Creating "the Field": Glocality, Relationality and Transformativity

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Abstract: Due to its standing as the basic unit of analysis in ethnography, "the field" needs to be approached with precision. However, while there have been plenty of attempts to detach the concept from its historical relation with places and groups, there are few reconstructions of it—not least in sociology—which prove useful in an increasingly complex world. For that reason, the objective in this article is to introduce three dimensions of fieldwork that enable the sociological ethnographer to unravel the concept and reassemble it for analytical purposes. Based on experiences from fieldwork on the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) conducted at various sites, the mutually inclusive processes of glocality, relationality and transformativity are discussed as a way to both define and analyze the field. The result is a conceptualization of the field as a way into a research topic (by decreasing the risk of getting lost in the topical diversity) and a way out of it (by increasing the chances of communicating field-relevant findings).

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1. Introduction

Ethnography is normally understood as a researcher undertaking "research and writing about groups of people by systematically observing and participating (to a greater or lesser degree) in the lives of the people they study" (MADDEN, 2010, p.1). Traditionally, this is done by spending a significant amount of time in the field, usually 12-18 months and doing participant observation in territorially circumscribed small-scale societies (ERIKSEN, 2003, p.6; STEWART, 1998, p.68; WULFF, 2007, p.139). Developments in this method, and generally in the world in the 1990s, nevertheless made it clear that "the field"—the basic unit of ethnographic exploration—could no longer be exclusively tied to place or groups, nor did the length of field stays alone generate relevant information about the given topic. For reasons usually associated with the causes and consequences of "globalization," "the lives of the people" were increasingly interconnected with phenomena spread across space and time. Thus, to grasp "their point of view," a beacon in ethnography, the researcher needed to include the context of globalization in a way that challenged the traditional understanding of the field. [1]

In contrast to the conventional view on the field as a territorial unit, this article argues that is should be seen as composed of several sites, processes and relations—sometimes far from each other geographically and connected with each other in different ways, on different scales and with different intensity. A *field*, consequently, is where the phenomenon can be said to exist. *Sites* are localities where you can investigate the processes, actions, and relations within this phenomenon ethnographically. As a result, fields have become, as NADAI and MAEDER (2005) put it, more and more "fuzzy" and, as several authors have remarked, the opening up of the idea of field as methodological concept has caused bewilderment rather than clarity. As anthropologist Ulf HANNERZ somewhat laconically wrote in 2006: "Now we do not seem to know what the field is, or where it should be, if it is real or perhaps virtual, and even if there has to be one at all" (p.23; see also AMIT, 2000a; APPADURAI, 1996; COLEMAN & COLLINS, 2006; GILLE, 2001; GUPTA & FERGUSON, 1997; MITCHELL, 2012; NADAI & MAEDER, 2005). [2]

However, for sociologists in particular the opening up of the idea is an opportunity to use "the field" as an analytical unit. So, with no intention of devaluing the discussion in general, the aim of this article is to take advantage of this situation, drawing mostly on my own fieldwork on the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). Now entering its 43rd season, WRC is a motorsport series consisting of 13 rallies spread across 11 countries and three continents. From being a niche championship in the 1970s, it has developed into a global spectacle with large investments from car manufacturers, global media coverage and star drivers. Along the way, the relationship between those who wish to preserve the sport's traditions (the oldest rally in the WRC calendar, Rally Monte-Carlo, was first run in 1911, way before the championship was established in its current form in 1973) and those who want to exploit its commercial potential better has become increasingly tense. Failing to establish a satisfactory balance between the two camps and struggling to avoid financial trouble, *Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile* (FIA), the governing body of global motorsports, has been on the receiving end of a great deal of criticism. However, other sport management studies (GIRGINOV, 2010; GIULIANOTTI, 2005) seem to suggest that it is possible to overcome this divide by engaging with the field and discovering common ground, since the unique selling point of many sports is the relation between contemporary practice and their heritage. [3]

I will elaborate on this study later, but suffice to say that due to the dispersed nature of the WRC, with one championship season including 13 events scattered around the world, it became necessary to do participant observation on multiple sites. To explore how the research topic was investigated and analyzed through the relation between these sites as well as the new ideas about creating the field that this approach may bring, I will first review the most notable attempts in sociology and anthropology to discuss a new approach to ethnography in general, ranging from the fieldwork debates that emerged in the 1960s to the now established "schools" of multi-sited ethnography and global ethnography they helped to produce (Section 2). At the end of Section 2, I return to the study of WRC and weave its characteristics together with my practical implementation of

techniques and principles of contemporary fieldwork. Subsequently, in Sections 3-5, I investigate a specific methodological finding from this project, namely, three field-defining dimensions—glocality, relationality and transformativity. What they have in common is that they are pivotal in producing narratives of the sport, which help the researcher place people in different factions and discover the different commonalities and differences between these factions. As I will discuss later, we also find evidence that these narratives often transgress preconceptions about the tension between "traditionalists" and "commercialists." Finally, in Section 6, I summarize some of the implications these findings have for qualitative research as a way to systematize the exploration of "patterns of interrelations and interactions, of connections and divisions, of forces and action and ensuing repercussions" (THERBORN, 2011, p.208) in ethnography in general. [4]

