

Core Course #8: Epistemology, Interdisciplinarity, Reflexivity

This Core Course is part of the fourth block of the Doctoral Program of the nccr – on the move (Epistemology and Interdisciplinarity). It is organized by Prof. Tania Zittoun and Prof. Matteo Gianni with support from the Network Office.

General Description

The nccr— on the move uses the “Migration-Mobility Nexus” through a variety of disciplinary approaches with the aim of producing knowledge that can inform policies. In this context, we ask ourselves questions like: Are there epistemological views that are more suited than others to address the Migration-Mobility Nexus? How do these views relate to different epistemological world views? More generally speaking, what does it mean to produce “knowledge”, what is the status of knowledge, and its relation to “reality”? Do all disciplines share the same understanding of these questions? What does this understanding depend on? Can knowledge change the world? And what are the effects and implications of knowledge production on a sensitive subject matter, like migration and mobility? The main goals of this Core Course are:

- to construct a shared theoretical basis of: (1) the main epistemological debates in the social sciences; (2) the conditions of interdisciplinarity; and (3) the effects of our scientific output over the social world;
- to invite all participants to reflect on the status and impact of the type of knowledge they aim to produce, as well as the conditions in which our projects can communicate.

Requirements

Doctoral Students are expected to read the compulsory texts since they will be discussed during the course. The compulsory readings (pdf) can be downloaded [here](#)

Date and Place

The course takes place on Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 October 2020 at L’Aubier, in Rochefort. A Webex conference link will be created to all the Fellows to participate remotely if they can’t attend in person.

Timetable of the Course

Monday 12 October

10:00 - 10:15	Introduction
10:15 - 11:30	Ontology and Epistemology: Discussion on the basis of the texts
11:30 - 11:45	Coffee break
11:45 - 13:00	Ontology and Epistemology: Discussion related to individual projects
13:00 - 14:30	Lunch break
14:30 - 15:45	Theories and Practices of Interdisciplinarity: Discussion on the basis of the texts
15:45 - 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 - 17:15	Theories and Practices of Interdisciplinarity: Discussion related to individual projects
19:00	Dinner

Tuesday 13 October

09:00 - 10:30	Reflexivity: Discussion on the basis of the texts
10:30 - 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 - 12:30	Reflexivity: Discussion related to individual projects
12:30 - 14:00	Lunch break
14:00 - 16:00	Final discussion

Please note: the schedule is subject to changes

Ontology and Epistemology

Abstract

Epistemology in the social sciences refers to a wealth of reflection on the production of knowledge, its status and life cycle. The criteria about valid knowledge depend on explicit or implicit ontological assumptions about what reality is. Therefore, ontological and epistemological thinking are often symbiotic. In this section, we identify the following epistemological questions, which are both very general and still likely to be relevant for the study of the Migration-Mobility Nexus:

- 1) Theories about progress in the social sciences (Popper, Kuhn, Stengers, Latour)
- 2) Classical epistemological stances, as relations to “truth” and “reality”: (naïve) realism, positivism, empiricism; constructionism/constructivism (more or less radical); perspectivism; pragmatism, dialogism, feminism, etc.
- 3) Generalization in the social sciences (nomothetic vs. idiographic approaches), including modes of reasoning in the social sciences (induction/deduction/abduction)
- 4) The epistemological status of normative claims

Compulsory Readings

Grix, J. (2002). Introducing students to the generic terminology of social research. *Politics*, 22(3), 175–186. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.00173>

Packer, M. (2010). What is science? In *The Science of Qualitative Research* (1st ed., pp. 17–41). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Zittoun, T. (2017). Modalities of generalization through single case studies. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 51(2), 171–194.

Additional Readings

James, W. (1904). What is Pragmatism. In *A new name for some old ways of thinking* (<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/james.htm>). The Library of America. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/james.htm>

Frazer, E. (1995). What's New in the Philosophy of Social Science? *Oxford Review of Education*, 21(3), 267–281. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1050872>

Haslanger, S. (1999). What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13, 459–480. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2676113>

Mirchandani, R. (2005). Postmodernism and Sociology: From the Epistemological to the Empirical. *Sociological Theory*, 23(1), 86–115. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4148895>

Reichertz, J. (2014). Induction, deduction, abduction. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 123–135). London [etc.]: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Theories and Practices of Interdisciplinarity

Abstract

Interdisciplinarity is a mantra that is rarely understood and seldom practiced. The discussion shall attempt to give an overview of the different meanings of the concept and of its different expressions and variations (trans-, inter-, cross, etc.). We will also discuss diverse ways by which interdisciplinary work can be constructed (e.g., through levels of analysis, systemic models, etc.), and the practicalities of collaborative work. We will elaborate upon this basis, reflecting on the necessary conditions for a dialogue among projects to take place.

Compulsory Readings

Favell, A. (2007). Rebooting migration theory: Interdisciplinarity, globality and postdisciplinarity in migration studies. 259–278. <https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01032383>

Zittoun, T., Baucal, A., Cornish, F., & Gillespie, A. (2007). Collaborative research, knowledge and emergence. *Integrative Journal for Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 41(2), 208–217.

Additional Readings

Doise, W., & Valentim, J. P. (2015). Levels of analysis in social psychology. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Second Edition) (pp. 900–904). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.24032-4>

Reflexivity

Abstract

How do we, as researchers, participate to social change? We will discuss texts that invite to consider the changing role of social sciences in society over history: from the idea that social sciences could change the world and their instrumental uses to legitimize power to more critical stances, including current reflections on the performative power of the social sciences (e.g., Hacking). Additionally, we will look into the influence that evaluative/normative implicit or explicit assumptions have on the way social scientists engage with the world or inform stakeholders of their research results. On this basis, we will also discuss the role and status of the knowledge which the projects aim to offer, and how the NCCR as a whole may contribute to social change.

Compulsory Readings

Hacking, I. (1996). The Looping Effects of Human Kinds. In D. Sperber, D. Premack, & A. J. Premack (Eds.), *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate* (pp. 351–383). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mortari, L. (2015). Reflectivity in research practice: An overview of different perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 14(5), 1609406915618045. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915618045>.

Additional Readings

Gergen, K. J. (2015). From Mirroring to World-Making: Research as Future Forming. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 45(3), 287–310.

Resnik, David B. and Kevin C. Elliott, (2016). The Ethical Challenges of Socially Responsible Science. *Accountability in Research*, 23(1), 31–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2014.1002608>

Tully, J. (2002). Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity. *Political Theory*, 30(4), 533–555. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3072620>

Wimmer, Andreas and Nina Glick Schiller (2002). "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences." *Global Networks*, 2(4): 301-334.