Institutional Ethnography

Newsletter of the International Sociological Association Working Group 06

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ISA WG06 Institutional Ethnography

ISA International Sociological Association

From the Co-Presidents

Liza McCoy:

As winter comes again to Calgary, I have been reflecting on what a year of disturbing environmental conditions it has been, in Canada and in the world: scorching heat, dryness, flood, forest fires, earthquakes, and deadly storms. Meanwhile, to the continuing wars in the world has been added a terrible new one. These are difficult times, and I know that our members around the world are touched by these situations in different ways. It's hard to feel much optimism as 2023 comes to close.

But when I shift my attention to our international IE network, however, I do feel energized about our shared project of institutional ethnography and the work we are doing in WG06 – which you can read about in this newsletter. Rebecca Lund, our Vice-President and newsletter editor, is on maternity leave (welcome, Baby Dagmar!), so I have pulled together this issue. What a richly informative issue it is! We have a report on the recent ISA conference in Melbourne, interviews with IE researchers, articles based on presentations given in Melbourne, news about awards, workshops and members' ongoing research, and a list of new publications and PhDs. Thank you to everyone who sent in articles, news, and contributions! Let's keep this up for the next newsletter.

I am also excited about the establishment of a second IE mentoring group, which meets online at a time that works for people living in the Asia Pacific region. The idea for this additional mentoring group came when the WG06 Executive was considering the feedback and requests from members shared at the business meeting in Melbourne. A huge thanks to Janet Rankin, Sophie Hickey, and Nerida Spina for making the idea a reality and getting this initiative under way – and to Adriana Suárez, Suzanne Vaughan and Lauren Eastwood for their continuing leadership in WG06's mentoring program. You can read about both mentoring groups and how to get involved on p. 9.

Frank Wang:

After three years of Covid, IEers around the world were finally able to meet in person in the 2023 ISA conference in Melbourne to feel the solidarity by sharing our work and learning from each other. Although it was relatively smaller than it used to be, the sense of community was unforgettable. The IE community holds a special place in my academic career, as many of you do. I hope we can all pass on the kind of support and inspiration to our fellow colleagues by creating more opportunities for IEers to connect. The second IE mentoring group is exactly a great example.

Besides what Liza mentioned above about this issue, we have reports from Chinese-speaking regions. Dr. Pei-Ru Liao did an interview with a PhD student, Jin-Si Chen, a counsellor with five years of counseling experiences in university. The interview illustrated how IE offers an alternative way of understanding for front-line practitioners to make sense of their daily work. Another report by Dr. Chen Wang describes the development of IE in China, summarizing how scholars in China approached and adopted IE in their research. What is interesting is that she mentions that IE's Marxist tradition creates a favorable socio-political conditions for its dissemination. As an international community, how IE traveled to different places, countries and cultures is another issue waiting to be explored.

As the year of 2023 is coming to an end, I wish you all joy and peace! Look forward to hearing and seeing you!

ISA XX World Congress of Sociology:
Report from the program coordinators

By Lauren Eastwood and Adriana Suárez

As program coordinators for the recent ISA conference in Melbourne, we'd like to first express our thanks to everyone who helped to make the IE sessions the rousing successes that they were! We understand that the time zones presented some challenges for people who were not able to come to Melbourne in person, but, having ushered these sessions through the process from beginning to end, we were really thrilled about the way everything came together over the days of the actual conference.

We can also speak to both types of participation, as Lauren was there in person and Adriana experienced the conference remotely. Being in the room was really great, as we were able to have those side conversations that are so invigorating at a conference. This is particularly important for IE scholars, as we often feel isolated in our institutions, so having this opportunity to talk things through was really fantastic. ISA provided fabulous tech support, which helped everything go smoothly with very few technical glitches. We really loved seeing faces from all over the world and appreciated the richness of the discussions that emerged in each session.

From the online perspective, the conference gave us a chance to watch the recording of sessions when we were not able to attend due to time differences. Participants made a huge effort in this regard, with people staying up until very late (or even very early in the morning) to present, to be part of a panel, to engage in the online discussion, or to drop a comment in the chat. All these forms

of participation made this hybrid conference an opportunity to share our work, reflect about research conundrums, and learn from what is going on in the IE world more broadly. We are truly grateful for people's support and engagement in this process, which began way before the conference itself took place. Participants' support took many shapes: from volunteering as session organizers, being flexible about abstracts' relocation to different sessions, chairing on behalf of those unable to attend in person, and staying up until unsocial hours just to be able to partake in this collective effort.

The sessions ranged in scope from ones that were very closely aligned with Institutional Ethnography (such as "Institutional Ethnography in Educational Settings" and "Institutional Ethnography in Healthcare and Healthcare Education") to ones that put various different approaches in conversation with each other (such as "Different Perspectives on the Sociology of Knowledge" and "Exploring Intersections: Institutional Ethnography, Environment, and Development"), allowing for an exploration of linkages and affinities between scholars who may or may not work directly with IE. The panel-session "The Legacy of Dorothy E. Smith: What is the Future of IE?" was an opportunity for fruitful sharing of ideas which developed both online and in the room, and where issues surrounding methodology, reflexivity and interculturality were discussed.

Overall, there were a total of 12 sessions, all conducted in a hybrid format. We really hope this was an opportunity to meet new scholars, connect with other people's work and hopefully boost collaboration for the development of future IE work.

We very much appreciate those who stepped forward to organize, chair or otherwise help out with the sessions. Adriana will be continuing on in the capacity of Program Coordinator for the 2025 ISA Forum. She will be joined by Sarah Murru this next time around!

Here's to another great conference in 2025!

See you in Morocco!

The next ISA Forum will be held in **Rabat, Morocco**, from July 7-11, 2025.

How Institutional Ethnography Flourishes in Mainland China

By Chen J. Wang
Associate Professor
Beijing Jiaotong University

Chen J. Wang is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, Beijing Jiaotong University. She is a socio-legal researcher committed to the following areas of research: immigration and refugee law, public international law, feminist legal theory, social justice, and qualitative research methodology.

Dorothy Smith developed Institutional Ethnography (IE) alongside her career and life path in England, the United States, and Canada, giving IE a deep root in the Western social context. Nonetheless, IE has spread far outside its traditional tents in Europe and North America. Specifically, China is a region where IE has flourished in recent years. In recent years, IE has been known and used by a small number of Chinese scholars in law, sociology, education, and medication, demonstrating its growing popularity in mainland China, but, facing reality, IE still remains hidden from the public eye and needs more time and attention to develop into a widely known theory.

