PhD Course: Doing ethnography of reforms in public organizations

The PhD course is founded by The Ethnographic Research into Public Sector Reforms (The Danish Council for Independent Research, Culture and Communication) at Center for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University in collaboration with University of Liverpool

Aim of course:
The aim of the PhD course is to bring together PhD students with disciplinary backgrounds such as anthropology, sociology, political science, public management, and business administration who share an ethnographic approach to the study of public sector reform and development. In doing that, we are part of an emerging trend to study politics, policy implementation, and public administration through ethnographic fieldwork. This approach has long been used by scholars of international development (Mosse 2005; Scott 1998), but only recently have political science and public administration turned to ethnography (Auyero & Joseph 2007). These works highlight a growing scholarly interest in understanding political and administrative systems by exploring the everyday practices of their multiple actors. Further, these studies demonstrate that the ethnographic research methods are well suited to examine both organizational contingencies and the processes through which micro-actions relate to, feed into, and ultimately transform macro-level structures. In the PhD course, we will examine and theorise the shared and country-specific ways in which the reform pace influence the work life and service delivery of public employees.

Course objective:
The course is primarily targeting PhD students, who have applied or are going to apply ethnographic methods to study public organizations. In this course, we have a particular focus on ethnographies of political and administrative reforms and their implications for everyday practices. That is how new demands are perceived, translated and enacted in various local, organizational settings. The overall objective of the course is to assist the PhD students to:

1) Identify and discuss (potential) benefits and challenges applying an ethnographic approach to studies of reforms in public organizations
2) Unpack field work material and identify potential analytical issues and how to contextualize these
3) Discuss the development of analytical concepts and ideas
4) How to write academic texts on the basis of ethnographic field work.

ECTS: 5 ECTs if all days are followed

Deliverables: Submission of up to 10 pages description of PhD project and subsequent assignment based on workshops at day 3

**Deadline for registration:** 6th June 2016

**Registration:** [https://auws.au.dk/Ethnography_of_reforms_in_public_organizations](https://auws.au.dk/Ethnography_of_reforms_in_public_organizations)

**Venue:** Bristol, United Kingdom

**Preparation for the course:**

Prior to the course participants are requested to submit a description of their ideas of and reflections on how to apply ethnographic methods in their study or a description based on their actual experiences of applying these methods and the data collected (up to ten pages). Within 14 days after the PhD course, the students are required to hand in an assignment based on insights and inspirations gained from the course.

**Day 1**

*Head of session:* Mike Rowe, University of Liverpool, Nina Holm Vohnsen, Aarhus University, Bagga Bjerge, Aarhus University

Considering the present speed of reform in public organizations it is reasonable to say that legislative change and organizational reconfiguration have turned into a permanent condition for many public organizations. As a result, in many areas of intervention (e.g. policing, social work, tax inspection, and education) the work lives of public employees are characterized by the need to reconcile and adapt to competing programs and constantly revised legislation. The literature in anthropology, political science, and public administration all stress that the cooperation of public employees is vital for the implementation of national legislation and reforms. Yet little has been written about how public sector employees learn about the content of new acts and reforms; and how they navigate the various demands made of them and deliver their services within the framework of public organizations characterized by such perpetual change. Thus, the focus of this session is on the benefits and challenges of applying ethnographic methods, when studying political and administrative reforms in public organizations in the everyday practices of public sector employees. Further, by taking our point of departure from the PhD students’ papers, the sessions also focus on and identify potential analytical issues and how to contextualize these drawing on the readings for the course as well as supplementary literature. By thorough reading and feedback from peers as well as senior researchers, the session aims to discuss the development of analytical concepts and ideas of each paper.

