploration over evaluation.

Ethnography as a Defining Feature of Anthropological Research

Ethnography emerged as a fundamental method within social and cultural anthropology, designed to obtain firsthand data (Atkinson, 2014). Several key figures have played a significant role in the development of ethnography, including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Clifford Geertz. Bronisław Malinowski also made substantial contributions to the field, particularly in establishing immersive fieldwork as a cornerstone of ethnographic research.

Communities that share a common way of life over time are believed to develop their own cultural systems. Culture consists of a set of behaviors and beliefs that establish societal norms and standards. It defines what is considered acceptable or unacceptable and dictates how social practices are carried out. Therefore, the core idea of ethnographic research is to understand culture as an intrinsic aspect of human societies.

The Importance of Ethnographic Research

Ethnography has emerged as a key component of qualitative research, offering a means to counterbalance the distortions created by statistical research, which often reduces human experiences to mere numerical data. Such statistical approaches can overlook the richness of everyday life and social interactions within the studied communities or groups.

The ethnographic approach in human group research began with anthropologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who believed that early social philosophers' speculative theories were insufficient to understand how people actually live. Ethnography posits that scholars can only truly grasp the complexities of human experience by

conducting fieldwork and immersing themselves in real-life contexts (Angrosino, 2011).

Ethnographic methods have since expanded across multiple disciplines and are now associated with various theoretical orientations, including:

1. Structural Functionalism
2. Symbolic Interactionism
3. Feminism
4. Marxism
5. Ethnomethodology
6. Critical Theory
7. Cultural Studies
8. Postmodernism

Ethnographic research employs a participatory approach, in which researchers engage directly with the community and integrate themselves as part of the studied group. Today, video and audio recordings are commonly used to document daily life and social interactions (O'Reilly, 2012).

As a qualitative research method, ethnography holds significant importance due to its ability to uncover a wealth of information that cannot be quantified. It becomes particularly essential when researchers seek answers to research questions that can only be found within specific communities. In such cases, ethnographers must immerse themselves in the field, becoming an integral part of the environment they study. This methodological approach ensures a deeper understanding of social phenomena that might otherwise remain inaccessible through other research methods (Blaustein, 2015).

According to Mosse (2005), ethnography possesses a unique capacity to identify connections within social structures. It allows ethnographers to integrate themselves into the communities they study, engaging in an agonistic and reflexive relationship with the community to deconstruct complex issues. Ethnography is not only a research method but also a form of storytelling and documentation. Within the academic sphere, ethnography plays a significant role in generating new paradigms that other disciplines may not offer. The diverse dynamics encountered in different ethnographic studies contribute to its continuous evolution.

Ethnography is particularly valuable for examining political dynamics or serving as a critical lens against authoritative policies that disregard local wisdom and impose institutional fundamentals. By facilitating deep engagement, ethnography enables researchers to explore spatial and temporal dimensions in understanding societal structures (Mosse, 2005).

Ethnographic research rejects the notion of a "one-size-fits-all" approach. As O'Reilly (2012) highlights, the fundamental concept of ethnography is holism. Traditional ethnographic research adopts a holistic approach, viewing societies as distinct and coherent entities. However, holism also acknowledges the interconnections between societies as integral components of a broader system. This perspective ensures a comprehensive understanding of cultural phenomena by recognizing both internal structures and external influences (O'Reilly, 2012).

The Importance of Ethnographic Research in Public Policy

Public policy studies often appear disconnected from the everyday realities of society. There is a significant gap between state regulatory systems and actual conditions within communities. Since culture shapes patterns of action, public policy, as a form of social action, can never be entirely separated from cultural dynamics. Policies are frequently formulated based on political good sense, yet the perceptions of policymakers often differ from those of the communities they govern (Becker et al., 2004).

Communities are deeply tied to their territorial histories, which are internal matters belonging to the people themselves rather than external entities. It is essential to recognize that within any given community, hegemony plays a role, meaning that not all members benefit equally from decisions made in the name of collective interests (Pellissery, 2021).

As a field of study, public policy, according to Malinowski, should remain closely connected to societal realities. Malinowski, an early researcher who integrated interviews, field surveys, and statistical methods in what is now known as the triangulation approach, emphasized that researchers should immerse themselves in community life throughout their observation period. This immersion fosters empathy and a deeper understanding of social structures. Malinowski argued that all institutions share universal elements that can be compiled and used as comparative dimensions across different institutional settings. These elements include participating personnel, established regulations and behavioral standards, material resources and tools, division of tasks among members, and functions that fulfill group needs through specific rituals or activities (Klimczuk & Tomczyk, 2017).