One might have the question: how did IE reach mainland China? An overview of existing IE publications in China revealed two major ways of its dissemination. The first way was through the translation of sociology books from the West to China. The wide recognition and high scholarly achievement of IE have led to its inclusion in many classic sociology textbooks. For example, Professor Qui Zeqi gave IE a Chinese name, "制度民族志", in his translation of Earl Babble's famous sociological textbook *The Practice of Social Research.* This translation is slightly different from the Taiwan Chinese translated version of "建制民族志", but they are essentially the same concept. To add a brief comment on this slight discrepancy, the translation of original IE-related work into simplified Chinese language remains scarce, especially when compared to the translation of Dorothy Smith and her academic followers' several books into the traditional Chinese language in Taiwan. IE books translated by Taiwanese scholars have significantly contributed to introducing IE to Chinese readers because these books are a good source of reference for IE researchers in mainland China despite the slight differences in word choice and writing styles.

As for the second way, Chinese scholars have published research articles in academic journals explaining what IE methodology is, as well as how IE has been applied in the Chinese social context. For example, Xie Ni from Guizhou University of Finance and Economics has published an article illustrating the theoretical basics and methodological steps of IE. Wang Dongfang has also published *"Inquiry on Daily Life World of Educational Research: Method and Methodology of Institutional Ethnography"* on this topic. There are also published research articles reporting IE's application in China. For example, Zhou Mengjie et al wrote *"The Consented Free Labor in the Internet: A Study on*

the Ethnography Construction of the Female Show Anchors". Gu Ya-lin and Yu Cheng published "*Power and Control in Medical Policy: An Institutional Ethnography Analysis on Cervical Cancer Screening in Rural China"*. Liu Luhu from South China Normal University has also published IE research in education. So far, these publications in the Chinese language, although still small in quantity, represent what is important: young Chinese scholars have produced a variety of IE work that touches upon both basic (the theory itself) and advanced (the ways to apply this theory) topics. It can be said with some optimism that research outcomes following the IE approach will continue to produce writing both in good quality and quantity.

In addition to IE research published in the Chinese language, I personally represent a kind of IE researcher who acquired IE training in the West, applied IE to new sociological issues with a Chinese perspective, and published research outcomes in English. Called upon the responsibility of promoting IE in Asian countries, I usually explicitly mention IE in my article title to increase its visibility: *"An Institutional Ethnography Analysis on Skilled Chinese Immigrant Mothers' Experiences in Canada"*, in the hopes of enhancing the visibility of IE. As I am mainly based in mainland China, I am involved in several projects on China's transportation laws and policies. I expect more IE journal articles that analyze the emergence of ride-sharing industries in China to be published in Chinese and English in the upcoming years.

Introducing IE to Chinese academia has particular worth for its dissemination and implementation. The most evident merit is the spread of its unique ontological, epistemological, and methodological assertions to a new geographical area outside its birthplace, reaching a wider audience in China. However, IE's potential for generating more profound impacts in China cannot be explained from such a single dimension. To think further, spreading across mainland China enjoys an advantage: IE's theoretical foundation reconciles with the underpinned socio-political theory of China's interpretation of Marx's historical materialism. Dorothy Smith developed IE under the influence of Marx's historical materialism, which is a worldview that has informed China's social revolution, construction, and reform in all historical periods. Dorothy Smith's exploration of social relations shares similarities with Karl Marx's materialist understanding of social structure. Marx developed a philosophic view that sees the actual as the fundamental constituent of the conceptual, whereas Smith also recognizes the actual material interaction as the ontological ground of social science. Marx and Smith both understand social relations as a series of processes that emerge from people's material interactions and engage people in relations organizing our interactions. This alignment is very important because it could effectively guarantee IE's compatibility with mainland China's socio-political environment, and it promises IE's spread to a larger Chinese audience in the long run.

After clarifying the theoretical linkage that creates favourable conditions for IE's dissemination, we could move towards discussing the social context for IE's practical application in mainland China. China's large population and complex social structure offer a rich ground for conducting IE analysis. As we know, the IE mode of inquiry has great strength in exploring the discursively constructed experiences of marginalized people. This IE research focus corresponds to China's communist value of empowering members of the proletariat who live and work under the Bourgeoisie's capitalist oppression in Marx's theory. In recent years, the oppressed group has changed to a more complex intersectional composition over time. For example, since China's economic reforms in the late 1970s

allowed "some will get rich first" (yi bufen xian fu qi lai) but lacked specification about how the others would later catch up, inequality has been created between the privileged rich from the poor in China. From other social dimensions, socially marginalized groups in mainland China also include people with disabilities, people of ethnic and religious minorities, children, women, seniors, people of a lower socio-economic status, and so on. As promoting the collective human rights of all people has become the Chinese government's long-term commitment and even its brand for projecting a favorable image at international occasions, we could optimistically anticipate that, given the time and opportunities, IE will be increasingly valued in mainland China. This tendency is predictable due to IE's inner strengths in analyzing the lived experiences of marginalized groups. IE is also effective in probing into institutionalized ruling relations to criticize existing social problems and discover ways for social advancement.

Currently, we are delighted to see that the development of IE in mainland China is already underway. In the future, we expect the development of IE in mainland China could go beyond adding local cases to the existing IE framework or creating localist exceptionalism; rather, it should expand the breadth of IE research and even enrich IE by providing additional voices and opinions from mainland China.

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Two Institutional Ethnographers Win Major SSSP Awards

By Suzanne Vaughan

Frank Ridzi and **Janet Rankin** each received prestigious awards from the Society for the Study of Social Problems at the Society's annual meetings in Philadelphia, PA, USA, in August, 2023. Frank Ridzi, Associate Professor of Sociology, Le Moyne College, and Vice President of the Central New York Community Foundation, won the Lee Founders Award, given in honor of Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee's life work and commitment to social justice. Janet Rankin, Professor of Nursing, University of Calgary, and Interim Dean, University of Calgary at Qatar, was a co-winner of the Kathleen S. Lowney Mentoring Award given in recognition of the value of quality mentoring relationships between mentor and mentees, and mentoring particularly for younger scholars and activists.