2. Theoretical Background

Wilbert E. MOORE, in his presidential address at the American Sociological Association meetings in 1965, explicitly critiqued sociology for provincialism at a time when globalization began to enter the academic language. According to MOORE, the changes of the world demanded "sociology of the globe, of mankind" (1966, p.475), because "to an increasing degree, the life of the individual anywhere is affected by events and processes everywhere" (p.481). As a solution, MOORE implied the need for a "return to the exotic places, dearly beloved of ethnographers" (ibid.), enabling sociologists to incorporate societal transformations from below into a larger, global framework. But rather than going back to these exotic places, or simply finding new ones, ethnographers in the 1970s and early 1980s, keen to explore globalization issues, started to investigate the possibilities of spreading the fieldwork across interlinked sites (FALZON, 2009; HANNERZ, 2003; LOUIS, 1982; MARCUS, 1986). [5]

Unfortunately, during this time, many sociological ethnographers seemed to be in hiding. One reason may have been the aversion in certain sociological environments to acknowledging this kind of inquiry. Although the legacy of the Chicago school has left us with unparalleled knowledge about urban America and progressive ideas on society, group identity and class (BECKER, 1999; CLAIR, 2003; DEEGAN, 2001) there was a growing tendency, exemplified by GOLDTHORPE (2007), to reject their method altogether. The lack of systematic approaches to principles of selection, and the fact that "the appreciation of style as creating an effect of verisimilitude and so on is not at all the same thing as having evidence of representativeness" (p.73) are not without justification. But these and similar criticisms simultaneously overlook the most basic principle of methodological variety in social science: ethnographies have never been, and will never be, measured by the same tokens as quantitative sociology. Instead, as GILLE (2001, p.321) puts it, ethnography is an epistemological position:

> "Doing ethnography is a commitment to study an issue at hand by understanding it from the perspective(s) of people whose lives are tied up with or affected by it. This concept of understanding requires that is a lot more open-ended than an inquiry based on the Weberian notion of *Verstehen* that imputes meaning to action based on

the structural position of an individual or the historical characteristics of a social order. Ethnography is the researcher's commitment to let herself be surprised, to be caught off-guard, and to be swept up by events that occur in the field as a result of which even the original directions of the inquiry may significantly change." [6]

The unwillingness to recognize disciplinary nuances like these, where ethnographic work "should be seen as an active process of knowledge construction, more akin to the construction of historical narrative than the more impassive or neutral 'discovery' of facts" (MITCHELL, 2012, p.4), becomes even stranger if we take into account those who continued MOORE's argument for a global outlook. Partly as a reaction to "methodological nationalism" in sociology, that is, the use of national community "as the terminal unit and boundary condition for the demarcation of problems and phenomena for social science" (MARTINS, 1974, p.276; see also AMELINA, DEVRIMSEL, FAIST & SCHILLER, 2012; CHERNILO, 2006), Charles TILLY proposed a relational perspective on social life. In his critique of eight "pernicious postulates" which emerged from a mistaken reading of nineteenth-century social change in the writings of WEBER, MARX and DURKHEIM, he writes that we have no "a priori guarantee that current national-state boundaries, as the most important means of identifying societies in sociology, mark the limits of interpersonal networks, shared beliefs, mutual obligations, systems of production, or any of the presumed components of a 'society'" (TILLY, 1990, p.23). To what extent the boundaries of different kinds of social relations coincide is an empirical question, and we are better off adopting the idea of multiple social relationships, some quite localized, and some worldwide in scale (p.25). [7]

For sociology in particular, TILLY's conclusion is relevant to our discussion of creating the field. In contrast to the territorial demarcations in classic ethnography, in the 1990s, a trans-local field was increasingly composed, as Akhil GUPTA and James FERGUSON argue, because of its "suitability for addressing issues and debates that matter to the discipline" (1997, p.10). In light of the growing awareness of globalization as a formative force on societies (CASTELLS, 2000; ERIKSEN, 2003; ROBERTSON, 1995), social science fieldwork underwent a necessary revamp. AMIT (2000b, p.6) writes that:

"the construction of an ethnographic field □now□ involves efforts to accommodate and interweave sets of relationships and engagements developed in one context with those arising in another. Or perhaps to view ongoing relationships from altered perspectives as ethnographers ask different questions on 'entering' and 'leaving' the 'field'." [8]

A consequence was that the transfer from "home" to "away" in fieldwork was no longer just physical, it had to be experiential and cultural, too. From the other side, doing fieldwork at home was not necessarily irreconcilable with ethnographic credibility. Local culture does not "freeze," and "the natives" no longer stay put while the ethnographer slowly come to grips with what MALINOWSKI once called "the imponderabilia of actual life" (1984 [1922], p.18). Against the idealized time of the field in conventional ethnography, DALSGAARD

and NIELSEN (2013) argue that time is a relative concept which, like other parameters defining the field, should condition the analytical framework rather than vice versa (p.10). Furthermore, while people in apparently isolated communities have a conscious relationship with their legacy, they also have Facebook accounts and Manchester United T-shirts, traveling from and to their villages intermingling with the modern world (KNOWLES, 2000; SPRADLEY & McCURDY, 1972; WULFF, 2007). [9]