Malinowski's insights remain highly relevant in the context of public policy in Indonesia. For example, the ceremonial and ritual practices observed by government officials in various regions can influence their performance within public organizations. Additionally, policies that fail to account for local wisdom can lead to social tensions. One such example is the issuance of mining exploration permits on Indigenous lands without consulting local communities, as seen in the coal mining exploration in the Meratus Mountains—home to the Dayak community. Similar conflicts have arisen with the limestone mining project in Wadas, Central Java, and the cement factory construction in the Kendeng Mountains, highlighting the disconnect between policymakers and the cultural and environmental concerns of the affected communities.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Ethnographic Research Method

Ethnographic research offers several advantages. First, according to Malinowski, researchers can uncover the deeper meanings behind their subjects by immersing themselves in the study environment and fostering empathy toward the community (Klimczuk & Tomczyk, 2017). Second, ethnography allows researchers to identify problems within a society and propose potential solutions (Klimczuk & Tomczyk, 2017). Third, ethnographic research enhances researchers' understanding of societal issues and enables them to effectively communicate these insights to a broader audience (Blasco & Wardle, 2019). Lastly, ethnography benefits the studied community by amplifying their voices,

with ethnographers often serving as advocates who represent their perspectives (Becker et al., 2004; Garriott, 2017).

Despite these advantages, ethnographic research also has several limitations. First, the process requires extensive epistemological exploration and validation across multiple sites and contexts, which demands substantial financial and logistical resources (Angrosino, 2011). Second, ethnographic studies require a prolonged data collection period, as researchers must integrate themselves into the community to gain comprehensive insights (Angrosino, 2011). Third, ethnography is inherently subjective, as it prioritizes the perspective of the studied group, often leading to a lack of neutrality. This means ethnographic research can sometimes be influenced by ideological or hegemonic struggles within the studied community (Blaustein, 2015).

Types of Ethnographic Research

As a commonly used methodology in social science research, ethnography does not have a rigid classification system. According to Knoblauch (2005), one notable distinction is between Focused Ethnography and Conventional Ethnography. Focused ethnography serves as an alternative approach to conventional ethnography. Unlike conventional ethnography, which broadly examines cultural phenomena within a society, focused ethnography is specifically designed for contemporary, highly fragmented societies.

The term "focused" reflects its emphasis on a specific, narrowly defined aspect of a society rather than a comprehensive cultural analysis. This methodological approach is particularly useful for studying specialized or niche aspects of social life, making it well-suited for modern, complex societies. The key differences between Conventional Ethnography and Focused Ethnography a Creswell (2007) further classifies ethnographic research into two main categories: Realist Ethnography and Critical Ethnography.

- 1) Realist Ethnography. Realist ethnography follows a traditional approach commonly used by cultural anthropologists. In this method, the researcher presents an objective account of the individuals being studied, aiming to document and report findings as accurately as possible. The research is typically written from a third-person perspective, emphasizing an unbiased and detached narrative. The researcher acts as an observer, compiling detailed quotations and edited narratives from participants to provide a structured interpretation of cultural phenomena.
- 2) Critical Ethnography. In contrast to realist ethnography, which seeks to describe social conditions as objectively as possible, critical ethnography integrates an advocacy perspective into the research process. This approach responds to social structures where power, prestige, privilege, and authority contribute to the marginalization of individuals based on class, race, or gender. Critical ethnography actively supports the empowerment of marginalized groups, challenging social injustices and systemic inequalities.

The key distinctions between Conventional Ethnography and Focused Ethnography can be summarized in the table below:

Table 3. The Difference of Conventional Ethnography and Focused

Ethnography Analyzed from Document Sources

Conventional Ethnography	Focused Ethnography
Long – term field visits	Short – term field visits
Experientially intensive	Data/ analysis intensity
Time extensity	Time intensity
Writing	Recording
Solitary data collection and analysis	Data session groups
open	focused
Social fields	Communicative activities
Participant role	Field – observer role
Insider Knowledge	Background knowledge
Subjective understanding	conservation
notes	Notes and transcripts
coding	Coding and sequential analysis

Unlike realist ethnography, which seeks to objectively depict societal conditions without researcher intervention, critical ethnography incorporates an advocacy perspective into the research process. This approach emerges as a response to social structures in which power, prestige, privilege, and authority contribute to the marginalization of individuals based on class, race, or gender. Critical ethnography actively promotes the emancipation of marginalized groups, striving to challenge and counteract social injustice and systemic domination.