Both Frank and Janet were recognized for their exemplary work in institutional ethnography by their respective committee chairs. For Frank, the committee noted how impressed they were with his body of research and service leading to the "betterment of human life" and "commitment to social action programs that promote social justice." Particularly notable for the committee was that "his creative use of institutional ethnography to map pathways of justice-oriented community change on issues ranging from welfare reform, educational and racial inequalities, quality of life indicators, and combating lead poisoning for refugees from global social conflicts in Syracuse, NY" not only "expands the social justice aims of Dorothy Smith and others whose research is *a sociology for people,* but demonstrates ways in which the tools of IE provide practical applications for making institutional change happen."

Frank Ridzi   Janet Rankin

For Janet, the committee pointed to her sustained and intensive commitment of time and expertise to students and colleagues within her department, university, and internationally by "fostering a deep

understanding of the significant problems of social life, promoting problem-centered social research, and encouraging social activism." The committee noted Janet's stellar skills in mentoring by quoting one letter of nomination: "Her ability to guide a diverse group of scholars and faculty speaks to her dedication to mentoring, her superior facilitation skills, her ability to articulate her firm grounding in the ontology of IE and to gently guide others toward this ontological shift." Further, the committee noted that many letter writers wrote that Janet had changed their lives by providing "a collegial environment to challenge and explore competing viewpoints" and by "fostering a community and sense of belonging especially for those who have not been able to access IE instruction at their own institutions."

We congratulate them both for their outstanding work in IE.

WG06 IE Mentorship Seminars

IE mentorship seminars provide a way for newcomers to IE, especially graduate students, to (a) connect with other IE students and the broader IE community; (b) discuss issues and practices of IE research with international IE scholars; and (c) talk about their own work and get feedback from experienced IE mentors. Mentorship meetings are online and live, and last for 90 minutes.

There are now two mentorship groups. One group – which has been in operation for two years – meets at a time that works for people living in the Americas, UK, and Europe. Following the ISA Congress in Melbourne this past summer, a new group was established to hold meetings at a time that works for people in the Asia Pacific region (Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan and China).

The first online meeting of the new Asia Pacific group took place this past October; the next meeting is scheduled for November 16, 2023, at 1:30 pm (Taipei), 4:30 pm (Sydney) and 8:30 am (Doha).

The Americas/UK/Europe group continues to meet monthly. Katie Koralesky discussed IE mapping at the recent October meeting. The next meeting of this group will be held on November 15 (10 am Calgary; 12 pm New York; 5pm London; 6 pm Frankfurt). At that meeting, Adriana Suárez will continue the mapping conversation. Meetings are recorded for members who are unable to attend the live meeting.

Participation in both groups is open to anyone interested in doing and learning about IE (ISA membership is not a requirement). People can join at any time. If you or your students would like to join one or both groups, contact Janet Rankin (jmrankin@ucalgary.edu.qa).

Planners and facilitators of both groups include Janet Rankin, Suzanne Vaughan, Lauren Eastwood, Adriana Suárez, Sophie Hickey, and Nerida Spina.

Getting to Know You:
Katherine Koralesky

Interviewed over e-mail by Liza McCoy

Katherine Koralesky is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Animal Welfare Program, in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia, in Canada. She received her PhD in Applied Animal Biology from same program in May 2022 with her thesis, "The social organization of animal sheltering and protection in British Columbia, Canada." She is the current Chair of the IE Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP).

LM: You are probably the first and maybe still the only person in your field who is using IE. How did you come to IE? What attracted you to this way of doing research?

KK: I learned about IE at a qualitative research methods conference workshop organized by Janet Rankin in 2018. At the time I was planning my doctoral work and knew I wanted to do research with animal sheltering and protection organizations and animal welfare law and policy. What attracted me to using IE was its focus on the empirical world. I appreciated that IE is grounded in observing actual, everyday work practices and examining how they are being organized by policy and law. As well, I liked that IE provided a new way to take the standpoint of animals and I knew I wanted to explore this in my work. I was also very lucky to have the support of my graduate supervisor, David Fraser, who encouraged me to use IE for my thesis.

Using IE to take the standpoint of animals could be applied to other settings where humans care for animals and are doing work that is organized by institutional contexts. For example, IE could be applied to laboratories where animals are used for scientific research, to farms that follow industry, government or corporate farm animal welfare assurance programs, or to wildlife centres (e.g., zoos, aquariums, rehabilitation hospitals) that follow institutional standards of care. The opportunities for using IE in animal welfare science are endless.

LM: How have you used IE in your research?

KK: I used IE for my PhD thesis, which examined how animal sheltering and protection policy organizes what happens to animals as they come to be involved in this institution. As a postdoctoral research fellow, I continue to use IE principles in my work. For example, I am following the same approach that I used in my paper "Animal sheltering: A scoping literature review grounded in institutional ethnography" to write a scoping review about how researchers have approached survey

work investigating public attitudes about gene editing in farm animals. These reviews, grounded in identifying the well-established frameworks researchers have used to investigate topics over time, can help us understand how knowledge on a topic is organized and highlight areas where we can begin to shift our understanding of a topic from theoretical to material.

LM: What are you working on now?

KK: I am now a postdoctoral research fellow in the Animal Welfare Program doing research on the social and ethical dimensions of gene editing in farm animals. I work with a great team to write scoping reviews, conduct interviews with industry partners, focus groups and mixed-method surveys with members of the public, and most recently I am developing creative ways of sharing our research. I am still engaged with animal sheltering and protection as a shelter volunteer and also in research, as I have been publishing my PhD work and developing shorter articles for veterinarian magazines and other publications so that this work can reach a wide audience.

LM: What has been your experience of sharing your IE approach with other researchers your field? What advice would you give to institutional ethnographers who are bringing IE into new areas?

KK: Dorothy Smith has talked about how Jane Goodall's work with chimpanzees in Tanzania is similar to IE in that IE is about discovering how individuals put their daily lives together: how they spend their time, fight and get along. I was thrilled when I heard Dorothy use this example because I knew this would resonate with animal welfare scientists. More broadly, the use of qualitative and social science research in animal welfare science has grown in the past few decades, and I think many now see how using different ontological and epistemological frames in research can be incredibly insightful when we think about how to improve animal and also human welfare in society, be it on farms, in shelters, research laboratories or zoos.

I have found it helpful to introduce IE as an approach to inquiry that aims to understand how policies organize what happens in institutions where humans and animals come together. It's important that people know IE is an approach, not a specific method, for learning about institutional organization. The advice I would give is to listen to how people talk about their research. Do they mention a policy or law directly? If so, ask how individuals are materially held accountable to that law or policy. When people frame their research using a well-established theory or framework and have used this to analyze their data, I have found it helpful to unpack what that theory or framework is about. For example, how is what people said during an interview or did during participant observation categorized into a broader theme? These kinds of questions are grounded in discovery and curiosity, and to me this is a core part of what making the ontological shift in IE means.

