Explain how you would carry out an observation to investigate the differences in use of personal space between rural and urban environments. Justify your decisions as part of your explanation. You must refer to:

* structured **or** unstructured observations
* participant **or** non-participant observations
* time **or** event sampling
* collection of data. [15]

Model Answer

The study would be conducted on a Wednesday in summer (middle of July), in two different locations: Watford city centre and the village of Letchmore Heath. There would be two different researchers, with one for the city location and one for the village (F4).

A structured observation (F1) would be conducted using the predetermined behavioural categories (F4) in the table here (E1 and C1). This would allow easy recording of personal space behaviours with a simple tally created of the number of times every behaviour occurred in both urban and city areas (J1, J4). When I did my research on Facebook, it would have been easier to have prepared categories (O1, O4).

This would be a non-participant observation (F2), with the researcher covertly recording peoples’ behaviour whilst sat on a bench pretending to read a newspaper (E2 and C2). This would allow data to be recorded unobtrusively, although it may be difficult at times to be certain about what personal space behaviours are engaged in if sat too far away or if passers-by obstruct the researchers view (J2). This was seen in my research on Facebook that to be able to objectively view behaviour is important (O2).

Time sampling would be used with observations occurring every half-hour, for two minutes each time between 8am and 6pm (F3, E3, C3). This would allow a more representative collection of data (J4) of peoples’ personal space behaviour covering many different parts of the day. For example, it may show that personal space is influenced by factors such as whether people are in a rush to get to work in the morning, and this may be different for urban dwellers compared to city workers etc. (J3). This should increase the overall validity of the data by not just focusing on one particular time period.

But by only recording behaviour each half hour (C4, E4, F4), there may be lots of examples of personal space behaviours that do not get recorded. When I did my research on Facebook, we used event sampling, from the outcome (their FB picture), rather than over time, but this was a very different study (O3 and O4).