As a result, the researcher chooses—or, during his/her investigation, is led to—different places and processes that are interconnected rather than subjecting herself to boundaries that are set beforehand. According to anthropologist Ulf HANNERZ, these sites are "connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important ... as the relationships within them" (2003, p.206), which makes such a study different from a mere comparative study of localities. There are two notable schools of thought in the study of these relationships: *multi-sited ethnography* (MSE) and *global ethnography* (GE). According to George E. MARCUS, who became a proponent of MSE, a field is constructed around "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (1995, p.105). In this way, it is possible to locate yourself "at critical points of intersection of scales and units of analysis and (...) directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales" (GILLE & O'RIAIN, 2002, p.279; see also FALZON, 2009; XIANG, 2013), which is what I did when deciding on sites to explore in my research on the World Rally Championship. This is not to say that trans-national connections must be present at all times, or that participant observation requires mobility across two nations or more, only that the field and its sites are created by a qualitatively chosen set of relevant social dimensions that appear through a primarily inductive research strategy. [10]

In locating the intersections mentioned by GILLE and O'RIAIN, we discover the biggest difference between MSE and GE: the approaches to theory and historical context. For GE researchers (see BURAWOY, 2000a), it is pointless to enter fieldwork without theory as it makes it impossible "to know where to look, what to ask for or what field notes to take" (LAPEGNA, 2009, p.13). Theory and data inform each other, yes, but "theory makes data possible," as LAPEGNA puts it, with the result that GE aims "to construct social explanations of social phenomena developing social theory" (ibid.). Only then, using, in addition, ethno-history as a way to deepen our knowledge about the social settings, can we explore how the links between the global and the local are "produced" in various localities (BURAWOY, 2001, p.158; 1991; 2000b). MSE takes almost the opposite view and states that theory should be "held in abeyance" since it may constrain the ethnographer's fieldwork by introducing preconceptions (LAPEGNA, 2009, p.13; MARCUS, 1998, p.19). Opposing "theory-centrism," MSE argues in favor of communicating findings based on the ethnographer's analytical understanding, rather than abstract concepts like colonialism which have both theoretical and historical implications (p.121). Whereas GE emphasizes the social

past of localities as a foundation for analysis and theory as a precondition for ethnographic value, many MSE studies (see e.g., BROWN, 2007; COLEMAN & HELLERMANN, 2011) hold a similar view to that of WILLIS and TRONDMAN (2002) who argue that the criterion for including theory is "maximum power in relation to the data for purposes of illumination, not theoretical adequacy or sophistication for its own sake" (p.399). [11]

Though theory for theory's sake was not among the priorities of my fieldwork, this article takes the GE position, acknowledging the need for a theoretical context and historical dimension in fieldwork. As will be discussed below, although theory and history obviously are not identical concepts, they share some characteristics when "narrative" is utilized as an analytical framework. That said, the structural disposition of GE favors a certain type of research and therefore is less relevant as a guideline for constructing the field in general. What this article argues is that the goal of our explanations, as TILLY (1992, p.36) recognized, is "not to give a 'complete' account (whatever that might be) but to get the main connections right." As effective fieldwork should combine making the most of one's field encounters (see WULFF, 2007, for examples) with theoretical consistency, knowledge of the topic's history is indispensable. The researcher must be informed, but not ruled, by theory in his/her quest for identifying the most central webs of connections. Matthew DESMOND (2014, p.559) writes that

> "certain relationships can be accentuated and others minimized depending on the relevance to a specific research question. This means that before fully entering the field the relational ethnographer should spend a considerable amount of time articulating a set of research questions and constructing a scientific object molded around them." [12]

This partly answers the key question of how the sites are bridged. According to Ulf HANNERZ, "the fields are not some mere collection of local units. One must establish the trans-local linkages, and the interconnections between those and whatever local bundles of relationships which are also part of the study" (2003, p.206). Because there is usually an overabundance of relations, whatever the field, Nancy SCHEPER-HUGHES (2004, p.32) notes, in her study of organ trafficking, that a simple technique was most effective: "follow the bodies." Her interpretation of how these sites were linked made a big difference to the communicated result, as her analysis displayed sometimes conflicting patterns. [13]

