

Understanding and studying people/environment interactions

Observation Task

Choose a setting and a method

The setting could be a larger or smaller space, preferably outdoors, but indoors is also possible, or both. You should focus on places where you are likely to find at least some people, for instance train stations, bus stops, libraries, shopping malls, pedestrian crossings, intersections, etc. *In any case, make certain that you yourself can keep the required “corona distance”.*

It's possible to use two settings for comparison. For instance: two seating areas in different types of settings with differences regarding layout or furniture; two pedestrian crossings with design differences; two bus stops with different facilities, etc. Beware, though, that the time for the task is limited.

Just watching a scene passively attempting to see connections between the environment and people's behaviour can be difficult. Therefore, a good approach is also *to decide in advance on a behaviour or activity that you would like to observe* in a setting, a behaviour that you think could be affected by the conditions/design of a setting or by other people's behaviour. In other words, you make a plan for what to look for before you go out and start observing. You can even make yourself a hypothesis to investigate, to see if you can verify the claims (e.g. something like *In this place, it is likely that people will be closer than the publicly recommended minimum distance frequently*, or *In this escalator, about 10% of the people will stand to the left*, or *In this place there will be more men than women*. A hypothesis is not necessary, though, and you can have a more explorative approach.

Feel free to try out more than one thing!

Some practical and ethical issues

Find a place where you can sit down or stand for a short while and observe what is going on without drawing too much attention to yourself and what you are doing. A good way can be to sit/stand inside some place and look out at the setting you are observing. This can make it easier to draw less attention to you as an observer. However, if your presence makes others behave in a specific way, this may also be of interest. Also remember that taking photos can easily draw attention, so making sketches to complement your notes may sometimes be a better way of documenting.

People who are out in public space are likely aware of and accept that others can observe them. There could of course be situations where people expect to be more private. Use your common sense when you decide what is OK or not to observe and document.

If people react to what you are doing or ask what is going on, tell them about your task and say that it is part of a student project you are doing at SLU.

Document and analyse the people/environment interactions going on

Here are just some examples of things that can be useful to pay attention to and to document:

- A setting is not only the physical objects. Also consider whether *day of the week, time of the day, weather* and similar aspects can be influencing the behaviours.
- *Duration and intensity?* For instance: Are people walking fast or slowly? Are they talking loudly or quietly? For how long do people stay in your setting?
- *Who* is engaged in the behaviour and does it matter? (age, gender, number of people, singles/couples/groups, etc.)
- What *environmental characteristics* may influence or explain the behaviour? Objects, architectural elements, surfaces/materials. Is the space narrow/wide/open/closed? What are the lighting conditions?
- Sometimes it's possible to make *indirect* observations, such as *traces* of behaviours and objects used as *territorial markers*.

Prepare yourself for the seminar

In the seminar (using Zoom in parallel sessions and possibly one session on campus) you will share and talk about what you observed and how that relates to the literature you have read.

Prepare a presentation consisting of four (4) slides, with (approximately) the following content:

1. A presentation of the **place**(s) you have observed.
2. What **method** you have used (observation, obviously, but what type of observation, other details, etc.).
3. A summary of the **findings** (results) from the study.
4. What did you **learn** from the study?

You will have a total of 15 minutes for the presentation. You should reserve half that time for discussion.