

Call for abstracts:
“Digitizing Peoples in Uncertain Times”
Seminar, 13 & 14 May 2021



On May 13th and 14th 2021, the Processing Citizenship ERC project organizes the seminar “Digitizing peoples in uncertain times: Interface methods for interventions on populations”. The seminar aims to address the emergent methods used to create data about populations, as well as the interventions we as social researchers can develop to create alternative epistemic forms about vulnerable, dispersed, invisible or just emergent populations.

During “the first pandemic of the datafied society” (Di Salvo and Milan 2020), pandemic-related contingencies have furthered the already steady global demand for fast, reliable and quantifiable methods to create knowledge about populations. The production and circulation of data for counting population is never neutral, but performative of politics, and the COVID-19 pandemic is the last source of uncertainty demanding even more digitization of population data.

The performative potential and non-neutral character of data about populations suggests two directions of investigation that promise to turn out strategic in the post-pandemic sociotechnical research landscape. First, it highlights the key role of the methods through which knowledge about populations is created. Second, it calls for interventions at the interface of social research and social action. The seminar’s overarching goal is connecting the Science and Technology Studies (STS) and digital sociology methodological debate to critical and interventionist studies on the data management of populations. The intention is to investigate and reflect on the hybrid (i.e. digital and analogue, qualitative and quantitative) interface methods to be furthered to study the data-based management of populations.

To this end, the seminar invites scholars to present and discuss in several panels these two main threads of investigation. On one hand, which methods of knowing populations are being introduced to cope with new uncertainties? Shall these methods aim at universality - a common claim when it comes to Big Data, or should they come to terms with some forms of invisibility? Which new regimes of inclusion/exclusion do they introduce? What should fair and just ways of knowing populations in security, health, mobility, education, or pandemics encompass? On the other hand, what is the role of social scientists, especially those engaged with sociotechnologies, in dealing with those methods? What can intervening in population management mean for STS scholars? To what extent can methods for social research and methods for social action overlap? Do we need alternative methods, or maybe we’d better combine existing digital and analogue, qualitative and quantitative methods in new ways? Which forms of intervention are more suitable to achieve fair and just enactment of populations? How can we deploy the principles of situated interventions in empirical and often sensitive fields?

These are some of the questions the seminar tries to address thanks to the participation of world-class keynote speakers, as well as by openly inviting participants to submit their research to one of the panels.

Confirmed keynotes

Noortje Marres, Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick.

Teun Zuiderent-Jerak, Associate Professor of Interactive Governance of Health Interventions, Free University Amsterdam.

Submissions guidelines

Please submit title, 300-word abstracts, author’s name and surname, affiliation and email address to webmaster@processingcitizenship.eu

Deadline: March 15th, 2021

Notification of acceptance: March 30th, 2021

We expect to be able to select around 15 papers.

Conference settings

Given the continuing pandemic, the Seminar will be held mainly or exclusively online. Should the possibility to (partially) convert it into a modality in presence arise by March 2021, the seminar venue will be the University of Bologna. In this case, travel costs for accepted participants to the panels who prefer to attend in person will be covered by the Processing Citizenship project. No fee requested.

More info about seminar rationale and themes

<https://processingcitizenship.eu/digitizing-peoples-in-uncertain-times-interface-methods-for-interventions-on-populations/>

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