LM: You have recently started your term of office as Chair of the IE Division in SSSP. What is happening in the IE Division this year? Do you have any specific goals or projects?

KK: As incoming division chair, one initial goal I have is to survey division members to understand the type of activities and support they would find helpful in their work. Past division chairs have planned webinars, for example, and I think these can help people learn more about IE and also provide

opportunities for individuals to share their work. On a personal level, I would like to learn more about how the findings of IE projects can be, or are being, taken up in communities. I know there are many people doing this type of work and I look forward to learning from their experiences. As well, we have some incredibly motivated division members who are working together to plan a great workshop and new panels at the SSSP conference in Montreal next summer! Check out our website and newsletters!

Editor's Note: The Call for Papers for the upcoming SSSP conference in Montreal (August 9-11, 2024) is now open, with a deadline of January 31, 2024. There are 8 IE sessions planned.

Exploring the Everyday Work of University Counsellors in Taiwan

By Pei-Ru Liao, Associate Professor
Center for General Education
National University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

Jin-Si Chen, a counsellor with 5 years of experience providing mental health services at a university in Taiwan, is beginning his PhD study this semester and is interested in using Institutional Ethnography (IE) to explore the experiences of counsellors and psychologists working in Taiwanese universities. I spoke with him about the unique aspects of working as a mental health provider in higher education and the ruling relations surrounding their everyday work within the administrative system of higher education in Taiwan.

Liao: *What sparked your interest in an IE study of university counsellors?*

Chen: *IE exploration could help me change our current situation. Specifically, from a career perspective, university counsellors earn less and have less power to transform policies related to mental health compared to those in other settings.*

Chen described feeling powerless due to the hierarchical structure of the university system. Counsellors are considered administrative personnel at the bottom of the pyramid, while professors often hold higher management roles. With directors potentially coming from non-mental health backgrounds, counsellors have little representation and find it challenging to communicate within the organizational system.

A key institutional term that arose was "administrative work." Chen emphasized that counsellors are trained extensively in professional skills but receive little preparation for the workplace reality of administrative tasks outside of direct counseling. He spends significant time communicating across disciplines and translating professional languages into lay terms. While this unlabeled work is time consuming, counsellors are pressured to quantify productivity by caseloads alone.

Chen: *If I have taken 10 clients a week, I need to reflect on these cases in 20 to 30 hours. If my working hours are filled with administrative work, I will have to spend my off-work hours reflecting on the cases I take. And I might have to discuss my cases with colleagues, whereas sometimes, I prefer to reflect alone. It is challenging to concretise and quantify the reflection time on cases. The time I spend reflecting on my cases is a part of the work, but it's hard to let people see it as work.* Chen describes his reflection moment as 'a mental space' needed as a part of his work, but this concept might not be accepted by professors in managerial positions. In our discussion of the invisibility of crucial aspects of counsellors' everyday work, Chen mentioned how Ministry of Education (MOE) funded projects fail to recognize this.

Chen: *If I argue for the recognition of 'the mental space' as a part of my work, I'm expecting the donors (i.e. MOE) to pay me for nothing.*

He noted these projects aren't created by frontline staff familiar with the role.

Chen: *Civil servants or professors draft them. They may think they can finish work in regular hours, so why can't we?*

It became clear counsellors are situated in a system that overlooks key invisible work, while metrics tie their role directly to MOE funding sources. This glimpse into the counselling center reveals how MOE financial support shapes university administration. Rather than flexible funds, MOE increasingly encourages competitive annual project proposals, driving paperwork and strengthening their control over sectors like mental health services within the university. This interview shines light on how the counsellors' standpoint could lead an IE study of the ruling relations within Taiwanese higher education. It also prompts discussion of how New Public Management affects contexts beyond North America.

Email me if you would like to learn more about university mental health services in Taiwan.
rpliao@mail.npust.edu.tw

Publishing IE Research in Journals or as Chapters

By Suzanne Vaughan

This is an abbreviated version of Suzanne's very helpful presentation at the 2023 ISA Congress in Melbourne, which she has kindly prepared for this newsletter.
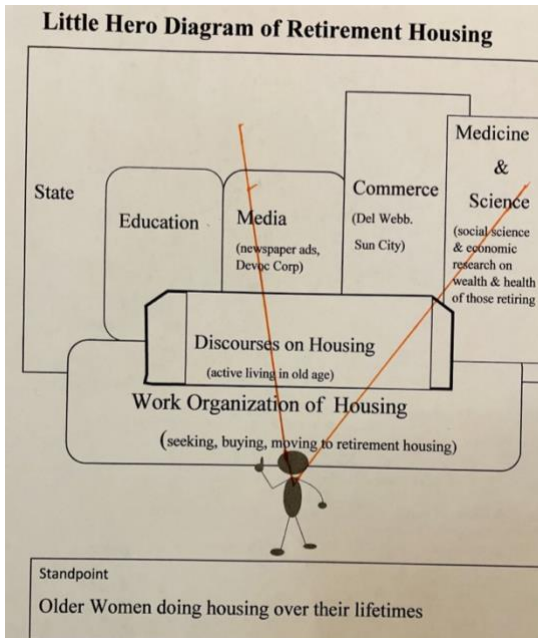
Often like you, my colleague, Paul Luken, and I struggled and often stumbled to publish our institutional ethnographic work on housing---so many rejection letters from journals ("this is not qualitative nor feminist research which we do in fact support") from grant proposals ("this is Marxist jargon") and from book proposals ("this is not social science, but rather humanities---better sent to NHC"). Of course, these gatekeepers had no knowledge of IE, but there was an upside since along the way we learned some valuable lessons about publishing and gained a deeper understanding of the ontological commitments we make in IE. I consider these conversations with reviewers, whether with other IEers or non-IEers, important in becoming a better thinker and writer of IE. Below I outline several venues/strategies and writing practices for publishing institutional ethnographic research I have learned as an author, reviewer, and editor. I hope they are useful in your efforts.

Venues to consider:

1. Write critical analyses of previous research literature in a field or topic and show how IE might address these topics by filling in gaps, by examining what is missing, or pointing to new discoveries IE might make. Seek out journals or edited volumes that specialize in these topics.