Put another way: the researcher is forced to reason systematically about how he or she has captured the linkages between the different units of the study and how, through this process, the field can be delineated. Although the material for the story is found in the field, it is the researcher who makes sense of it by writing it and communicating it. In this process, some things are omitted and other things emphasized because of how well they flesh out the research topic. In my study of the WRC, introduced in the beginning of this article, the aim was to ease the tension between those who want rallying to be what it was "back in the days" and defy any changes made on the behalf of anything but the sport itself. On the other hand we find those who desire a real shift into "the commercial age" by

adapting to contemporary media consumption patterns and promotional desires. As such, the WRC seemingly is trapped in "the challenge of extracting commercial value from their brands without compromising the intrinsic 'integrity' and spirit of the game" (SMITH & STEWART, 2013, p.534). The idea was to interview relevant stakeholders and do participant observation on sites of cultural significance to the championship in order to gain an understanding of how the various factions could be allies, not enemies, in their quest for improving the WRC as an experience. [14]

Against this backdrop, the next step was to identify the sites in which this potential common ground could be investigated. Through a mix of preliminary investigations of relevant sites, research related to "the paradox and commercialism" (ibid.), and negotiations to get access, I ended up with six interlinked site types: FIA's headquarters, the WRC's spectator cultures, its media production, its team organization, its event organization and its famous locations. Between 2010 and 2014, this led me to six countries where, in the end, three inductively discovered field characteristics became key to understanding the relation between tradition and commerce: the construction of glocality, the relational composition of meanings and people's view of the historical transformations. In addition to interviews, online forum studies, analysis of motorsport texts (previous research, history books, annuals, biographies, documentaries) and photos, participant observation was the key method of gathering data (see KAWULICH, 2005, for an overview). Access was obtained through a combination of luck (for example, I got one of the spots with a company organizing rally travels to Rally Monte Carlo, one of the most popular destinations), negotiation (which in one case led me to be "fly on the wall" in one of the rally teams at Rally Sardinia) and network acquaintances (I was able to live with a local veteran during Rally Argentina, for instance, because I had met some of his friends at an earlier WRC event). [15]

In addition, I conducted ten semi-structured and structured interviews, some by telephone, others by e-mail and some face to face. The reason for this diversity was both practical and intentional; in some cases, I contacted the interviewee by social media (like Facebook and LinkedIn) or e-mail with a set of questions, to which they could reply in their own time. In other cases I made appointments through formal procedures including marketing departments and the like. All interviewees were selected because they either held, or had held, important positions in the WRC since its establishment in 1973. I assumed beforehand that even with factual questions about the sport's development, the answers from the interviewees would reflect their personal views and memories because they were all contributors to it. Nearly everybody was asked a fixed set of questions regarding the history, the main changes and the future of WRC, which served the purpose of providing me with cues as to where to put the emphasis in contextualizing historically the development of WRC. Because of that, and because of my reason for interviewing these people in the first place, I did not embark heavily on issues connected to the interview as a communicative event. Although I was mildly inspired by the concept of "active interviewing," emphasizing "that all interviews are reality-constructing, meaning-making

occasions, whether recognized or not" (HOLSTEIN & GUBRIUM, 1995, p.4), due to my prior interest in the sport, all interviews were semi-structured or structured but without the intention of capturing codifiable data—rather, they were read as pieces of the narrative that I, as the project progressed, identified as important to the WRC community. The benefits were that this made it possible to standardize the interview, at least to a certain degree because I had to modify the questions along the way both in order to improve the questions and to adapt to the interviewee, without necessarily standardizing the interview situation (see OPDENAKKER, 2006, for a discussion). [16]

Along the way, I cataloged the data—regardless of whether they were formal interviews, field notes, "after hours" conversations or coincidences (like ending up on the same plane as some of my informants)—into two boxes: traditionalists and commercialists. Then, I began to scrutinize these categories to see whether I could find some additional distinctions within them as well as commonalities between them in terms of how they viewed various aspects of the championship. Three findings stood out as particularly relevant. First, the discussions of certain things were usually representative of a larger conflict. For "traditionalists," it was not so much that the itinerary of Rally Monte Carlo 2013 was boring compared with that of 1986, but that the change itself was done for commercial, not sporting, reasons. The diverse nature of the WRC (more about that below in the section headed "Glocality" below) was seen by the same faction as a comparative advantage in preserving the sport, not something one needed to "McDonaldize" to enhance the spectator market. For commercialists, on the other hand, whether or not the WRC, a sport that apparently appeals mainly to "hardcore" fans, could be appreciated by new market segments in emerging countries, was a matter of survival. Second, these disagreements were often rooted in how much the comparative view of the sport meant to various factions. Whereas some thought it insignificant (with arguments like "the past is foreign country"), others claimed that, without its past, the WRC was nothing. Third, contrary to assumptions, the view that participants took on any of these issues was not governed by the category they fell into. The two factions included people from various positions, nationalities, gender and age, and were identified through two different narratives of the sport, rather than through any other existing categorization. [17]

