

# People in a hybrid neighbourhood

## Using ethnography to explore social boundaries in urban transformation

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CASE STUDY: SOUTH PARK SLOPE,  
Brooklyn NY, US

Focus: this is a paradigm for a "hybrid zone", where new neighborhood communities have been created and are still undergoing several processes of gentrification. The research focuses in particular on the genetic moment of these hybridizations: therefore I'm studying social/urban interactions by considering whether the cohabitation of populations of different classes can possibly result in creating new social boundaries.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: Urban Ethnography

FIELD ACCESS: Local Karate gym

DURATION: 14 months - empirical research in the field

As Lamont and Molnar (2002) emphasize, **potential boundaries can acquire a very peculiar symbolic connotation in the social sphere**. They might refer to conceptual distinctions, "vocabularies of motives" (Mills 1942) "repertoires of evaluation" (Lamont and Thévenot 2000) and specific cognitive tools used by social actors to classify objects, people, practices, time and space. As Tilly (2004) explains, people organize a significant part of their social interactions around the formation, transformation, activation and suppression of social boundaries.



INTERPRETATION KEY:  
the symbolic  
elaboration of an  
hybrid neighborhood

Urban Forms of Social  
Representation Cohabitation Boundaries

Social boundaries may allow us to analyze and define social identities.

## Insiders vs Newcomers: What Kind Of Relationship Comes About?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- (a) How do the insiders and newcomers perceive each other?
- (a.1) Do the established residents view them as a threat?
- (a.2) Do the newcomers become a form that stands out as a collective status?
- (b) Between the two groups are social boundaries going to be constructed, or not? What form:
  - 1) ignore each other
  - 2) distinction
  - 3) resistance/conflict
  - 4) cooperation/acceptance.



FOUR MAIN OBSERVATION SETTINGS:

1. **The local karate dojo** (south) To analyze the binary relation of symbiosis and opposition to the changing realities of the neighborhood that the dojo defines itself
2. **Park Sloop Food Coop** (north) To look at the interaction btw insiders and newcomers (as members)
3. **Prospect Park** (east) To look at the interaction btw insiders and newcomers (in a public space)
4. **Subway station** (west) on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave/9<sup>th</sup> Street, the symbolic border btw the north and the south part

## Visual Approaches To The Ethnographic Urban Study

PRIMARY METHODS:

urban ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews. In order to capture the specificity and the evocative power of interpretation of visual data, I am photographing and videotaping interesting aspects of the neighborhood, its edges and defining characteristics.



Visual approaches to the study of street landscapes provide insight as to how visible cultural resources are commodified (Krase 2009)

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