2. Investigate journal editors' research area or content of articles published under their editorship and send your article or chapter to them. A bit of research about editors or journals is useful in bringing your topic to the attention of reviewers. Don't forsake journals with quantitative reputations. Editors tell me they wished they received more papers using other methodologies.

3. Seek out special issues devoted to IE or to the topic of your research. Opportunities abound nationally and internationally as IE has spread globally.

4. Organize an IE panel within an established conference association to develop a special issue for a journal or book.

Writing practices to consider:

1. Your writing should be as pristine as possible, in correct style, with images/figures properly labeled, and proofread by others before submitting your paper or chapter.

2. Writing and publishing in IE requires a grounding in the framework of IE, rather than just employing its vocabulary or concepts in our writing. Thus, I recommend reading and rereading

Little Hero Diagram of Retirement Housing

State

Education   Media

(newspaper ads,
Devoc Corp)

Commerce

(Del Webb.
Sun City)

Medicine
&
Science

(social science
& economic
research on
wealth & health
of those retiring

Discourses on Housing

(active living in old age)

Work Organization of Housing

(seeking, buying, moving to retirement housing)

Standpoint
Older Women doing housing over their lifetimes

Chapter 4, "Institutional Ethnography" in *The Everyday World as Problematic* and Chapter 3, "Designing a Social Ontology for Institutional Ethnography" in *Institutional Ethnography*. Pay attention to Dorothy's small hero diagram as she discusses work people do with others, and the resources available to them in the setting, across different times and places. These chapters speak to IE's expansive framework and ontology and open up our investigations to many contexts, timeframes, overlapping institutional complexes, and other useful conceptual frames and methodological tools compatible with this ontology.

3. If you are moving from a dissertation or research project, focus your paper on a wedge of the small hero diagram, not on the whole IE project you completed. Craft different papers for different audiences, different topics, different puzzles.

4. In your writing distinguish between what Abraham Kaplan, in *The Conduct of Inquiry,* calls "logic-in-use" and "reconstructed logic." Dissertations/research proposals follow "logic-in-use," an idealized research process, while journal articles and chapters focus on telling a story. If you begin with a puzzle, a quote, or some disjuncture, build toward the solutions from your findings. Your article or chapter should tell a compelling story to the audience.

5. Avoid long overviews of IE including elaborate definitions of standpoint, ruling relations, etc. A paragraph, at most, can explain IE's framework; only include definitions of particular concepts you single out in your research in a paragraph. Don't drown your audience with jargon so they lose your story.

6. Write thick descriptions in everyday language of the activities of people at work, how people use talk and text in their work, and how this work is organized with others located elsewhere and at different times. Include empirical data, interviews, field note observations, or images of text so that your readers can follow the empirical details as you describe the ruling relations organizing the everyday world of the small hero.

7. Once you get your paper in the hands of reviewers you have won most of battle, but take the reviewers' comments seriously. If they seem to misunderstand something, assume that you have done a poor job of explaining – so rewrite. If they object to something you've written or suggest that you include something, assess their comments in terms of IE's ontology. Respond by meeting them "where they are," rather than dismissing their concern, by thoughtfully helping to move their thinking from their premises to those of IE.

IE and the Theory Question

By Kjeld Høgsbro
Professor, Aalborg University, Denmark
Member, WG06 Board of Directors

My presentation at the ISA conference 2023 dealt with the differences and similarities between governmentality studies and IE studies in the last two decades when both traditions have gained a considerable influence within sociology. Governmentality studies focus in general on the discourses of governance and the way global discourses like New Public Management have been implemented in different national and local contexts involving different actors on different levels (Dean 1999). In many instances, IE studies have had the same focus and in some instances IE studies have focused more on discourses than kept the traditional focus on procedures (DeVault and McCoy 2006). Thus, it is obvious to look at similarities and differences between the two traditions with respect to epistemological premises, theoretical references (implicitly or explicitly expressed or discussed) as well as methodological design and procedures.

The question arises: are the two traditions obviously overlapping and just kept apart by a kind of bubble organization of sociological research? Or do they complement each other as a focus on two different aspects of social power structures? Or do they represent two different approaches which must be kept separated? Do they have significantly different goals, ethical premises, and practical ambitions as 'sociological practice' or do they have common ambitions for making a difference in a world of oppression and inequality (Høgsbro et al 2009, Høgsbro 2015)?

My own answer is quite clear. I regard Governmentality studies and IE as two traditions which are overlapping and driven by the same ambition to address and give us all a rising and accumulated knowledge of the way modern institutions are formed and developed. But there are differences, too. IE contributes a more profound study of procedures within the institutions while governmentality studies focus on the discourses in society that influence the thinking and interplay between the involved actors (Smith and Turner 2014, Little 1999).

But the question is wider than this. It opens up a more general discussion of how we deal with the combination of IE and different theoretical approaches to sociological theory, which different members of the IE community have found to be valuable in their empirical investigation. So, this discussion is what I am trying to push forward in the following brief summary of my presentation at the ISA Conference.

Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic Region
The edited book about Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic Region from 2020 comprises a number of contributions from the members of the Nordic IE network and has as its main focus how different researchers have combined IE with recent approaches to sociological theory (Lund and Nielsen 2020). In the North American tradition, there is a tendency to avoid too many theoretical considerations and focus mainly on the empirical data, and this is obviously inspired by Dorothy Smith's effort to avoid the tendency among many sociologists to jump to theoretical generalizations instead of being focused

on how real people act in real settings (Smith 2005, Smith ed. 2006). On the other hand, as Karin Wiederberg puts it in her introduction to the Nordic book: "For a start, it seems as if the perceived anti-theoretical approach of IE needs to be deconstructed and an IE approach that is hooked up to sociological theory to be outlined. (…) Hopefully this effort of mine can contribute to further theoretical discussions within and between the disciplines of IE and sociology" (Widerberg 2020: 34).

The whole dilemma between theory and IE seems to be linked to Dorothy's own ambition of being both closely connected to the specific experiences of people and at the same time contribute to a general understanding of the ruling relations: "In opening up an institutional complex it participates in institutional ethnography's more general discoveries of the workings of institutions and the ruling relations in contemporary western societies" (Smith 2005: 41).

Widerberg's argument is that if we want to use the specific empirical case studies to say something general about modern institutions and thus make them relevant for other than those directly involved, then we must get into a dialogue with sociological theory. Accordingly, the chapters of the edited book about Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic Region address different theoretical approaches which might be relevant for IE investigations. The different chapters of this book are the point of departure for the following considerations.

