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Anthropology of the Crowd, Blog 7

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Janos' Blog

<https://rampages.us/janoslw/>

Janos Leitner-Wise

Archaeology

- 11 October 2015
- Published by [janoslw](#)



In terms of viewing this event through the lens of archaeology, the presence of various different flags would indicate that the event was global in nature. Meaning that the event involved some kind of collaboration between different countries. This would tell you nothing of the specifics of the event, but would give some idea of its scale.



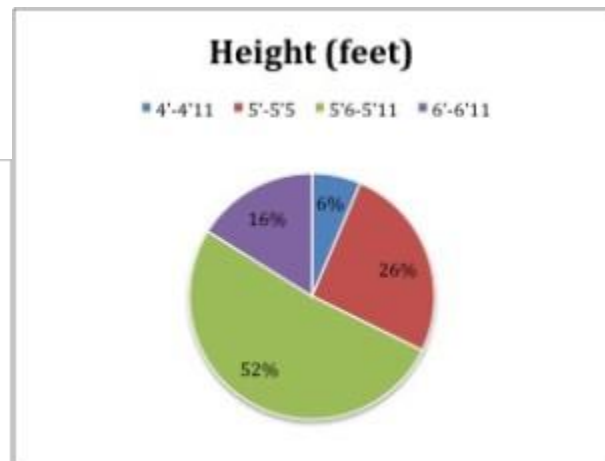
Various banners such as this were present at the event. If any of these were found they would serve as great indicators of what was happening. Even if the language could not be understood, many banners, such as this one, included pictures of bicycles, giving a clear indication of the nature of this event.



Finally, many bicycles were at the event. Though it is not likely that anyone would have left an entire bike, it is possible that wheels or other pieces of the bikes could have broken off and been left behind. In conjunction with the other remains from the event, this would likely make it clear that the event involved bicycles and global participation.

Crowd Variation

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The data in the charts above represent both the different words for "bicycle" that people came up with and their frequency of use, as well as the variation of height among those interviewed.

Based on this data, it is clear that most individuals used the word “Bike” when asked for another word for “bicycle.” The next most common words were “Cycle” and “Bicicleta,” with “Fahrrad” coming just after them. Both “Bike” and “Cycle” are English words, indicating that most of our sample may have been of English or American background. “Bicicleta” is a Spanish word and “Fahrrad” is a German word, suggesting that these languages made up our second most common background.

Our data on height indicates that most people were in the range of 5’6-5’11. In fact, more than 50% of our participants fell in this range. 26% were in the range of 5’-5’5, 16% were in the range of 6’-6’11, and only 6% were in the range of 4’-4’11. This data indicates that the vast majority of people are in the range of 5’-5’11, making up 78% of our sample, with individuals below 4’11 and above 6’ as the outliers.

Final Thoughts

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- *Published by [janoslw](#)*

I very much enjoyed the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, and appreciated the brief conversations I had with them. A few of our participants were from the UK, and as a UK citizen myself who has not been back there in years, I took just a couple minutes to talk with them about where in England they are from, and what they think of America. I found this very personally interesting and am glad that I had the chance to briefly talk to them. Of course, I did not want to take up too much of their time and only asked additional questions when it was clear that the participant was enjoying talking with us.

I think that this course was a great introduction to such methods of data collection. This was my first experience interviewing people in a crowd, and although it was difficult at first, it became easier as time went on. If I were to participate in similar data collection in the future, I believe that I would be far more comfortable in doing so. As I have mentioned in a separate blog post, it was unfortunate that a language barrier excluded a fraction of the crowd from our data collection. It would have been especially interesting to talk with these individuals, as they potentially represent a clear difference in culture. In similar future projects, I am not sure if any viable solution to this problem exists, but any possible solutions should be explored.

Willingness to Participate

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I found it interesting how the willingness of crowd members to participate in our interviews was slightly impacted by our physical location. Some of our data was collected along monument ave, by Stuart Circle. Here, no participants refused to answer our questions. The rest of our data was collected along broad st, around 5th ave. Here, some crowd members did refuse to participate. This difference in willingness to participate could be due to various factors, including physical location, density of crowd, or just random chance. I find it unlikely that physical location alone resulted in this phenomenon, although broad and 5th was a more ‘happening’ location than Stuart Circle. Crowd density seems to be the most likely contributing factor, as denser crowds were consistently less likely to participate than

those that were more spread out. My understanding of crowd dynamics is limited, so I am not sure if this is a recognized occurrence. Perhaps it was due to noise level or increased enthusiasm for the race itself.

There is the chance that this was simply a result of random chance, and that crowd dynamics played little to no part in willingness to participate. This is certainly a possibility, however my experience appears to indicate otherwise, and I am curious if any other groups experienced something similar.

Anthropology and Variation

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Within the field of anthropology, human variation can be looked at in terms of either culture or biology. Cultural variation deals with the diversity of our learned behavior, while biological variation deals with genetic diversity. Personally, I have a preference for biological anthropology, so I will look at variation from that perspective.

Understanding the reality of human variation is a fundamental aspect of anthropological thought regarding our species as a whole. Contrary to how it may appear, humans have relatively little variation on a species scale. Subspecies of chimps, for example, have far greater variation than human populations. This is almost certainly due to a point in our evolutionary history some 70,000 years ago when the entire human population was reduced to around 1,000 breeding pairs. This global lack of variation flies in the face of long held beliefs that human populations are significantly 'different', biologically speaking. That said, population differences do exist, and understanding them can have a notable impact on the treatment and prevention of certain diseases.