**Day 2**

*On the second day, there are two workshops.*

**Starting out in the Field**

*Head of session:* Mike Rowe, University of Liverpool, David Weir, Edge Hill University
For those students at an early stage in their thinking and planning, this workshop will consider the familiar hurdles of ethical approval, gaining access and the little considered practicalities of venturing into unfamiliar terrain. Supported by experienced researchers, the principal aim of the session is to dispel some familiar anxieties and instill some of the sense of excitement that we feel as practitioners every time we are privileged to share someone else’s space and thoughts.

**Emotions**

Head of session: Hamid Foroughi, University of Portsmouth, Manuela Nocker, University of Essex

PhD students are encouraged to produce a more reflexive and emotionally engaged ethnographic writing. Such an approach has allowed ethnographers to celebrate the complex, ambiguous and messy nature of the social world and reflect on our own positioning and relationships in the field. Yet, despite the recognition of these various emotional challenges, the practice of reflexivity has remained fairly restricted and arguably formulaic. Various emotional experiences are left out of researchers’ accounts to avoid giving the impression of a weakness or something that may have obstructed the research in a negative way. In a new development in ethnographic practice, a number of authors have argued for a ‘collective approach to reflexivity’ (Brannan, 2011; Riach, 2009). They propose moving away from a focus on the individual ethnographer towards an understanding of this research practice as collective. Building on this, we invite organizational ethnographers to participate in a collective storytelling exercise to explore a range of emotions experienced by the field researchers, such as, excitement, anxiety, anger and fear. A collective approach to reflexivity, we suggest, could also lead to a more ‘inclusive reflexivity’ by forming a community which care about those emotional encounters - unlike journal reviewers - it is more likely to evoke memories that would have been otherwise muted (Foroughi, 2015). In so doing, we aspire to bring together scholars from different backgrounds into a ‘community of practice’ to share their stories from the field which could shed light on 1) emotional predicaments of fieldwork 2) how and if emotional encounters could help ethnographers in the fieldwork and 3) how as ethnographers we can cope with and navigate emotionally challenging encounters.

**Day 3**

*On the third day, there are two workshops.*

**Impacts**

Head of session: Clifford Stott, University of Keele

Professor Stott will lead a discussion of the value of demonstrating the impact of ethnographic work for developing further research, for securing funding and for building networks. He will also prompt a discussion of some of the dangers of focusing on impact to the detriment of independent and rigorous research.
**Writing Workshop**

*Head of session: Mike Rowe, Matthew Brannan and Manuela Nocker, Editors of the Journal of Organizational Ethnography*

This session is a writing workshop in which PhD students and other participants are invited to discuss their experiences of writing for, submitting to and receiving feedback from journals. While the discussion is intended as an opportunity to learn about the processes of writing for publication, we will also seek to develop support for students through peer review and feedback on written submissions to the workshop. In the spirit of encouraging experimentation, we will also consider the potential that the increasing use of on-line access has for publishing in new formats in academic journals. Specifically, we will explore the use of sound and moving images embedded in texts.

**Head of sessions:**

Professor Mike Rowe, Management School, University of Liverpool

Professor David Weir, Business School, Edge Hill University

Lecturer Hamid Foroughi, Organization Studies and Human Resource Management, University of Portsmouth,

Senior Lecturer Manuela Nocker, Business School, University of Essex

Professor Clifford Stott, School of Psychology, Keele University

Lecture Matthew Brannan, Management School, Keele University

Assistant Professor Nina Holm Vohnsen, Anthropology, Aarhus University

Associate Professor Bagga Bjerge, Center for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University

**Additional information**

There is no fee for PhD students. The PhD course is run before and parallel with the 11th Annual Ethnography Symposium: Current Developments in Ethnographic Research in the Social and Management Sciences in association with the *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* and *Ethnographic Research into Public Sector Reforms*, Aarhus University. PhD students are encouraged to participate in the symposium free of charges. For further information on the Symposium see: [https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/management/conferences-and-events/ethnography/symposium/](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/management/conferences-and-events/ethnography/symposium/)
Readings (app. 200 pages)