In addition to the previously mentioned ethnographic categorizations, there are also more practical classifications based on how ethnographic research is described and documented. As outlined by Spradley (1979) in *The Ethnographic Interview*, ethnographic reports can be grouped into the following categories:

- 1) Ethnocentric Descriptions This type of ethnographic report translates the local cultural language into the researcher's own writing style without altering the substance and cultural elements. The language used must accurately reflect the actual conditions observed in the research.
- 2) Social Science Descriptions This ethnographic report provides a comprehensive depiction of social life within a community through observations, interviews, and analysis. It reflects the cultural perspective from within the society but is limited to interpretations that align with the community's existing conceptual framework. The description aims to present an approximation of the local culture as perceived by the researcher, who remains an outsider attempting to interpret ethnic concepts in relation to the informants' perspectives.
- 3) Standard Ethnographies These reports highlight linguistic diversity among populations, seeking to explain such variations in a standardized manner that is widely comprehensible. The original cultural concepts are analyzed systematically, ensuring that ethnographic studies are deeply rooted in the language of the indigenous people. Informants' cultural concepts and meanings are integrated into the descriptions, providing a profound understanding of different worldviews within the community.
- 4) Monolingual Ethnographies Ethnographic reports based on local narratives, where stories from the community—such as folklore or historical events are carefully deconstructed by the ethnographer to gain insights into the society's cultural framework.

- 5) Life Histories Ethnographic reports that document culture through personal life experiences, illustrating how individual histories shape cultural meanings and values within a society.

- 6) Ethnographic Novel Ethnographic reports written in the form of a novel, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the cultural narrative. These writings contain cultural meanings that engage readers and transport them into the actual cultural environment being studied.

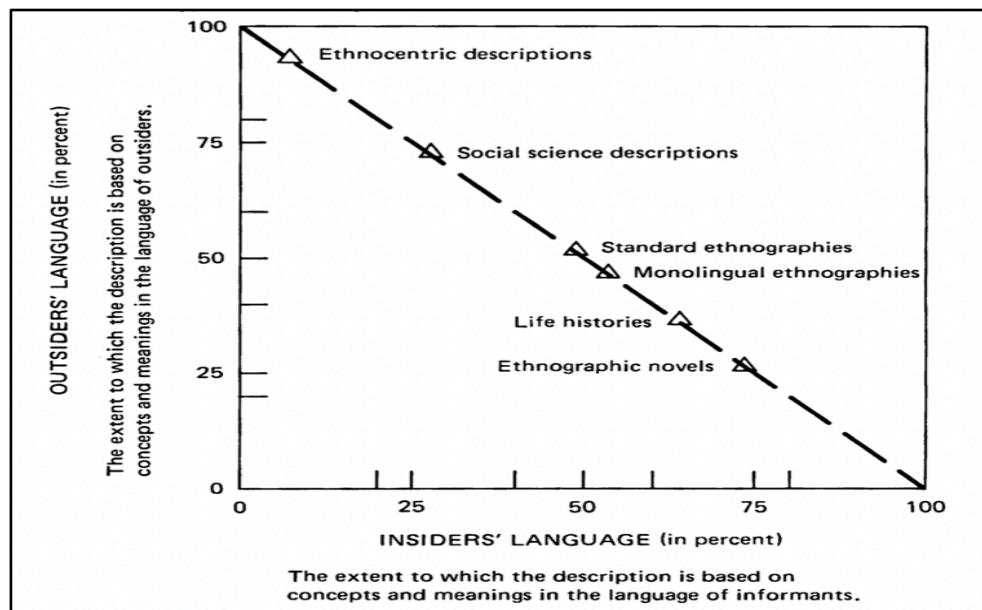


Figure 2. Epistemological Positions in Ethnographic Description

Source: Spradley (1979)

The rapid advancement of digitalization has significantly transformed the way people communicate, enabling discussions on any topic through social media platforms. The rise of the internet and social media has even given birth to a new form of society known as online communities, where interactions often occur entirely in virtual spaces without face-to-face encounters.

