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Mapping Staten Island: A Field Study Guide

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MAPPING STATEN ISLAND: A FIELD STUDY GUIDE

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Overview

This is a guide for the field study and urban lab as partial requirements for GEG 260 Urban Geography at CUNY College of Staten Island. The field study introduces students to spatial ethnography and offers an opportunity to observe, experience and examine a range of spatial urban phenomena that they have learned in the classroom within actually-existing urban environments. Designed as a collaborative activity, students will work in teams in exploring and examining the built environment on-site and then produce multimedia deliverables to capture their reflections throughout the field study using creative and experimental methods. The collaborative and experimental design of the field study offers students to see, sense and re-imagine the city in ways that students might not have done so before.

Learning objectives

By the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- a) define and demonstrate spatial ethnography as a research method in studying the city;
- b) plan and implement spatial ethnographic activities and methods during field study;
- c) prepare written, digital and/or multimedia materials drawn from the field study;
- d) present their spatial ethnographic findings and reflections to their peers and demonstrate a better understanding of the field site;
- e) demonstrate capacities for collaboration, cooperation, creativity, time management and leadership.

Key concepts

built environment
gentrification
hostile architecture
New York City
public space
rules of place
sense of place
spatial ethnography
Staten Island
thick mapping

References

Prior to the field study, students will review the following materials previously covered in the course:

- a) “Chapter 1: Suburban Borough in a Global City” (pages 1-12), *Staten Island: Conservative Bastion in a Liberal City* by Daniel C. Kramer and Richard M. Flanagan (University Press of America, Inc., 2012)

Title

Staten Island: Conservative Bastion in a Liberal City

Authors

Kramer, Daniel C. and Flanagan, Richard M.

Permalink

- https://cuny-si.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CUNY_SI/14j9or0/alma990072165130106125
- <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csicuny/detail.action?docID=948649>

ISBN

9780761858317

- b) “Thick Mapping” (pages 15-19), *Hypercities Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* by Todd Presner, David Shepard and Yoh Kawano (Harvard University Press, 2014)

Title

Hypercities Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities

Authors

Presner, T., Shepard, D., and Kawano, Y.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3mh5t455>

ISBN

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Context

Spatial ethnography allows us to capture and examine the ways in which space (material, built, embodied, represented, or symbolic) and our interactions with space shape a variety of social, cultural, political and economic relationships, meanings and expressions. As a research method, spatial ethnography is grounded upon an understanding of space as constituted and constitutive of power and relations of power. Through spatial ethnography, students have the opportunity to individually and collectively examine the role of space and their interactions with space framed within the broader themes of spatial politics, spatial agency, and spatial justice.

For this field study, students will draw from the concept of “thick mapping” (Presner et al., 2014) in conducting spatial ethnography to better understand select sections of Staten Island’s North Shore, specifically Tompkinsville Park, Bay St., and the waterfront area. A “thick map” is defined as a temporally layered, multimodal/multimedia, cartographic representation. Part of the “thickness” comes from the different historical, cultural, economic, political, and geographic layers captured in the map. These multiple layers may be presented through a combination of written texts, memories, images, sense of place, sounds, videos, and other types of data. As Presner et al., (2014) remind us, a thick map tells a story and makes an argument about the past, the present, and the future.

We will focus our thick mapping within and around Tompkinsville Park, along Bay St., and throughout the waterfront area. When all the thick maps are assembled together when we get back to the classroom the following week, our thick maps will give us a multilayered, multidimensional, multimodal, nuanced and intimate understanding of Staten Island’s North Shore.

Each team will explore 3-6 themes from the options below and gather materials with the idea of creating different layers of your team’s respective thick map of Tompkinsville Park, Bay St., and the waterfront area. Each team’s thick map should include materials from your ethnographic observation such as written text, photos, sketches/drawings, images, sounds, signs and symbols, historical information, and any other information or materials you will find that may be related to any of the themes proposed below. The “thicker” your map, the more nuanced, informative, and creative it will be.

Refer below to some proposed themes and sample prompts as you begin your field study. Students are encouraged to develop new themes outside these prompts based upon your observations in the field.

<p>Sense of Place: What smells, colors, sounds, emotions are you sensing around the park? Where and how would you describe them?</p>	<p>Social and Cultural Diversity: How many/What languages do you see/hear around the park? How about cultural traditions? Religions? political or other cultural beliefs?</p>	<p>Public space: What makes the park a public space? How would you describe the actors who are using the park or passing through the park?</p>	<p>Boundaries: What types of social, economic, spatial or cultural boundaries do you see/observe/feel?</p>
<p>Signs / Symbols: What images, signs and symbols do you see at the park? around the park?</p>	<p>Structure/Architecture: What’s the composition of businesses around Tompkinsville Park? What kind of houses/structures are visible/invisible around the park?</p>	<p>Hostile Architecture: Do you observe elements of hostile architecture around the park, where, and who gains and who loses?</p>	<p>Gentrification: Do you observe signs of gentrification around the park, where and how?</p>
<p>History and Heritage: What signs of historical events or memories, or earlier functions, buildings, economies, residents can you still observe or figure as fragments of the past around the park?</p>	<p>Movements: How do people move in the park or around the park? What are areas are more accessible than others?</p>	<p>Temporality: How does the park and its immediate area change over the time of observation, say, every 10 or 30 minutes?</p>	<p>Positionality: How would you describe your positionality (for example: insider/outsider, gender/racial/class background, etc.) and emotions or sensations while being at the park or specific locations at the park and its immediate area?</p>

Field Study Reflection

At the end of the field study, the class will gather at the end point of the field study, the *Postcards 9/11* memorial in St. George. Each student will write a short field study reflection to take notes and describe key observations of the places we visited in the North Shore, as well as emerging themes that students can develop and work on next week for your thick maps. Students will be provided the form for the field study reflection. Students will refer to a set of questions and prompts below to begin their reflection:

- What are your impressions of the different places, public spaces, and landscapes that you encountered in the North Shore?
- Are there things that surprised you that you haven't observed, felt or seen before in any of these places?
- How would you describe the social (people) and spatial/architectural features of the North Shore? Its economy, cultural, and political landscape? Its unique history and geography as part of Staten Island and New York City?
- How would you describe the variation and changes in the landscape that you have observed along North Shore? What do these tell us of gentrification, urban design, urban planning, urban geography? Of the borough's history, present and futures?
- Describe your feelings, emotions and thoughts during the field study. Why do you think you felt this way?



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