

# Core Course #9: Social Science Research during a Pandemic

This Additional Core Course is part of the fourth block of the Doctoral Program of the nccr – on the move (Epistemology and Interdisciplinarity). All Doctoral Students enrolled in the Certificate in Migration and Mobility Studies are encouraged to attend. Other members of the community are welcome to attend.

## General Description

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions to travel have created unprecedented challenges to researchers in social science. By forcing unexpected changes in data collection strategies, fieldwork, and human contacts more generally, the pandemic has pushed social scientists to think about new methodological approaches to conduct research.

This Core Course will give participants the opportunity to think and discuss about alternative techniques to interact and create relationships of trust and mutual cooperation with the research participants. With the help of researchers from the nccr – on the move and one external scholar who has written extensively about online research methods, the course will showcase emerging approaches and alternative techniques. In particular, it will address the potential of approaches based on research reciprocity and the turn to digital methods. It will also discuss the way in which these emerging approaches have generated flexible and creative responses, whilst raising new methodological and ethical problems.

## Date and Place

The Course takes place on Tuesday 17 November 2020 in the afternoon. It will be held entirely online. We ask you to register [here](#) no later than 15 November. A Webex conference link will be sent to all the participants one day before the event.

## Timetable of the Course

13:00 - 13:30	Introduction and Round of Presentations <i>Robin Stünzi, University of Neuchâtel</i>
13:30 - 14:30	Do We Still Need to Talk About Online Methods Now that Everything is Online? <i>Christine Hine, University of Surrey</i> <i>Discussant: Laure Sandoz, University of Neuchâtel</i>
14:30 - 14:45	Break
14:45 - 15:15	Is Research in Times of COVID-19 Mainly a Problem of Techniques? Potentials and Limitations of Approaches Based on Research Partnerships and Reciprocity <i>Yvonne Riaño, University of Neuchâtel</i>
15:15 – 15:30	Break
15:30 – 16:00	Applying the Principles of Partnership and Reciprocity on Migrant Entrepreneurship Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic <i>Christina Mittmasser, University of Neuchâtel</i>
16:00 – 16:15	Break
16:15 – 17:15	Workshop: How Could I Apply Some of the Received Inputs to my Research?

## Do We Still Need to Talk about Online Methods Now that Everything is Online?

Christine Hine, University of Surrey

### **Abstract**

In this talk I will explore the development of online and virtual research methods in social science with the goal of gaining some perspective on where we have come to and what challenges currently confront the research community. As scholars who focus on the nuances of lived social experience, qualitative sociologists and anthropologists have been quite reasonably concerned about the abilities of online research methods to fully encompass the aspects of human experience that interest us. Various marked categories of “online” “virtual” “cyber” and “net” methodologies are the result. In recent months, however, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a massive shift online across swathes of human activity and a breaching of taboo after taboo as actions that we only thought could be conducted face-to-face suddenly have come to seem possible, acceptable and even in some cases better online. In this context, I will be exploring where online methods for fieldwork currently stand and highlighting some of the challenges that still face practitioners of online methods, around the definition of fieldsites, the representation of diverse populations and the accountability of our research methods to disciplinary frameworks.

## Is Research in Times of COVID-19 Mainly a Problem of Techniques? Potentials and Limitations of Approaches Based on Research Partnerships and Reciprocity

Yvonne Riaño, University of Neuchâtel

### Abstract

Is the problem of doing migration research in times of COVID-19 mainly a problem of what techniques we should use to replace face-to-face interviewing? I argue that the current challenges we face are not merely a situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather compounded by classical 'utilitarian' approaches that do not sufficiently reflect on the kind of relationships that we build with our research subjects and the need to create spaces of collaboration that enhance mutual learning and produce more solid scientific knowledge. I argue that approaches based on research partnerships and the principle of reciprocity (Riaño, 2015) are now more important than ever before. This talk discusses the potentials and challenges of such an approach.

### Reading

Riaño, Yvonne (2015): "Minga Participatory Workshops with Highly Skilled Migrant Women: Enhancing Spaces of Inclusion". In: *Qualitative Research (QR)*, Special Issue on Feminist Participatory Methodologies: Vol. 16(3): 267-279. Sage.

## Applying the Principles of Partnership and Reciprocity on Migrant Entrepreneurship Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Christina Mittmasser, University of Neuchâtel

### **Abstract**

This talk discusses a recent research experience of conducting a digital workshop with members of an NGO that supports migrants in creating their own entrepreneurial projects. The workshop aimed at reporting back and validating research findings, but also – and most importantly – at creating a space for mutual learning by applying the principles of partnership and reciprocity. In the presentation will question the potentials and challenges of digital research and of involving research participants in the process of knowledge production during the COVID-19 Pandemic