This phenomenon has led to the emergence of a new ethnographic approach known as digital ethnography, online ethnography, or netnography (Müller, 2021). In netnography, digital reality serves as a medium where expressions and perceptions are formed. Social norms are negotiated through mechanisms such as likes and comments, while images uploaded on social media, such as selfies, act as representations of an individual's identity and self-perception.

When Ethnographic Research Is Necessary

Ethnographic research is primarily conducted to describe and analyze cultural phenomena. The core purpose of ethnography is to understand the lived experiences of a community by interpreting the meanings behind their actions and events from their perspective. Some of these meanings are explicitly conveyed through language, while others are embedded in social behaviors and practices (Spradley, 1979). In other words, ethnographic research is essential when a study focuses on the natural cultural environment of communities, societies, groups, systems, organizations, and similar social structures. It is particularly relevant when examining behaviors, norms, beliefs, customs, values, and

human interaction patterns within these groups.

As ethnography has evolved, its applications have expanded beyond traditional descriptive research. The emergence of Critical Ethnography has broadened the scope of ethnographic studies. Unlike conventional ethnography, which aims to objectively describe societal conditions from the perspective of the studied community, critical ethnography goes further by advocating for social justice. This approach is particularly useful when researchers seek not only to understand existing social realities but also to highlight and challenge structural inequalities and injustices within society (Creswell, 2007).

Research Areas, Techniques, and Implementation of Ethnography

Ethnographic research has expanded significantly and is now widely applied across various disciplines, particularly in exploring areas that have not been extensively studied. Originally rooted in anthropology, ethnographic approaches have evolved to encompass multiple fields and methodologies. This development has been driven by scholars and intellectual research groups, including British Social Anthropology, The Chicago School of Sociology, and The Community Studies Tradition (Atkinson et al., 2014).

In practice, ethnographic methods are frequently utilized in diverse professional domains, such as law enforcement, criminology, religion, professional ethics, and social welfare. The adaptability of ethnography allows researchers to gain deeper insights into complex social dynamics across various sectors.

Table 4. Ethnographic Research in Various Fields from document sources

Title	Authors	Scope
Ethnographic Studies of Health and Medicine	Michael Bloor	Health Science
Ethnographic Research in Educational Settings	Tuula Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma	Education Science
Ethnography And the Study of Deviance	Dick Hobbs	Deviant Behavior
Ethnography In the Study of Children and Childhood	Allison James	Child Behavior
The Ethnography of Communication	Elizabeth Keating	Communication
Technologies of Realism?	Mike Ball and Greg Smith	Cinematics
Ethnographic Uses of Photography and Film	Christopher Tilley	Culture
Feminist Ethnography	Beverley Skeggs	Feminism and Women's Studies
The Ethics of Ethnography	Elizabeth Murphy and Robert Dingwall	Etics
Computer Applications in Qualitative Research	Nigel Fielding	Applied Technology

Ethnographic research relies on the researcher's sense of reality, involving deep interpretation based on observed facts and an

understanding of the values within the studied community. To ensure the validity of research findings, researchers must fully align themselves with the community by immersing in and becoming part of the social environment. This integration process often requires a long period of engagement; however, researchers with strong social adaptability can establish connections more quickly and effectively navigate the cultural landscape.

The duration of ethnographic research is not strictly defined, as it depends on the researcher's ability to adapt and the level of acceptance by the community. However, authoritative sources suggest that ethnographic studies typically require between 6 to 18 months (Atkinson et al., 2014). In cases where the researcher is already familiar with the community or has prior experience within the studied environment, the required immersion period may be shorter—potentially around six months or less.

Characteristics of Ethnographic Research in Public Policy

Ethnographic research is fundamentally structured from the emic perspective, meaning it is developed based on the views and experiences of indigenous or local community members. This research approach seeks to understand the meanings and values that shape a culture through a combination of in-depth interviews and naturalistic observations. As a result, researchers must engage in immersive fieldwork, conducting extensive interviews and direct observations. To gain deeper insights into cultural nuances, researchers are often required to live within the studied community, allowing them to uncover hidden layers of meaning through comprehensive analysis (Maxwell, 2019).

Ethnography is characterized by its data analysis approach, which involves interpreting societal values and human actions. It seeks to explore and examine observed phenomena by collecting unstructured data and transforming it into meaningful case studies. The research process emphasizes thematic and issue-based exploration, enabling the identification of relevant locations and communities associated with the study's focus.

