

Notes on Methodology

9/29/57

B. Frieden

Review of techniques used:

1. Office interview. Has given us the best understanding of how subjects perceive and organize the urban environment, but it is too long and cumbersome, time-consuming to give and to interpret. Most useful parts the long trip descriptions, but these are marred somewhat by the interviewer's unevenness in interjecting ^{questions} ~~remarks~~ and in soliciting further details. Because of the loose structure of this part of the interview, questions asked in the course of trip descriptions are difficult to standardize. As a result, the responses of different individuals are sometimes not truly comparable. Similarly, within the trip descriptions themselves, certain features ~~sections~~ ~~become~~ are difficult to interpret because of the unstandardized questions that have brought them forth. A case in point is the heightening of attention at intersections: to what extent is this ^{effect} merely a result of asking questions at intersections instead of at other ~~part~~ places in the trip?

The least useful section of the office interview is that concerned with "distinctive elements." Confusion over the meaning of this ^{vague} phrase renders answers too ~~vague~~ different in intent to be either comparable or meaningful.

Two sections that are not germane to the main study could have been used for separate studies: stereotypes and paintings (the latter perhaps a refinement of the basic

(2)

schema study).

2. Sketch map and derivatives (sequence map, structural map, intensity of detail map, distortion grid). The sketch map is easy to give and easy to interpret. Although limited in the depth of material it can reveal, the sketch map ^{outputs} checks well against material derived from the more elaborate interview schema analysis. This technique offers the best potential for refinement and further development. (See remarks below under Proposals.)
3. Photo test. Conveys little information except corroboration of what other techniques indicate to be the best-known parts and least-known parts of Boston. This technique is not sufficiently directed, ~~however~~. Since photos can mean too many things at once, responses are difficult to interpret.
4. Field trip. Little return for the considerable time and effort expended in conducting field trips. This technique probably more useful for detailed small-area studies.

General Critique:

The office interview, which is relatively non-directed, is suitable for "fishing" for ideas. The questions tend to be suggestive

(3)

rather than precise and limited. The result is that subjects talk freely, reveal much about the way they perceive the city, and suggest some tentative conclusions. On the basis of several office interviews, a number of ^{topics} subjects could have been selected for further investigation: to make the tentative conclusions less tentative. For this kind of exploratory expedition, interviews could have been read with something less deliberateness and time than we gave them. Then new techniques (or a new interview) could have been devised to test our ideas ^{more precisely} on a larger number of subjects. I think we spent too much time studying interviews that were able to give us only fragmentary insights.

We lacked precise techniques for testing ideas. We lacked also a sufficient sample in numbers and personal characteristics. Perhaps the major defect of this study is the failure to obtain a better cross-section of city residents for our subjects. Our conclusions rest on doubtful ground — or have only limited applicability — if they depend solely upon evidence from a small group of well-educated people. Justification for limiting the sample to these "articulate" people may conceivably be found in time limitations: in this event, the need to devise a quicker technique for testing people is merely underlined. One cannot justify the use of such a limited sample by maintaining that all social classes perceive the city similarly and that we chose articulate subjects only to facilitate our research; such an assumption would in itself be a topic for research. If it is argued

(4)

instead that we are not concerned with everybody's view of the city,
I can only contend that we should have been.

Proposals:

The sketch map should be accepted as the core of future testing techniques. A written questionnaire should be prepared to supplement the sketch map with questions that can be answered briefly and without personal explanation. For example, to test whether people divide Boston into regions, ask "Where are the following located: Prichney Street, Faneuil Hall, Old N. Church, Dartmouth Street." Then give sketch map problem and questionnaire to a large sampling of people.

(i.e., how people find their way)
For topics that require personal explanation, give short personal interviews, have interviewer record answers, rather than start time-consuming tape recorder + typing process.