

CCIG method signature

Research methods are always in motion. People experiment with different modes of meaning and knowledge creation. Governmental institutions demand and develop new methods for gathering and interpreting data. Companies create similar demands for enhancing corporate information and knowledge and social movements for challenging ways of living. Yet, the critical issue for social scientists today is not to respond to the intensified demand for new methods but rather to reflect on what these methods set in motion. New methods never entail simply technical adjustments or a requirement for new expertise. When methods change, the key challenge is to understand the implications for knowledge creation and meanings as social accomplishments, and therefore the impact on citizenship identities, and modes of governance.

CCIG aims to develop a cross-disciplinary research focus on **methods in motion** (MiM) driven by an ethos that is sensitive to how methods enact discriminations and violence as well as create possibilities for open and inclusive social change.

Elaborations

The key methodological question we aim to address is how methods shape states of the world, rather than simply monitoring them, and to what effect. At a time when social data is proliferating as a result of experiments with communication and representation, ranging from selfies to the commercial and social media exchanges which are stored as ‘big data’, it is crucial to explore what these new information processes set in motion.

There is a need to venture beyond technical knowledge about how to use methods properly and evaluate research findings, in order to explore what methods *do* when they are deployed. To this end, we propose methods in motion as both a practice and an object of study. Our aim is to understand how society engages with methods and data generation, and the implications of this engagement for practices of citizenship, identities and modes of governing.

Working with the dual notion of methods in motion and methods setting things in motion requires open methodologies. Such methodologies address the current practices that trouble the boundaries of knowledge, as it has classically been organised. In particular, open methodologies look at how methods traverse four boundaries: between disciplines, between expert and lay subjects, between pure and applied knowledge, and between science and society.

Open methodologies do not assume a reflective subject as the originator of knowledge and meaning, yet avoid wholly relinquishing the notion of human subjects in favour of anonymous forces. Central to such an approach is a concern with the formation of subjectivities that methods set in motion, and the nature of that subjectivity.

Open methodologies are post-ideological in that they approach methods not in terms of grand narratives but as practices through which worlds are enacted. To take just one example, interpretative methods are not necessarily linked to critical emancipatory knowledge but can be used in various ways and for various purposes. The same holds for statistical methods, and others. Ethnographic methods have been used to challenge stereotypes and prejudices but also to further colonial oppression.

An open methodological signature integrates technical expertise in methods with a critical conception of method as both a social accomplishment and a practice linked to discriminations and violence, as well as to resistance and reconfigurations for the purpose of greater equality and freedom. Methods derive their credibility not only from academic debates but also from the multiple social practices through which knowledges are circulated, reinforced and contested. Recent examples are the rise of big data and visual methods that were developed through publicity media, corporations, governmental institutions, and also broader public engagement with digital data and visual instruments.

A focus on methods in motion thus traverses technical, sociological and philosophical conceptions of method. Prompted by a technical approach to method, that is, as techniques for doing research, we might ask questions about how to conduct visual analysis, or content analysis, or regression analysis, and how to evaluate our findings. The sociological conception invites us to consider the social and political history, and importance, of methods. The philosophical conception refers us to the connections between methods and versions of knowledge, and current states of social worlds. For example, the debate between disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge concerns the nature of knowledge, the reality and rupturing of boundaries between scientific knowledge and 'lay' knowledge, and the conception of knowledge instigated by calls for public engagement and impact.

Methods in motion therefore brings together our research interests in methods and changing worlds, the role methods play in creating worlds, the development of new methods that can capture such worlds in motion rather than in stasis, and how methods create, recreate, and challenge discrimination and violence.