Before conducting full-scale ethnographic research, a preliminary study is essential to determine whether the research problem is best approached using ethnographic methods and to identify the most suitable type of ethnography for the specific community. This initial data collection phase plays a crucial role in shaping the research perspective and ensuring that the chosen ethnographic approach aligns with the study's objectives.

The next step in ethnographic research is identifying a key informant, an individual who possesses deep knowledge of the culture and can effectively communicate with the researcher. According to Spradley (1979), an informant must meet five key criteria: (1) full enculturation, meaning they have a strong understanding of their own culture, (2) direct involvement in cultural practices, (3) an authentic cultural setting, (4) sufficient availability for engagement, and (5) a non-analytical perspective.

Engaging in meaningful discussions with an informant requires alignment of objectives to establish rapport and ensure their willingness to participate. There are two primary approaches to initiating communication: (1) using an intermediary, someone who can introduce the researcher to the cultural community, or (2) providing a clear explanation of the research objectives to reassure informants of its potential benefits for their culture and community.

Data collection is conducted through informal, naturally occurring conversations during daily activities or structured interviews designed to encourage open discussions. The information gathered from interviews can be recorded or documented in written form for in-depth analysis, helping to construct a broad understanding of cultural values. The data is then reviewed and supplemented with additional interviews featuring descriptive questions, followed by deeper inquiries with multiple informants to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

In ethnographic research, iterative and structured interviews provide deeper insights, as repeated engagements uncover underlying cultural values that may not be immediately evident in a single

discussion. The next stage involves categorizing findings through taxonomic analysis, which clarifies any ambiguities. This can be refined through contrast questions that highlight cultural differences, as well as the examination of artifacts and cultural images to deepen the research findings. The final step is componential analysis, where various attributes and symbolic representations are interconnected and analyzed, ultimately contributing to a detailed ethnographic report.

Types of Ethnographic Research Instruments

According to Spradley (1979), ethnographic research utilizes five primary instruments:

1. In-depth Interviews, a qualitative method where researchers conduct detailed and exploratory interviews with informants to gain deeper insights into cultural practices and beliefs.
2. Life History, a technique that involves gathering personal narratives from informants to document their life experiences and the historical background of their community.
3. Participant Observation, a method in which the researcher actively participates as a member of the studied group, observing and documenting cultural behaviors from within the community.
4. Focus Group Discussion (FGD), a structured discussion involving multiple informants, designed to explore cultural dynamics and collective perspectives in greater depth.
5. Document Analysis: the examination of various cultural artifacts, such as documents, images, and physical objects, to interpret and understand cultural meanings and historical contexts.

Techniques and Thick Description

Several data collection techniques are commonly employed in ethnographic research, as outlined by experts, including participant observation, interviewing, life histories, and narrative analysis (Atkinson et al., 2014). These techniques help define research objectives and ensure that the study provides meaningful contributions to the social and cultural groups being examined.

Another key approach in ethnographic research is thick description, a method introduced by Geertz (2008). Thick description involves an in-depth, holistic analysis of cultural behaviors, emphasizing both verbal and nonverbal patterns within the studied society. This approach examines various aspects, including interpersonal interactions, shared cultural experiences, belief systems, societal values, and material artifacts. These artifacts may include clothing styles, architectural structures, and everyday objects, all of which serve as cultural symbols that shape daily life and social identity.

Research Gap

Based on the content and review analysis of this article, the research gap identified is the lack of a comprehensive synthesis of how ethnographic approaches have been conceptualized, applied, and debated in the field of public policy research. Many studies utilize ethnographic elements without clearly defining their methodological foundations or epistemological implications, making it difficult for

researchers to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and appropriate use of this method in a policy context. Furthermore, although ethnography has demonstrated great potential in understanding local community dynamics and supporting more contextual and participatory policy development, there remains a lack of systematic and structured integration of this methodology into public policy studies more broadly.

Thus, the primary gap identified is the need for more in-depth and organized studies on the conceptualization, application, and validity of ethnographic methodology in public policy analysis, including its epistemological aspects and application techniques, which may not yet be fully explored and systematically understood in the existing literature.