These findings were then organized according to "the pattern model" of social scientific research. Originally an argument in Abraham KAPLAN's "The Conduct of Inquiry" from 1964, the pattern model means that "we understand something by identifying it as a specific part in an organized whole" (KAPLAN, 2008 [1964], p.333). Rather than taking a functionalistic perspective, which it may sound like, KAPLAN emphasizes "that particular relations that hold constitute a pattern, and an element is explained by being shown to occupy the place that it does occupy in the pattern" (p.334). In other words, "the activity of describing the relation between one action and others in a context is equivalent to interpreting or explaining the meaning of that action. Describing its place and its relation to other parts is therefore to explain it" (WILLIAMS, 1976, p.128). Others, like me, argue that the pattern model fails to have true explanatory power. Instead, its real value "lies not in the context of justification (with the notion of explanation) but rather in

the context of discovery" (HUNT, 2010, p.94). The analysis, hence, was to a large degree a result of field-defining dimensions as they shaped stakeholders' view of what the WRC had been, what it was and what it should be. In what follows, I will discuss how I arrived at this conclusion by elaborating on the production of glocality, the relational composition of social life and transformations across time. [18]

3. Glocality

Roland ROBERTSON (1995) described the changes that emerged in the world after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of communism as "glocalization," defined as the interpenetration of universalism and particularism. The ethnographic evidence of its applicability as an analytical signpost is overwhelming. Based on copious studies of the importance of information and the technology that facilitates it, Manuel CASTELLS (2000) argues a completely new society emerged in the 1990s. This is explained by developments that began in the 1970s: a structural transformation in the relationships of production (the global economy, the network enterprise and the changing patterns of labor), in the relationships of power (the crisis of political democracy vis-a-vis newly-articulated identities) and in the relationships of experience (for instance, the emergence of a global criminal economy or global sporting communities like the WRC). Taken together, these processes have produced "a new social morphology of our societies," in which "the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture" (p.500). [19]

This diffusion and the reaction it provokes, however, is unequally distributed and can only be accounted for by empirical studies. ROBERTSON (1995) suggests that the investigative focus should be on "the changing relationships between, different emphases upon and often conflicting interpretations of these aspects of human life that the contemporary world as a whole has crystallized" (p.35). In other words, representing glocality through ethnographic work means assembling and analyzing links that convey these dimensions, how they affect human life and how people perceive and communicate them (APPADURAI, 1996; SAHLINS, 1993). This work was essential to consideration of the WRC. As a world championship, the WRC strives to be recognizable regardless of where the individual events are held, which means having a strict set of rules for the competition itself, as well as for event format and media coverage production. Since 2000, the WRC has outsourced the entire responsibility for promotion to different companies, which, in return, lease all the commercial rights to the championship. To make it even more recognizable, the WRC only allows production-based cars to enter the competition. [20]

At the same time, the WRC differs from track-based racing. Because WRC rallies are held on public roads, closed off during competition, they can take advantage of the local scenery like no other motorsport: the frosty winter landscape of Sweden, the Argentinian pampas, the flowery forests of Japan and the steep hills in the Alps above the principality of Monaco, to name a few. Hence, the glocality of the WRC is a mix between the FIA's/promoters' format requirements, the

natural diversity of its backdrops and its history. To explore how a globally standardized format is intertwined with local variations and has thus affected people's view on the tradition-commerce dimension, I needed to include this mix in my conversations in the field as well as during interviews. Like SHARPE and MULLER (1984), I believe that the purpose of fieldwork is not only to get data, but also to understand the sociological information in a given community. The WRC is best viewed as a symbolic community (COHEN, 1985): it does not correspond to a fixed unit, like the nation-state, nor is it demarcated by clear membership boundaries. One reason for this, as I quickly discovered, is that the past—or rather specific versions of it told in particular ways—is of utmost importance in understanding the present. COHEN points to a number of ethnographic studies to make the claim that the symbolic expression of community:

> "... refers to a putative past or tradition. We thus encounter the paradox that, although the re-assertion of community is made necessary by contemporary circumstances, it is often accomplished through precisely those idioms which these circumstances threatens with redundancy" (p.99). [21]

In fact, COHEN's paradox is the specific source of the polarization between the traditionalists and the commercialists in the WRC. The current status of the championship is always measured against past expectations. It was therefore crucial to my inquiry to investigate those *narratives* that were integrative or disintegrative of the WRC community. The key concept in this part of the investigation was what POLKINGHORNE (1991) calls a "narrative configuration'" that takes place through the process of *emplotment*, the means by which narrative weaves together the complex of events into a single story (p.141). To understand how emplotment produces glocality, we can use as an example the decision of which rallies to include in a WRC season. Unlike, say, the Olympic Games, WRC rallies do not require large infrastructural investments. Like the "traveling circus" it is, it packs up and goes when the rally is done. [22]

Because of this mobile character, the meaning and importance of the events of a rally accumulates over time, in a diversifying relation to other WRC events, and is characterized by a special kind of social life. According to RELPH (1976, p.61), "identity of place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other—physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meaning or symbols." Discussion about the composition of the calendar among stakeholders is therefore a delicate matter because places first become meaningful in the collective imagination of the community when they are "interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined" (GIERYN, 2000, pp.464-465). While the organizers and defenders of rallies with an established history use this understanding of place as an argument for a rally's retention (without them, it would not be a proper championship, would it?), those who favor new events use the same argument to justify the inclusion of new events (how else can they become part of the WRC community and legacy in the future?). Place, thus, is a glocal construct and matters to both established and new rallies (so-called "classics" and "newbies"). As narrative experiences of certain sporting

values in the WRC, rallies need to be nurtured in different ways to be effective as promotional venues for the marriage between tradition and commerce. [23]