Strategy

It is not my intention to skip the ambition of being both empirically grounded and contributing to an accumulated general knowledge, and my strategy will be (Høgsbro 2020):

- To keep the main and unique ambition in IE to focus step by step on what is really happening in the relation between people and probational officers in public services. Report and document how information is transformed and delivered from one level to the other in the institutional complex and the loops and feedback which characterize the action.
- To realize that sometimes people act under the influence of discourses rather than strictly following the ruling texts. Or their interpretation/reception of the text is influenced by the professional discourses to which they are educated to refer.
- To keep the IE ambition to stick to the empirical findings and not too quickly jump to conclusions which confirm the theory like ending up with 'answers already included in the questions' (Dorothy's expression). But simultaneously admit that different sociological theories have two important functions in the analytical process:
    - It makes you aware of aspects you might otherwise forget to see. Theories are 'ways of seeing' and not only ways of concluding. It can bind you as well as it can open your eyes.
    - In the end when IE has an ambition to contribute to the general understanding of modern institutions, this 'general understanding' will have the form as a sociological theory, and in this form, it has to contradict, contribute to or confirm other theoretical approaches.

Fig. 1 (see below, p. 19) illustrates both functions, and it shows the possible contributions from different theoretical traditions to the analysis associated to the different levels of an institutional ethnography.

Thus, the phenomenological approach from Schutz, Luckman and Goffman has contributed to our understanding of the everyday world of modern citizens in a way which both opens our eyes to see the strange details of everyday interaction and understand the way people organize the world outside the institutions and thereby define some of the important context for understanding the interaction between citizens and professionals (Schutz and Luckmann 1989, Goffman 1959).

Resistance studies contribute with detailed descriptions of the way people react to oppression in different silent ways without getting into open conflicts or political activism (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020, Sørensen, Nielsen and Lund 2020).

Actor-network theory contributes to our analysis of the setting by showing how artifacts can have an autonomous life in the physical structures of the setting. Artifacts articulate a certain power relation between citizens and officers, they articulate the reason and history, and they have a life which bear a certain discourse until they are finally removed because they symbolize a social order which is no longer accepted (Tørrisplass and Breimo 2020).

Lipsky contributes to our understanding of the whole life and situation of frontline professionals, and neo-institutional theory contributes with a general discussion of the function of modern institutions (Lundberg and Sataøen 2020, Hansen 2020).

Thus, different theoretical approaches can be seen as supplementing our understanding and way of seeing when doing Institutional Ethnographies.
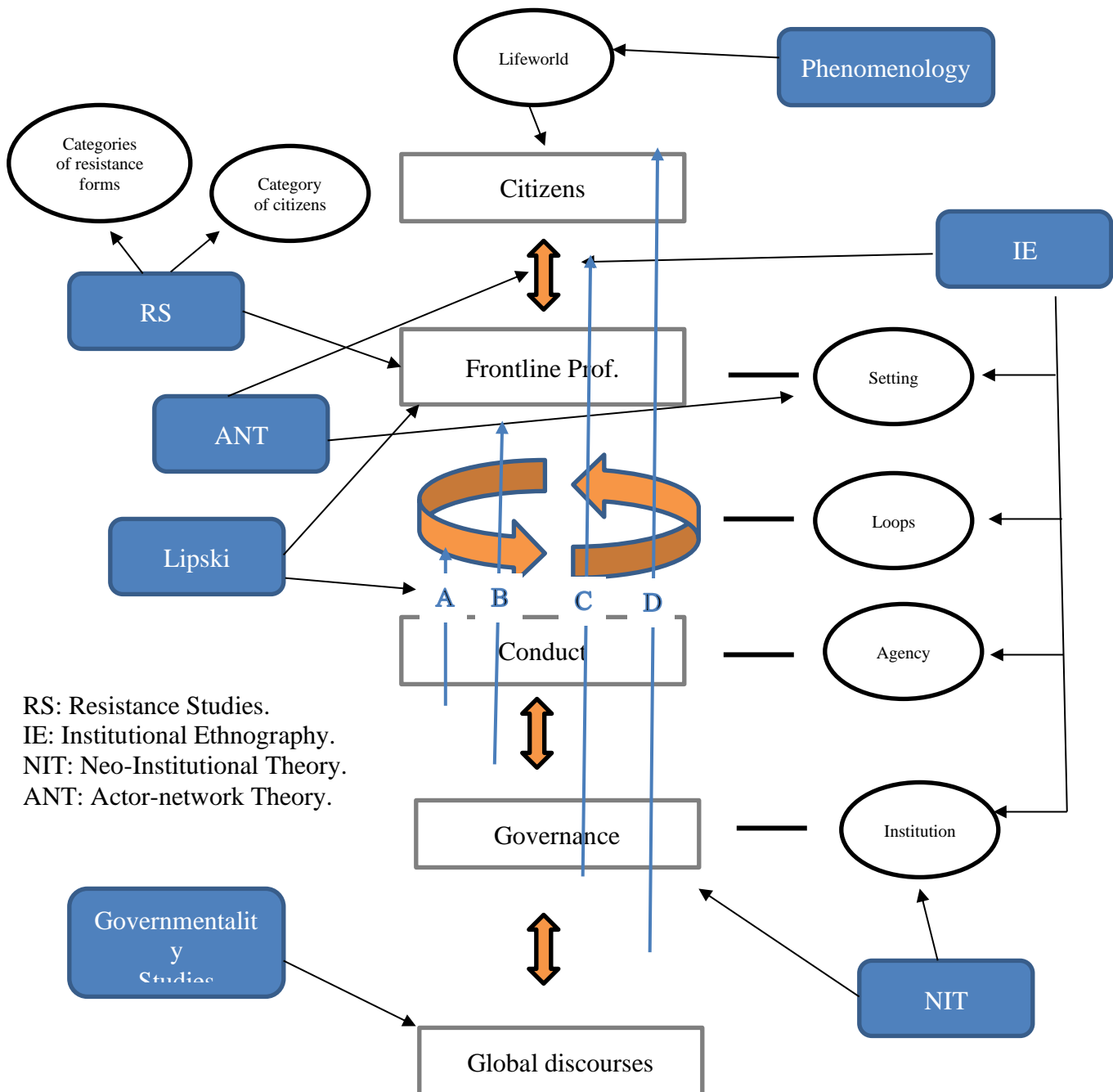
Governmentality studies
To me, Governmentality studies per se has served as a necessary supplement to IE studies both as specific studies of the implementation of international discourses on the governance of modern institutions and a way of seeing, observing, and analyzing the way people act when there are no specific guidelines, manuals or regulating texts to guide their action. Like IE, governmentality studies does not operate with an idea of ideology, false consciousness or misinterpretation but aims at understanding descriptively the premises, logic and interplay between people's references to different existing discourses in the field.

