At the School of
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RESEARCH METHODS: PRIMARY DATA

PRIMARY DATA: COLLECTION METHODS

As mentioned in Lesson 1, using primary data means collecting it **in the first person**.

You can do it in **different ways**: observing and taking organised notes, recording interviews, measuring activity and behaviour, running surveys.

Infinite information can be collected, so it is important to grasp the principal methods for collecting primary data for organising it in the best way.

METHODS OF COLLECTING PRIMARY DATA

ASOC

SURVEY

Surveys are helpful for collecting huge quantities of data, for carrying out quantitative and qualitative analysis.

SURVEY: ADVANTAGES

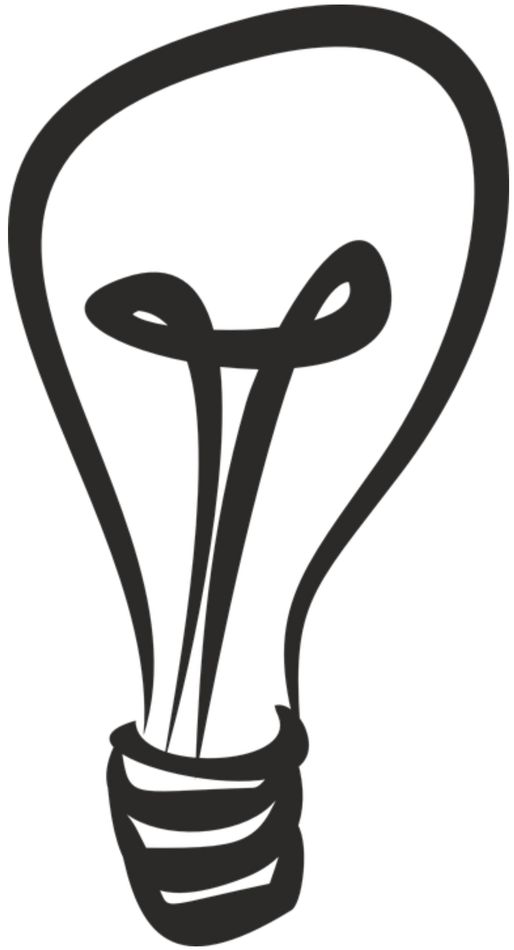
- Less costly
- Effective for structuring the research for analysing the territory
- Good quality of responses (reliability of information)

SURVEY: DISADVANTAGES

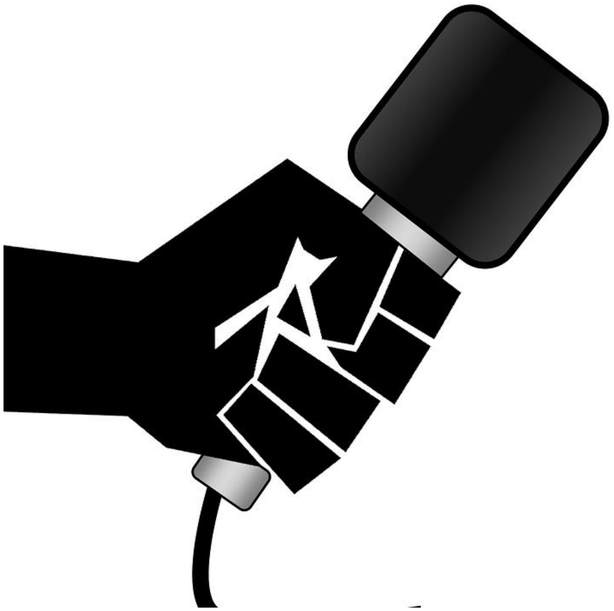
- Needs to be carefully designed
- Could be not very engaging
- Impersonal method (resolvable problems of authenticity)

SURVEY: WHAT TO FIND OUT

- Identify the **scope of reference**
- Give **clear instructions** for responding
- Understand **which variables** we want to investigate and transform this information into good questions
- Choose whether to use **closed** or **open** questions
- Potentially use **online tools** (e.g. LimeSurvey, SurveyMonkey, Google Forms)



INTERVIEW



Interviews are very helpful for collecting specific information, which perhaps only certain people know, or for collecting very in-depth knowledge.