Future Research Direction

Based on this article, recommended future research directions include the following aspects:

1. Development of a Clear Conceptual Framework: Future research needs to develop a more comprehensive definition and theoretical framework for the use of ethnography in public policy studies, including clarification of its methodological and epistemological foundations.
2. Studies on the Implementation and Validity of Ethnographic Methodology in Public Policy: Research is needed that empirically evaluates the effectiveness and validity of using ethnography in supporting the validity and success of policies, as well as addresses existing weaknesses and limitations.
3. Use of Mixed Approaches and New Technologies: Integrating ethnographic methods with other approaches, such as quantitative methods, and utilizing cutting-edge technology (e.g., digital ethnography) to expand the scope of studies and the depth of analysis.
4. Examination of Broader Cultural and Regional Contexts: Conducting cross-cultural and regional studies to understand how local contexts influence the application and effectiveness of ethnographic methods in different public policies.
5. Development of Ethical and Technical Guidelines and Standards: Develop more systematic guidelines and ethical and technical standards for the application of ethnography in public policy, so that studies conducted are more credible and can be widely adopted.

In general, the direction of future research is directed at deepening the understanding and practice of ethnography in the context of public policy, including conceptual, methodological, technical, and ethical aspects, to enhance its contribution to more contextual, inclusive, and effective policymaking.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study in this article from RQ 1 and RQ 2, it can be concluded that ethnographic research plays a crucial and multifaceted role in public policy development. The definition and concept of ethnography are understood as a qualitative method that emphasizes

an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of society. Its evolutionary history shows that ethnography has developed from its roots in anthropology into broader fields of study, including public policy, through various approaches and theories.

Furthermore, in RQ 3, ethnography's contribution to public policy studies is significant, particularly in uncovering local insights, community values, and social practices that have been overlooked by quantitative approaches or other methods. Ethnography supports a holistic and contextual understanding, making the resulting policies more relevant and sensitive to community needs.

In terms of strengths and weaknesses in RQ 4, ethnography offers advantages in obtaining rich and in-depth data and is able to penetrate the boundaries of subjective perceptions and policy biases. However, this method also faces challenges such as time constraints, financial constraints, sustainability constraints, and difficulties in ensuring data validity and reliability.

Situations that require the use of ethnography include contexts where policies must be rooted in the lived experiences of communities, particularly in issues of sustainability, social justice, and community engagement. This approach is particularly relevant for studies of complex and community-based conditions [RQ 5].

Types of ethnography used include realist, critical, autoethnography, and digital ethnography, which can be adapted to the needs of the research and the context. Research techniques and steps such as observation, interviews, and data analysis support a comprehensive and in-depth depiction of social issues [RQ 6 and 7].

Finally, ethnography shows great potential in enriching policy analysis, strengthening the role of communities in decision-making processes, and ensuring the successful implementation of more contextual and inclusive policies. By addressing existing limitations and challenges, this approach can be a strategic tool in creating more equitable and sustainable policies, thereby increasing the relevance and effectiveness of public policy in general [RQ 8].

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Appendix

List of reviewed documents

Authors	Title	DOI/ ISBN	Source	Type of Document
Angrosino, M.	Introduction: Ethnography and Participant Observation. In Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research (pp. 1-18). Sage Publications Ltd.	https://doi.org/10.4135/978149208932.n1	Sage Publication	Article reviewed peer-reviewed
Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. (Eds.).	Handbook of ethnography (Reprinted). Sage	ISBN: 9780761958246	Sage Publication	Book
Becker, H. S., Gans, H. J., Newman, K. S., & Vaughan, D.	On the Value of Ethnography: Sociology and Public Policy, a Dialogue. <i>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> , 595, 264-276.	https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716204266599	Jstor	Article reviewed peer-reviewed
Brewer, J.	Ethnography. McGraw-Hill Education (UK). Open University Press. Sage	0335202683 (paperback) 0335202691 (hardback)	Sage Publication	Book
Blaustein, Jarrett	Speaking Truths to Power: Policy Ethnography and Police Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Clarendon Studies in Criminology</i> (Oxford, 2015; online edn, Oxford Academic, 21 May 2015),	https://doi.org/10.1093/acpr/oso/9780198723295.001.0001	Jstor	Article reviewed peer-reviewed
Cappellaro, G.	Ethnography in Public Management Research: A Systematic Review and Future Directions. <i>International Public Management Journal</i> , 20(1), 14-48.	https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2016.1143423	Jstor	Article reviewed peer-reviewed
Clemens, R. F., & Tierney, W. G.	The Role of Ethnography as Ethical and Policy-Relevant Public Scholarship. <i>Cultural Studies ↔ Critical</i> published 2020)	https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708620936993 (Original work published 2020)	Jstor	Article reviewed peer-reviewed