4. Relationality

The identification of the WRC as a symbolic community led to ideas of how to pursue its social life relationally. Relational sociology, as it has been termed, is a school of thought with origins in the sociology of Georg SIMMEL which, according to Nick CROSSLEY (2011), translates into the general study of "networks of interaction demarcated by their participants' mutual involvement in specifiable sets of activities ... They are generated by interaction but also function as a context and environment which shapes interaction" (p.138; see also DÉPELTEAU & POWELL, 2013; DONATI, 2011). Within these networks, there are often conflicting factions whose existence is relationally defined by political or institutional positions. What I discovered was that the location of individuals on the traditional-commercial axis in the WRC did not follow the usual typology, with those desiring return on investment on the one end and old-school fans on the other. Moreover, rather than sociological categories like class, nationality or team loyalty, the integrative mechanism of WRC's culture was narrative proficiency. The better you knew the history and development of the WRC, the higher the chance of a cultural understanding of the sport across positional differences. [24]

This discovery mirrors an articulate critique of conventional ethnography put forward by Matthew DESMOND (2014). He argues that "the substantialist perspective," dividing people into bounded objects with a set of internal qualities, does not grasp the complexity of the real world. "The seemingly innocent decision to carry out an ethnography of police officers, teenagers, Chinatown, or General Motors," he argues, "rests upon countless ontological assumptions, not the least of which is that what the world is made up of is a collection of isolated groups and places" (p.551). To underpin his argument, DESMOND draws on TILLY (2005) and his categorization of research as systemic, dispositional and transactional. Whereas systemic accounts often come in the shape of a locality's response to some macro force, dispositional accounts resemble classic ethnographies where local life is unaffected by wider processes. When it comes to transactional accounts, however, interactions among social sites are taken as a point of departure for investigation, rather than an afterthought (TILLY, 2005, p.26). Social action is hence explored by using "the relational processes between and among identities" and their presentation in narrative terms as basic units of analysis (DESMOND, 2014, p.551). [25]

As an example, NADAI and MAEDER (2005) did fieldwork on the *process* of exclusion in the labor market, rather than on those excluded. Even though their specific fieldwork sites were a multi-national company, a bank and a large, nationally operating retail company, their main findings were not the cultural composition of these venues. Similarly, in my study of the WRC, the focus was on the conflict more than the conflicting parts, as it took into account the people voicing different opinions. The result was knowledge about what above was called "the paradox of commercialism" (SMITH & STEWART, 2013, p.534). This

paradox was expressed differently depending on the site, and was often relationally defined. To give an example of this, let's return to the issue mentioned above of which events to include in a WRC season. With 13 events, FIA has to choose between events relatively new to the WRC and those with a history in the championship. Without the classics, there would not be a WRC as people knew it and, although they expand its market, new events need time to accumulate a sense of place in order to become recognizable. [26]

My approach to investigating this dilemma was to interview those in charge of instating the calendar and to include participant observation of both kinds of events. In the latter case, this threw up a particular challenge. GILLE and O'RIAIN (2002, p.286) may be right to say that, in trans-local ethnography, the methodological imperative of "being there" is in danger of being replaced by that of chasing things around. For example, Matei CANDEA (albeit quite positive about trans-local fieldwork) spent more than a year trying to organize his field research sites, only to be left with "a constant sense of incompleteness and arbitrariness, the obsessive feeling of missing out, of vagueness and unjustifiable indeterminacy, of never being at the right place at the right time" (2009, p.33). Though some argue the benefits of making the researcher's worldview radically different from those he or she lives with (WOLCOTT, 2008, p.22), doing participant observation as it is described here requires some groundwork to avoid situations like CANDEA's. This is not to say that you can always begin with a pre-existing field or a set of trajectories that are being followed, but insight into the field's structure does help you find "entry points." In my case, this approach allowed me to uncover central relations in the WRC through what Mustafa EMIRBAYER and Jeff GOODWIN call "the fact of social connectivity itself—as well as through density, strength, symmetry, range, and so on, of the ties that bind" (1994, p.1424). [27]