Measuring Variation

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Variation is an important aspect of biology because variation is what allows evolution to occur. Additionally, when a population has too little variation, it can increase its chances to produce offspring with genetic diseases. It is also important to measure variation as a way of identifying trends over time, as this can have implications in medical science.

Our sample specifically represents a small part of global diversity and may be useful for certain purposes. In terms of tracking the participation of various countries in the event, our data is ideal, as we may be able to show an approximation of how many people came from each country.

Other Data

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I think it would have been interesting to ask why they decided to attend the event. It was interesting to meet people from all over the world, but it would have been nice to learn more about them. Hearing why so many people chose to travel so far would have given us an idea of the importance of this event to its fans. That said, this question could be seen as too personal, and thus may not be appropriate to ask.

It may have also been interesting to ask if they were rooting for any athlete in particular, to see if there were any crowd favorites. This could likely have been asked with little to no repercussions, as the response would not be too personal.

Finally I would have liked to ask what their favorite part of the event was. This refers primarily to their favorite race, but could also include things like the process of traveling to get to the event, seeing the city, etc. This would allow us to see how people felt about different aspects of the event.

A Day of Data Collection

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We began our day by meeting at the library on campus, as this seemed easier than trying to find each other in the crowds. Once we had both arrived we would talk briefly and discuss any confusions about the project that we had, then agree on a plan for the day. After we decided where we wanted to go and how many people we should interview, we made our way to the location. When we got there, things became a bit more complicated. Surprisingly, it was a little bit difficult to pick individuals out of the crowd to interview. The selection process seemed kind of arbitrary, especially at first. Our goal was to capture the diversity of the crowd, of course, but actually picking out each person was hard to get used to. However, if I were to do this again I think that I would have a better idea of how to go about it.

On one of the days, it was raining a lot for 45 minutes or so. This was a challenge because we could only interview people that were out of the rain, as our notebooks would have been damaged otherwise. Thankfully the rain didn't last too long and we were able to resume our normal data collection, but it was difficult to capture the diversity of the crowd during that time that it rained. If I were to do this again, I think this issue could be resolved by simply bringing an umbrella.

Interesting Aspects of the Crowd

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- *Published by [janoslw](#)*

I found it interesting that the dynamics of the crowd were so fluid. Many people came from all across the world and had never been to Richmond before, yet they were able to navigate the crowd and the event just as well as those who live here. It would not be completely unreasonable to expect that

cultural differences may make it challenging to participate in a mostly American crowd, but I never observed anything 'out of the ordinary' in this regard. This phenomenon is likely due to the globalization of racing as a sport, allowing people across the world to share a certain cultural aspect. Still, I think it goes to show that cultural differences can only separate humanity by so much. Sometimes all it takes is a shared interest to bring us together.

Of course, it could be said that cultural differences did make it difficult to navigate the crowd and I simply did not notice it. While this may be true, if it were a significant problem I would expect a more glaring issue with how the crowd functioned as a whole. I have no doubt that certain people had issues with certain aspects of the event, and that these were due to cultural differences. But in terms of larger scale crowd dynamics, they would have little impact.

Is the Crowd Representative of our Global Population?

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This is an interesting question. I believe that a certain aspect of the diversity of humanity was captured in this crowd, but that the global population, as a whole, was not accurately represented. Yes, many people came from all over the world, and this is what I consider to be a snapshot of some of humanity. However, various issues resulted in the crowd significantly under-representing the global population. For starters, only some of the world's countries were represented. Those that were not did not contribute to the crowd, for the most part at least. Additionally, although many foreigners were present, the majority of the crowd seemed to be from America. I believe that both of these issues significantly under-represented the diversity of all humanity.

Issues with Collecting Data

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Data collection went relatively smoothly for the most part. Most of those interviewed were cheerful, easygoing, and willing to answer our questions. However, a significant obstacle arose while attempting to accurately represent the diversity of the crowd. As we began to identify individuals that were clearly from another country, we realized that many of those we approached did not speak English and could not be interviewed as a result. I believe that this caused our data to be, at least slightly skewed, representing only some of the true diversity present. Unfortunately, there is little that could be done to solve this problem, as many different languages were present. I estimate that approximately 1/5th of those interviewed were unable to participate because of this language barrier. If there is some way to account for this when analyzing the data I recommend that it should be done.

Race Crowd

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- *Published by [janoslw](#)*

When I first heard about the Bike Race in Richmond, I was not sure what to expect in terms of who would show up or how they would act. If I expected anything at all, it was the generic image of a crowd, gathered for the shared interest of observing a sport. In this sense, the event met my expectations. However, I have been to very few sporting events in my life and I have never watched a bike race, nor the crowd that it may gather, so I had little reference, if any. Even though I had heard that the event was attracting people from all over the world, I was surprised that so many people traveled so far to watch the race. It struck me how much interest they must have in the event if they were willing to spend so much time and money to come here. One woman I spoke to had traveled here from East Africa, and had to take a 24 hour flight to do so. Many people were visibly excited and expressed great pride for their respective countries. As someone who has little personal interest in the sport, I was pleasantly surprised to learn how important the event was to this crowd. In summary, I would describe the crowd, as a whole, as enthusiastic, proud, diverse, and enlightening.