Methodologies, 20(5), 389-401.					
Creswell, J. W.	Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry. In Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (pp. 53-84).	https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198107306434	Sage Publication	Book	
Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D.	Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. Sage Publications.	ISBN 978-1-5063-8670-6	Sage Publication	Book	
Durnová, A.	Making interpretive policy analysis critical and societally relevant: emotions, ethnography and language. Policy & Politics, 50(1), 43-58.	https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16129850569011	Sage Publication	Book	
Garriott, W.	Afterword: Why Ethnography? Social Justice, 44(1 (147)), 165-171	http://www.jstor.org/stable/26405742	Jstor	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed
Blasco, P. G., & Wardle, H.	How to Read Ethnography (2nd ed.). Taylor and Francis	https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646961	Jstor	Book	
Geertz, C	Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In The Cultural Geography Reader (pp. 41-51).	DOI:10.4324/9780203931950-11	Jstor	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed
Janine Wedel, R., & Feldman, G	Why an Anthropology of Public Policy? Anthropology Today, Feb., 2005, Vol. 21, No. 1, Policy and Islam (Feb., 2005), pp. 1-2 Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Stable	http://www.jstor.org/stable/3695032	Jstor	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed
Keiser, B	SAGE's newest new strategy. Volume 35. Online (Wilton, Connecticut).	Could not find the DOI	Sage Publication	Journal Article	
Klimczuk, A., & Tomczyk, Ł.	Malinowski, Bronisław. in The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory (pp. 1-3). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd	https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118430873.est0225	Sage Publication	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed
Knoblauch, H	Focused Ethnography. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 6(3). Sage	(ISSN 1438-5627	Sage Publication	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed

Maxwell, J. A.	The Value of Qualitative Inquiry for Public Policy. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i> , 26(2), 177-186.	https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419857093	Sage Publication	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed
Mosse, David.	Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice. Pluto Press.	https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs4st	Jstor	Book	
Müller, F	Design Ethnography. Springer International Publishing.	https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60396-0	Jstor	Book	
Nicolosi, G.	Sage research methods core review. <i>Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship</i> , 28(1), 82-89.	https://doi.org/10.1080/08963568.2022.2147653	Sage Publication	Journal Article	
Nolan, riall	Ethnography and Applied Policy Research Source: Practicing Anthropology, Fall 1980, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 1980), pp. 35-40 .Published by: Taylor & Francis,	Ethnography and Applied Policy Research Source: Practicing Anthropology, Fall 1980, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 1980), pp. 35-40 .Published by: Taylor & Francis	Jstor	Journal Article	
O'Reilly, K.	Ethnographic Methods, Second Edition. In Ethnographic Methods, Second Edition. Taylor and Francis.	https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203864722	Sage Publication	Article reviewed	peer-reviewed
Pellissery, S.	Anthropology's Contributions to Public Policy: Introduction to Special Issue. In Special Issue on Anthropology's Contributions to Public Policy (Vol. 44, Issue 1).	https://about.jstor.org/terms	Jstor	Book	
Spardley, J. P.	The Ethnographic Interview. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.	ISBN 978-0030444968	Jstor	Book	
Blaustein, Jarrett.	Speaking Truths to Power: Policy Ethnography and Police Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Clarendon Studies in Criminology (Oxford, 2015; online edn, Oxford Academic, 21 May 2015),	https://doi.org/10.1093/acpr/of:oso/9780198723295.001.001	Jstor	Book	
Pacheco-Vega, R.	"Chapter 18 Using ethnography in	https://doi.org/10.4337/97817	Jstor	Book Chapter	

	comparative policy analysis: premises, promises and perils". In Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Comparative Policy Analysis. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved Oct 30, 2025,	8811195.00027		
Vidich, A. J., & Lyman, S. M.	Secular evangelism at the University of Wisconsin. <i>Social Research</i> , 1047-1072.	http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971230	Jstor	Journal Article
Stack, Carol B.	Beyond What are Given as Givens: Ethnography and Critical Policy Studies. Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association	http://www.jstor.com/stable/640354	Jstor	Journal Article