In WRC rallies, these ties were obviously physical, in the form of a spectator culture where people come together to celebrate their fascination for the sport through rituals in different countries, but most of all, they were narrative. Investigating the symbolic elements of storytelling in the WRC, uncovers not only the meaning of the championship, but also *how* people attributed meaning to it. More often than not, discussions on cars, drivers or rallies (regardless of whether they were "newbies" or "classics") symbolized views on the entire sport rather than just on those separate elements. For instance, one of my Norwegian informants called the Ford Escort that was driven by Ari VATANEN (world champion in 1981) in the late 1970s and early 1980s the most awesome car in the history of rallying. After a while, by talking to him and other informants about this issue, I understood that the reason for this was that it was driven in particularly spectacular way by VATANEN and made a non-replicable sound. What's more, compared with what this informant's view of WRC cars today, the overall impression of the previous cars and their impact on his senses became a relationally induced view on what it would take to impress him as a spectator. Another informant, from Estonia, said it like this: "Modern WRC cars and also drivers has no personality, they all look the same. And almost sound same. Hope that new rules coming in 2017 can bring the difference in sound and also driving

style." A precondition for doing this kind of research is therefore to know enough to identify the dominant relations in the field. DESMOND elaborates on this:

> "In documenting ground-level dynamics and particularities of social situations, the relational ethnographer can contribute to field theory's pursuit of the whole picture. And in addition to mapping out the terrain and complex dynamics of social spaces, field-theoretic fieldworkers also can work to reconstruct the perspectives of various actors situated at different points in the field" (2014, p.563) [28]

The final cluster of sites and the relations between and within them in the WRC were therefore determined as a result of these findings. To return to the importance of emplotment mentioned above, this was operationalized in two parts: an *analysis of narratives* and a *narrative analysis*. The former was used as a way of organizing data because it "seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data" (POLKINGHORNE, 1995, p.13). Narrative analysis, on the other hand, which became equally important in analyzing the data, is according to POLKINGHORNE, "the procedure through which the researcher organizes the data elements into a coherent developmental account" (p.15). However, as David MAINES (1993, p.21) argues, because the researcher enters people's lives "that are partly formed by still unfolding stories," informants will most likely tell different stories depending on who's asking. To avoid "narrative smoothing"—telling the story without (the possibilities of) severe distortions (CLANDINEN & CONNELLY, 1990, p.10), a critical and multi-faceted approach to the topic was chosen by engaging with people ranging from high-ranking FIA officials to team members and spectators and reviewing their narrative relations. In practice, I decided to go where the likelihood of getting to know them was greatest. This brings me to the final dimension of this discussion. [29]

5. Transformativity

What I discovered about narrative relations was that they were formed very much by the holder's views on certain episodes. In David CARR's view, turning points constitute "the quintessential element of narrative" and are "the stuff of communal life" (1991, p.159). At the same time, as with ethnography in general, a relational approach is open to criticism on the grounds of ideographic bias (GILLE & O'RIAIN, 2002, p.286). The assembly of sites and episodes from the researcher's prior knowledge could create a situation where the end-product is more a result of that prior knowledge than of discoveries along the way. Connected to this is also the critique of relational relativism, which can only be met by demonstrating how some relations are more important than others (DONATI, 2011, p.18). There is also the allegation that "jet-set ethnography" deprives the researcher of the opportunity of going deep into the lives of locals, "getting access to the fluidity of others' lives and enhancing people's sensitivity to interaction and process" (GOFFMAN, 1989, p.125; see also HAGE, 2005). Yet, as the choice of topic and entry points into the field require groundwork on history and theoretical relevance, more useful data might be generated by being prepared than if one had entered

the field with the ideal of being "alone among the unknown" (GEERTZ, 1995, p.102). [30]

The reason is this; those narratives, which revolve around changes that are central to the WRC, contain information about how these changes are perceived and are then used as arguments either in favor of, or as a defense against, new transformations. "Far from being a formal distortion of the events it relates," CARR writes, "a narrative account is an extension of one of their primary features" (1986, p.117). Although knowledge of history and theory on the matter of turning points is no direct substitute for prolonged field stays, I would that investigating the narratives of transformations generate knowledge about what features of the WRC engage its community. In my case, this approach produced three benefits. First, it enabled me to distinguish "positive nostalgia" (using the past to engender hope for the future) from negative nostalgia (a sense that the glory days of the past will never return). Second, it gave me directions on where to look for answers, interesting people and relevant information, as well as how to engage with different factions to stimulate debate. Third, letting go of the ahistorical approach to ethnography allowed me to discover specific aspects of the field whose relationality became apparent through shifts in time. As pointed out by GILLE:

> "What was connected by the links I was creating differed depending on what period I was concentrating on. Furthermore, what were the sites was less and less obvious, and what became truly important and consequential for the development of the case and not just for my narrative was the change in the relationship among these sites over time" (2001, p.324). [31]

GILLE calls MSE "politically naïve" as it leaves little room for transformation (p.326) At this point, as GILLE did, I harvested some inspiration from GE. LAPEGNA argues that "the logic that justifies the connections between sites or the historical changes of a site is explained as a result of larger determinations or 'global forces'" (2009, p.11). However, even this view needs some modification where the WRC in concerned. This force was not simply globalized capitalism in the WRC's case—even though the development of the sport-media complex in the 1990s, exemplified by the acquisition strategies of large content-savvy companies like International Management Group (IMG) and Red Bull Media (BOYLE & HAYNES, 2009), had a great deal to do with the promotional revamp of the WRC around 2000. Despite liberalization of media politics and the proliferation of social media, the desire to exploit the WRC for commercial purposes had been there since its very beginning. Already in the 1920s, car manufacturers used motorsport to display their technology, design and qualities (COFAIGH, 2011). [32]