> *The idea of mentalities of government, then, emphasizes the way in which the thought involved in practices of government is collective and relatively taken for granted, i.e. not usually open to questioning by its practitioners. To say that these mentalities are collective is not necessarily to identify them with specific social groups or classes, although it might also be possible to examine the relation between the different mentalities of specific ruling or subordinate groups. It is to say that the way we think about exercising authority draws upon the theories, ideas, philosophies and forms of knowledge that are a part of our social and cultural products.* (Dean 1999: 16)

New Public Management has often served as an important subject for the discussion on ruling relations (Griffith and Smidt 2014). Global discourses like NPM influence the way governance is formed and developed in a certain period. It became a global discourse in 1995 generally accepted as

the main reference for administrative reforms all over the world. But when implemented in specific national contexts, it got its specific form in accordance with national political discourses and cultural premisses for governance (Schmidt 2002). This is the first level of the influence of governmentality (Fig. 1 A). At the next level NPM fuses with the workfare discourse which is likewise accepted as a main reference for social policy in western countries (Fig. 1 B), but then again: The rhetoric behind, which legitimises the workfare-oriented initiatives, differs from one country to the other, and the discourse on different levels of the institutional complex differs in accordance with the exact experience and local discourses of the involved professionals and users (Fig. 1 C). Thus, resistance, acceptance of, or direct revolt against forms of oppression are influenced by the existence of hegemonic versus oppositional discourses people might refer to (Fig. 1 D) (Schmidt 2002, Little 1999).

Fig. 1. Analytical strategies

RS: Resistance Studies.
IE: Institutional Ethnography.
NIT: Neo-Institutional Theory.
ANT: Actor-network Theory.

Regional News

UK & Europe

New two-day IE workshop run by the [IE UK and Ireland Network](#) funded by the National Centre for Research Methods

Date: 15/01/2024 - 16/01/2024

Organised by: NCRM, University of Southampton.

Presenters: Dr Órla Murray, Dr Liz Ablett, Dr Adriana Suárez Delucchi and Courtney Buckler

The overall aim of the workshop is to provide attendees with a comprehensive overview of institutional ethnography as an approach and the opportunity to translate their own research ideas and projects into an IE research proposal and do a small piece of text-focused analysis. This hands-on workshop is suitable for students, academics, and anyone else interested in feminist methodologies, text and discourse analysis, and institutional or organisational ethnographies. No prior training in, or knowledge of, IE is required.

Link for booking available here: https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/training/show.php?article=13101

Translating IE Works into Spanish

The IE Network for the UK and Ireland secured in 2023 a pot of funding from Essex University's Researcher-led Initiative. This allowed us to develop some new illustrations for our workshops, and we also managed to pay for a professional translation from English into Spanish of our videos (which we also use in our workshops).

In October and November, we held two online workshops where all those who know IE and speak Spanish gathered to discuss these translations and to collectively agree on the most appropriate words to translate the main IE concepts. As none of Dorothy Smith's books have (yet) been translated into Spanish, we want to make sure we come up with the best possible terms to interpret complex ideas such as 'standpoint' 'disjuncture', or 'ideological code'. We will then be able to share these resources online on our website and expand the scope and use of IE to other regions of the world… Stay tuned!

UK PhD news

Courtney Buckler writes:

In September 2023 I submitted my PhD thesis titled *Governing Sadness,* which used Institutional Ethnography to explore the ways in which responses to depression (and mental health care more broadly) have shifted in England over the past 30 years. In particular, I focussed on the impact of evidence-based medicine (EBM) and the imperative to be evidence-based, thinking about the bureaucratic and institutional functions of EBM within the context of state funded healthcare. To do so, I developed a three-part model for doing IE, zooming out to look at the textual, processual, and discursive elements to analyse a controversial evidence-based guideline for depression care (this model was based on a paper by Murray, 2022 outlining approaches to analysis in IE). Instead of rejecting EBM, I advocate for a more ambivalent reading, paying attention to issues of science and society, power and knowledge, and what it might mean to build liberatory mental health care beyond the institution. My work was based in the department of Sociology, Philosophy, and Anthropology at the University of Exeter and will be examined in the Autumn by Professor Eric Mykhalovskiy (York University) and Dr Sam Wilkinson (University of Exeter). - Courtney Buckler (she/they)

USA/North America

Naomi Nichols writes:

For those who missed the 2023 Dorothy Smith Open School at Trent University (Canada) this past spring, here is a link to the "Rad Talks about Social Life" panel presentations that I'd love you to share with the ISA IE network:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDWh7ytTuWo4P9PsDxkle1w

Research for Social Change Lab
www.youtube.com

Research, Publications, Dissertations, and Other Important News

IE Research in Progress:
International IE Project on Music Students' Health in Postsecondary Education

A research team led by Dr Christine Guptill at the University of Ottawa is carrying out IE projects in three tertiary schools of music: Two in Canada and one in Australia. Data collection and analysis will be primarily carried out by postdoctoral researcher Kyle Zavitz and doctoral trainees Jeff Sabo and Mona Oikarinen. Data collection is underway in Australia and will begin at the Canadian sites in 2024. Project design and initial findings from the Australian site have been presented at a number of conferences, including the International Society for Music Education 2022 and International Symposium on Performance Science 2023, as well as at the SSSP 2023 and ISA 2023 conferences. An upcoming protocol publication has also been submitted.

PhD Dissertations

Josefine Jahreie, [Constructing the School-Ready Child: A Study of ECEC Teachers' Experiences of Preparing Children for School](#) (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway, 2023).

Courtney Petruik, [Caring for People on the Margins: An Institutional Ethnographic Exploration of Community Palliative Care Work for People who are Precariously Housed](#) (University of Calgary, Canada, 2023).

Katrine Mayora Synnes, [Unemployed Polish Migrants' Experiences Encountering the Norwegian Welfare State](#) (University of Agder, Norway, 2023)

Hasmik Tovmasyan, [Syrian Armenian Refugees in Canada: War, Forced Migration, Resettlement, and the Collective Memory of the Armenian Genocide](#) (University of Calgary, Canada, 2023).