INTERVIEW: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

- Most flexible instrument of all
- Proximity to the interviewee, good for grasping multiple nuances

- More complex to organise
- More complex to analyse
- Risk of interviewee going off topic

INTERVIEW: WHAT TO FIND OUT

- Interviews can be **structured, semi-structured** or **non-structured**, i.e. having a more or less precise scheme of questions
- They can be conducted **in person** (face-to-face), but also by **telephone** or via **Skype**
- If the interview is not recorded, take a lot of **notes**; if you wish to record the interview, ask for the interviewee's **consent** first
- Interviews could be **transcribed** before then being **analysed** following a scheme/code

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OBSERVATION

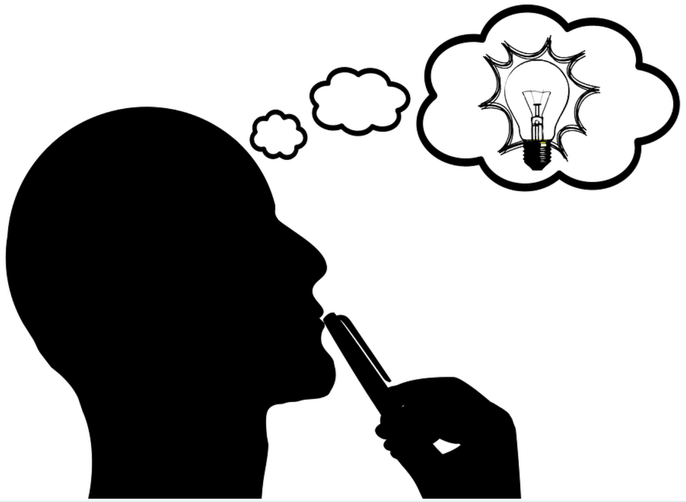
Detached or engaged observation can be very useful for observing conditions at particular places, events and activities.

OBSERVATION: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

- Excellent method for understanding a territory as a whole
- More neutral than the object of the research
- Good way to obtain preliminary info

- Good observation requires time
- Unhelpful if the context being observed changes often

OBSERVATION: WHAT TO FIND OUT



- Observation can be **pure** (not interacting with the context) or **engaged** (interactive)
- It is helpful to make a **preliminary list** of the things to be observed before heading out
- Try to **obtain access** to important sites to observe
- **Organise the information** in a structured format

FOCUS GROUPS

The **focus group** is a type of “group” interview, focusing on in-depth analysis of a specific theme, not only by questioning the various participants, but also through interaction between the participants themselves.

FOCUS GROUPS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

- Combines the flexibility of the interview with interaction between participants
- Excellent method for investigating a topic in depth

- Difficult to organise
- Interactions between participants not always easy to manage

FOCUS GROUPS: WHAT TO FIND OUT

- Needs to be **well moderated** and individual participants dominating the discussion must be avoided
- Important to clarify **the objective** of the focus group
- Try to achieve **diversity and viewpoints that diverge from** or were not initially anticipated by the questions

DIARIES OR REGISTRIES

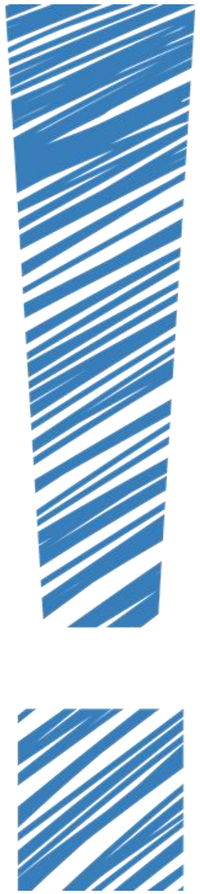
Diaries or registries are a particular form of observation that allow you to get highly detailed information on a specific behaviour.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is systematic and quantitative analysis of text.

If a large part of the information collected is in text format, systematic analysis of the content can be very effective for understanding whether there are recurring themes.

READY FOR RESEARCH IN THE FIELD...



Now it’s over to you!

Carefully choose the primary data collection method you consider is most helpful and effective for your research.

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FIELD RESEARCH: PRIMARY DATA