More importantly, it was not so much the WRC's promotional changes as the way they were conducted that caused debate. Many of my informants were happy to see a commercialization of the WRC, as long as it did not interfere with the basic structure of the sport—something they saw as the reason it became popular in the first place. In fact, several of them wanted the promoters to increase their

activity to brand the WRC globally. One example of this, given the WRC's day-and-night itineraries, which last for 3-5 days, is what I interpreted as an increased use of "transmedia storytelling" (JENKINS, 2006) to communicate WRC events on the web, on TV and on social media. What the informants argued against was commercial interference in the competitive aspects that defined the WRC as a sport. Prior to the mid-1990s, the WRC was a disorganized affair at times. Events could go on for a week, far from populated areas, and the rallies were more than twice as long as in 2016, when a WRC event can have maximum 500 kilometres of speed tests. One reason is that medical helicopters, which are unable to fly in the dark, are now a requirement. In the mid-1980s, safety measures were less strict. Another reason is that the "cloverleaf" format was introduced in 2000, with a single service park, to make the sport more TV- and investor-friendly by emulating Formula 1's VIP treatment and the condensation of the action in X Games. Although popular with sponsors, the transformation of the sport affected how cars were developed and how they were driven. They got faster, but looked less spectacular. [33]

Essentially, it is not what happened in the past or what is happening now that is most important analytically, but "the generative transmission" (RICOEUR, 1984, p.221) through which perspectives on the sport are made. While FIA headquarters in Paris is relatively insignificant as a physical research site, it is still relevant in a narrative context as there is often a noticeable gap between FIA's stakeholder deliberations (or lack thereof) and its decisions on the WRC that affect the entire WRC community. For instance, in 1976, Audi decided to develop a four-wheel drive system for high-performance cars, and using the WRC, made itself into a company with a high public profile by doing so. At the time, four-wheel drive was a rarity in the world of ordinary cars and was not allowed in the WRC. By first establishing a lobbying relationship with its own motorsport authority, the German Federation, who then took the case to the FIA, Audi, who had never participated in the WRC before, worked intensely over the next three years to change the rules—and to no complaints. As historian Graham ROBSON puts it "With very little notice" the FIA allowed four-wheel drive in the WRC from 1979 onwards (2008, p.11). Although the FIA's deliberations neither elicited, nor took account of opinions from other stakeholders (even car manufacturers), the change itself and its prelude has influenced FIA's stakeholder relations ever since (NAESS, 2014). [34]

6. Concluding Remarks

While there have been plenty of attempts to deconstruct "the field" in its traditional sense, far less attention has been directed towards rebuilding it as methodological platform for participant observation on a set of related sites. Though the need to reflect on potential bias is generally acknowledged in ethnography, the practice of doing fieldwork on various sites exposes the "white spots" in a way that an ethnographer like EVANS-PRITCHARD never had to discuss, although he probably never went everywhere in the locations he conducted fieldwork (HANNERZ, 2003, p.207). This article has made an attempt

to draw a conceptual map based on the discussion of the question based on my ethnographic experiences from a study of the FIA World Rally Championship. [35]

Three dimensions were emphasized as particularly relevant to how we can create and analyze "the field" on which to center our research topic: glocality, relationality and transformativity. Applying the field-defining dimensions outlined in this article has allowed me to systematically trace discussions about the FIA's decisions on the tradition-commerce situation. Regardless of site—in teams, at media production companies or among fans—the emergence of a field subsequently shaped the investigative progress, the analysis and what was communicated in later publications. At the same time, use of these dimensions allowed me to gather inspiration from similar studies emphasizing the "transactional" rather than the "substantialist" perspective as a key to unlock the chains in the field. As a result, in an epistemic context, data from this study of the WRC were not used to describe an "objective reality;" "rather they yield clues as to the state of mind with which people apprehend the world and act upon it" (DESCOLA, 2014, p.434). [36]

For these reasons, the findings have a certain transferable value. It is not a matter of generalizing the findings in a strictly social scientific manner. This is partly because, due to their conflicting and complex nature, studies that include a narrative element, are in the words of Bent FLYVBJERG "difficult or impossible to summarize into neat scientific formulae, general propositions, and theories" (2006, p.237). Rather, this approach is "*demonstrative* of the complexity of the process of [ameliorating the social phenomenon] and of the problems of how to facilitate it" (KORAC, 2003, p.54). More specifically, I would argue that this three-stranded framework is eligible for "contextual generalization"—generalizable knowledge of both research procedures and epistemological findings at "local research frontiers." These frontiers are defined as many researchers asking the same research questions that are crucial to the community (MJØSET, 2009, p.60). Whether the topic is organ trafficking, motorsports or exclusion in work processes, this framework is therefore useful for organizing your fieldwork. [37]

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