

4th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



**Rethinking social theories
and methods in a digital
society**

Prague, 8-9 June 2023



UNIVERSITY OF FINANCE
AND ADMINISTRATION





UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI SALERNO



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IV International conference International Lab for Innovative Social Research (ILIS)

Rethinking social theories and methods in a digital society

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University of Finance and Administration
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Hybrid format (online and on-site)

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The digitalization raises a number of both theoretical and methodological issues.

From a theoretical point of view, the digital should not be intended as a separate or sectorial field of study but rather as an irreducible field of analysis entailing broader societal transformation and making possible new forms of understanding sociality that arise from the complex interactions between digital technology, social research and social life (Marres, 2017).

It permeates the micro, meso and macro areas shaking sociological theories and transforming the most basic assumptions underlying them.

From a **micro perspective** the digital has the potential of **making porous the public-private boundary** for example by transforming traditional intimate and private phenomena into a public-facing genre such as in the case of digital suicide and the practice of publishing the last notes on social media (Marres, 2017) or in the case of the relationship with social media profiles of dead people. Moreover, the digital has accelerated the inclusion within daily life of practices related to virtual worlds and video games, such as gamification extended to every aspect of real life, virtual reality applications in every field of human activities, or the creation of the multiverse.

The digital is also a **socializing institution for legitimizing minority, non-normative and stigmatized sexualities** which use digital spaces as performative spaces for reflexivity, self-understanding and acceptance and language negotiation (Delli Paoli, Masullo, 2022). Sometimes the digital offers also **backspaces for deviant practices** (deviant sexuality, criminality, illegal actions, etc.) validating and exacerbating deviant desires and practices (such as pedophilia, child pornography, cybercrime, cyber bullying, etc.) (Delli Paoli, 2022).

From the meso perspective, the digital is impacting the forms of social ties and the relationships between social sectors and practices, as the example of forms of distributed democracy and citizen sourcing, clearly demonstrates. More in general it is transforming the forms of social support and **models of community** and communitarism, changing both the sources of **social capital** (strengthening existing social relationships but also activating new and latent ties), its consequences (both positive such trust and relationships' building and negative such as segregation, conflict, inequality and crime) and space-time anchorage (Caliandro, 2018).

From the **macro perspective**, the digital can produce **new organizational forms**, alternative to capitalist economy such as in the case of the *sharing economy* or **new spaces of inclusion/exclusion** by exacerbating inequalities, producing and reproducing social orders and stratifications, operating along axes of divisions and differentiating people's space of opportunities, well-being and level of agency.

Apart from entailing broad societal transformations which need to find a place in sociological theory, the incorporation of technology into our daily materiality, is also transforming social research methods by



providing **methodological resources** for researching social phenomena (both intentionally and unintentionally produced digital data such as social media posts, narratives, storytelling, search engine queries, phone calls, and banking interactions) (Amaturo, Aragona, 2019).

Digital has accelerated the hybridization and inclusion within social research methodology of practices and related disciplinary fields, such as video games. **Video games** are proving to be a fruitful analytical support for the analysis of social phenomena of various kinds, not only those closely related to the media sphere (Kennedy, 2006; Mayra, 2008; Neitzel, 2010). In this context, **Game-Based Methods** were born and are being developed. Initially adopted within educational research, in recent years video games have also been used in a variety of ways within social research: as a tool to conduct surveys (Keush & Zhang, 2017) or to detect (or "measure") complex concepts (Foroughi, Serraino, Parasuraman & Boehm - Davis, 2016), as an integral part of a research design (Denisova & Cairns, 2015) or as a general methodological perspective of research (Zendle, Cairns & Kudenko, 2015).

This opens methodological challenges at different levels of the research process. At the level of data collection where the **non-neutrality of algorithms**, the **identity strategies of self-presentation** applied online, the **invisibility of the research design** in repurposing digital data, need to be taken into account (Veltri 2019; Delli Paoli, Masullo, 2022). At the level of research design where **new competences are required** implying technological proficient researcher able to use a digital language based on the affordances of online environments (the socio-technical architectures of media) (Marres, Weltevrede, 2013). At the level of sampling which is complicated on the web by **direct digital discriminations** (sampling biases deriving from procedures discriminating against minorities or disadvantaged groups based on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and **indirect digital discrimination** (sampling biases deriving from procedures intentionally or accidentally discriminating against a minority) (Criado, Such, 2019; Favaretto, De Clercq, Elger, 2019). At the level of data analysis both in qualitative approach due to **online narratives** being intertextual, transmedial, multimodal and interdiscursive and in quantitative analysis for example in **big data-based correlation** which are not automatically meaningful and do not tell much about humanity (human motivations, feelings, values, norms, meanings, etc.) failing to understand deep motivations (Fuchs, 2017; 2019).