Articles

Kearney, G.P., Corman, M.K., Johnston, J.L. et al. Towards accountability-centred practices: governance in OSCEs subordinating patient and practitioner clinical experience. *Advances in Health Sciences Education* (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-023-10238-7

Abstract: *New public management ideals and standards have become increasingly adhered to in health professions education; this is particularly apparent in high-stakes assessment, as a gateway to practice. Using an Institutional Ethnographic approach, we looked at the work involved in running high-stakes Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs) throughout an academic year including use of observations, interviews and textual analysis. In our results, we describe three types of 'work'—standardising work, defensibility work and accountability work–summarising these in the discussion as an Accountability Circuit, which shows the organising role of texts on people's work processes. We show how this form of governance mandates a shift towards accountability-centred practices, away from practices which are person-centred; this lens on accountability-centring during high-stakes assessments invites critique of the often-unquestioned emphasis of new public management in health professions education.*

Talbot, D. (2023). Using Institutional Ethnography and students' voices to explore students' capacity to learn. *Australian Educational Researcher* 02-11-23 online first https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00667-z

Abstract: *As a response to declining student results on certain academic measures, a great deal of government policy intervention in Australia and internationally has been directed towards correcting a perceived deficit in teachers. Such interventions deliberately ignore the possibility that other factors might also be impacting student learning. The study reported here employed Institutional ethnography (IE) to begin from the standpoint of students, across all secondary year groups, and trace the factors that students perceive influence their capacity to learn. The voices of these students provided new and surprising insights to teachers and to the school executive. Surprising in the sense that other large scale, institutionalised data collection methods had not revealed the factors considered important by students. The study demonstrated the efficacy of an IE approach to student voice in uncovering a broad range of student views.*

Books

Two from Norway

Institusjonell etnografi. En innføring. [Institutional Ethnography. An introduction] by Ann Christin E. Nilsen and Janne Paulsen Breimo gives an introduction to IE as a methodology. The book can be considered a primer, and targets in particular master and PhD students with an interest in IE. The books has six chapters:
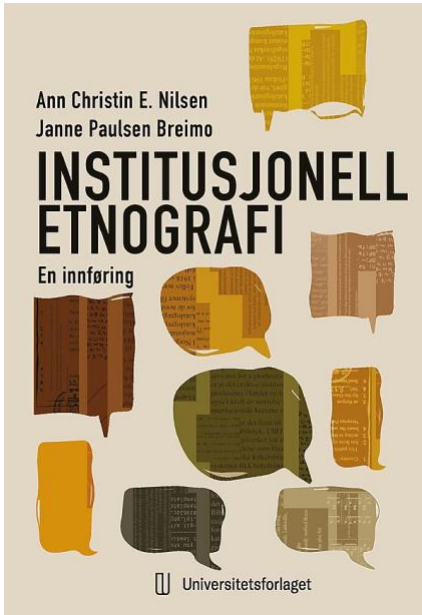
1. An introduction. Here the background of IE is outlined, Dorothy Smith is introduced, and there is a short reflection on what is "institutional" and what is "ethnographic" about IE.
2. Exploring the social. This chapter gives an introduction and description of key analytical concepts and how they are of use in the research process.
3. Data collection. Different strategies for collecting data are presented, with examples. The chapter incorporates a quite extensive section on the role of texts, as well as digital data.
4. Analysis. Again, different strategies are presented. The chapter also holds a section on what sort of knowledge IE analysis seeks to develop and how the analysis can be assessed.
5. Researcher role and research ethics
6. Institutional ethnography in sociology. This chapter depicts some of the theoretical underpinnings of IE, and discusses IE in the context of Norwegian sociology.
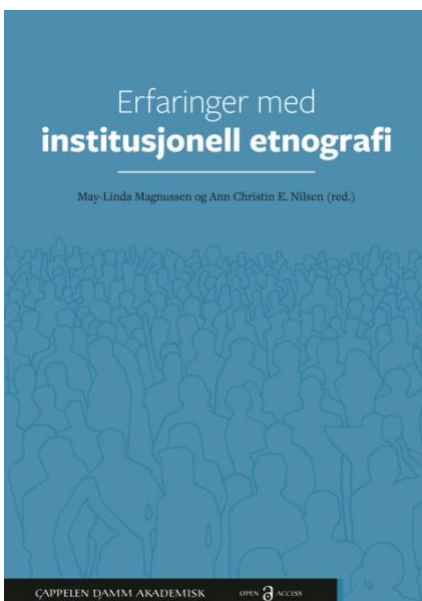
The second book is called *Erfaringer med institusjonell etnografi* [Experiences with IE], and is a collection of chapters written by scholars at different stages in their academic careers. It is edited by May-Linda Magnussen and Ann Christin E. Nilsen, and is available online. The chapter authors present how they have made use of IE in their research, and how different analytical concepts from IE have informed their analysis. In the introductory chapter, the editors argue why IE is particularly useful for researching the welfare state.

The two books will be presented at a **seminar** at the University of Agder in southern Norway on 15th November. Morena Tartari and Orla Murray have been invited as speakers at the seminar. On the subsequent day (16thNovember), we have invited five PhD-students to attend a session of collective analysis, together with five more "seasoned" IE scholars (Morena Tartari, Orla Murray, May-Linda Magussen, Janne Lund and Ann Christin E. Nilsen).

University of Toronto Press Book Series

Edited by Eric Mykhalovskiy, **Institutional Ethnography: Studies in the Social Organization of Knowledge** is the first book series to curate book manuscripts that showcase research excellence and innovation in the field of institutional ethnography. The series serves as a focal point for scholarly discourse that connects insights about and critiques of the various forms of intersecting knowledge, technologies, and practices through which contemporary societies are governed. The series critiques relations of exclusion, marginalization, and oppression, and contributes new perspectives about how they can be altered in pursuit of better futures.

Eric writes:

I'm delighted to announce that the second book in the series will soon be published. Colin Hasting's book, ***"It's someone's job to get those quick crime stories out there:" The social organization of digital knowledge about HIV criminalization***, is scheduled for release in Fall 2024. Colin's book offers an insightful and original analysis of how news about HIV criminalization is created in an age of digital and convergence journalism. This is book that moves institutional ethnographic research into new empirical domains, while expressing a deep commitment to ending discrimination against people living with HIV. Stay tuned for updates and news of a book launch!!

As always, I encourage anyone with book ideas to reach out to me.

Eric Mykhalovskiy
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