Digital social research seems to extend the importance of human interpretation beyond the boundaries of qualitative research (where it is incorrectly confined) imposing to interpret technology and avoid the mythology of data objectivity also as an antidote for digital discriminations.

In the previous editions of this conference, which is now at its fourth edition, we focused on the epistemological impact of digital methods, on innovative methodological practices (digital ethnography, computational analysis, etc.), on the impact of the digital on traditionally "offline" and face-to-face contexts such as education, policy and politics, sensitive topics and population such as gender and sexualities.

This resulted in several publications which collect the outputs of the previous conferences:

- 2 special issues in Italian Sociological Review (Class A journal -ANVUR rating) dedicated to the reconceptualization of social research in the digital era:
 - [Vol 11, No 4S \(2021\)](#)
 - [Vol 12, No 7S \(2022\)](#)

- A special issue in [Italian Journal of Sociology of Education](#) (Class A journal -ANVUR rating) The impact of digital on research, socialization, and communication processes – vol. 14, n. 3 (2022).
- A special issue in Mediascapes Journal (Class A journal -ANVUR rating) [Cultural Machines](#) - vol. 20, n. 2 (2022)
- A [Handbook of Research on Advanced Research Methodologies for a Digital Society](#)
- 2 special issues in [Cultura e Studi del Sociale](#) (Scientific journal – ANVUR rating):
 - [Between Infodemic and Pandemic: On-line Researches in the Time of COVID-19](#) - vol. 6, n. 1, Special (2021);
 - [Exploring Everyday Digital Life](#) - vol. 7, n. 1 (2022)
- A book dedicated to [ethnography and netnography](#)

Leveraging on the previous editions, this conference will explore the main challenges digitalization poses to different strand of sociological theories and methods particularly investigating the distinctive topics of digital social research and the digital biases.

Thus, it especially (but not exclusively) calls for contributions that shed new light on the following topics:

- Digital sociology;
- Revised sociological theories;
- Revised sociological concepts: identity, citizenship, social capital, inequalities, institutions, power, work, community, etc.;
- Revised social research methods and digital transposition of traditional methods;
- Social research methods that incorporate digital and gaming practices, such as the game-based methods;
- Digital biases;
- Digital discriminations.

Abstracts need to be limited to **500 words** and include goals, research methods and main findings. Please use the **abstract form** and send it as an attached file to: labilis@unisa.it

Conference publications

The scientific committee of the conference will select best papers for publications in special issues dedicated to the conference and/or national or international books.

Registration

The registration deadline for presenters is 28 April 2023. The fee for both on-site and online conference is € 50. The conference fee includes two lunches and coffee breaks for on-site participants. Students and Ph.D. candidates are exempt from paying conference fee.

After acceptance further information about payment will be provided.

Authors with insufficient funding will be eligible for partial fee support. Please, apply for the fee support by writing to labilis@unisa.it and motivating your request.

Conference organisation

The conference is organised by the [International Lab for innovative social research \(ILIS\)](#). The lab is an interdisciplinary centre for social research established within the Department of Humanities, Philosophy and Education. It aims to stimulate theoretical and methodological discussions, as well as empirical studies, on emerging trends in social research: from theoretical challenges faced by new social issues to innovative methodological approaches to understand them. The lab's mission is to promote theoretical, epistemological and methodological advances in the social sciences through continuous exchanges with national and international scholars.

The research interests focus on social processes ranging from educational, migratory, identity and cultural processes, to gender, generational and health issues drawing special attention to the social research methods. The main goal is to offer an integrated research system to direct scientific actions towards an innovative theoretical and empirical knowledge of the processes transforming our societies.

From the scientific point of view, the centre aims to combine the understanding of contemporary social processes with emerging trends in social research methods which have innovated traditional approaches and have introduced alternative data collection and analysis methods together with new methods for representing information (such as in the case of e-methods and big data analysis).

The conference will be held on the **8th and 9th of June 2023**.

Conference location: Estonská 500, 101 00, Prague 10 – Czech Republic

GPS: 50.0711122N, 14.4530614E

Call for abstract

Deadline to submit abstracts: 12 March 2023

Author Notification: 25 March 2023

Payment Deadline: 28 April 2023

Deadline to submit papers: 27 May 2023

Conference dates: 8-9 June 2023

Chief of the Conference: Giuseppe Maiello, University of Finance and Administration Prague

Executive Board: Felice Addeo, Angela Delli Paoli, Giuseppe Masullo, University of Salerno; Gabriella Punziano, University of Naples Federico II, Jitka Cirklová, ČVUT Prague; Eva Kostikov, Jan Lánský, University of Finance and Administration Prague.

Organizing secretary: Rudolf Blábolil, Noemi Crescentini, Marco Di Gregorio, Lucie Finová, Giuseppe Michele Padricelli, Assunta Scaglione.



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