



Democratising social research

Graham Crow, National Centre for Research Methods

The democratisation of the research process is an important trend in the field of social research methods. The relationship between researchers and the people whom they research has a long history which continues to evolve, and the idea of the democratisation of this relationship has come to the fore for several reasons.

First and foremost is the point that growing numbers of researchers are committed to the principle of research participants being empowered; this necessarily involves moving away from models of research that treat people as 'subjects'.

In addition, more pragmatic considerations may be at work. Researchers can no longer assume that people will want to take part in research as a self-evidently good thing. Across the social sciences, declining rates of participation present a challenge. Searching for answers to the question, 'what's in it for us?' is a familiar experience for many researchers, and one response is to offer some form of collaboration. 'Knowledge exchange', as the contemporary terminology has it, helps to gain access to research samples. This is a particularly important consideration when studying hard-to-reach social groups.

A further reason for undertaking research collaboratively is that it helps to achieve the objective of research impact. Involvement of participants in research in the design and execution of the research projects in which they are involved makes it more likely that they will be active 'users' of the research findings. This helps researchers to demonstrate the relevance of their work.

Finally, research that involves collaboration and participation can be considered to produce better-quality data than the outputs of those approaches to research that are more expert-oriented and hierarchical in their operation.

The argument runs that if people being researched are more committed to the aims of a project and feel some sort of ownership of it, they will take the research more seriously and engage with it more honestly.

Although a trend towards the democratisation of social research can be posited, it would be wrong to see its spread as unproblematic. It does present challenges, because the agendas of the collaborating partners may be distinct. It is not always easy to find common ground in answering questions about what the research is for, what each partner brings to the process, who does what in the execution of the project, who owns the research data collected, and what arrangements should be in place to resolve disagreements about what findings should be published and which should be kept from public view. The complexity of these issues means that success in research projects that set out to be more democratic is by no means guaranteed. The surprising thing is not that there are challenges inherent in the approach but that it has numerous achievements to its name.

A contemporary classic of collaborative research is the 2004 book *The Other Side of Middletown*. Middletown is famous in the history of social science as a small town in the mid-west of the United States (Muncie, Indiana) which was first studied in the 1920's and re-studied in the 1930's by Robert and Helen Lynd. It has subsequently been the subject of so many studies that people now refer to the body of work produced as 'Muncieology', but it took three quarters of a century for researchers to capture the experiences of the town's African-American community.

Eric Lassiter, the lead editor of The Other Side of Middletown will be speaking about the theory and practice of collaborative ethnography at two NCRM events in Nottingham on 11 and 12 April 2011. For more details go to <http://www.ncrm.ac.uk>

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How should we measure living standards or wellbeing?

Thomas F. Crossley, University of Cambridge & Institute for Fiscal Studies

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Traditionally, economists have focused on income - whether at the national or household level - as the key measure of living standards, wellbeing, and economic progress. Recently, there has been a great deal of discussion about how to appropriately measure economic progress. The recent Sen-Stiglitz report¹ commissioned by President Sarkozy is indicative of the growing attention this question is receiving from both researchers and policy makers.

One long-advocated alternative to income as a measure of household living standards is consumption. Economists believe that income is desired primarily because it allows consumption; it is the consumption of goods and services that generate wellbeing. Moreover, if households are forward looking, they may try to maintain a constant living standard, consuming less or more of their income by saving or dis-saving. In this case, household consumption gives a better indication, at any point of time, of a household's living standard, and of its own assessment of its future prospects.

These conceptual reasons for preferring consumption to income have been argued for many years. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a renewed interest in using consumption as a measure of living standards, especially among the poor. The reasons for this renewed interest have been practical rather than conceptual.

In particular, a number of authors have made the case that, especially among the poor, the available expenditure micro data (from which consumption measures are constructed) are of higher quality than the available income data.²

This development illustrates an important point about the debate around measuring living standards and wellbeing: our measurement choices will always be shaped by both consideration of what would be the preferred concept of wellbeing, and by practical considerations of what can be measured, with reasonable reliability, and at reasonable cost.

Happily, recent years have brought accelerating innovation in this area, and a rapid expansion of the evidence base on the reliability of different approaches to measuring wellbeing. While there is much work to be done, one can point to a number of important developments.

The emergence of the global Gallup data-base, which contains data on wellbeing in 155 countries, has intensified research on the subjective measures of wellbeing.^{3,4} An important methodological question is whether subjective responses elicited across many different countries and cultures can be compared in a meaningful sense to produce a ranking of living conditions. Several authors, including Amartya Sen, have pointed out that subjective assessments incorporate assumptions and expectations that people have built up over their lives so that people living in impoverished conditions may come simply to view these as normal.

One major attempt to deal with this issue has been the development of anchoring vignettes, in which individuals are asked to assess vignettes describing hypothetical states of the world. Responses are then used to examine how people from different countries actually interpret the subjective scales.⁵

The most commonly used subjective wellbeing measures are short questions on happiness and life satisfaction. More recently, researchers have developed detailed measures of the emotional quality of life experience. One important example is the Day Reconstruction Method. This method seeks to measure the emotional quality of everyday experience by dividing a person's day into a series of episodes and recording how respondents felt during each of these episodes.⁶ Recent research has shown that overall life satisfaction and the emotional quality of everyday experience have very different correlates, and so appear to measure different aspects of wellbeing.⁷

Joint NCRM and cemmap workshop "Innovations in the measurement of living standards and wellbeing" is held at the Institute for Fiscal Studies on 11 March 2011. Please see <http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/other/NMI/2010/crossley.php> or email thomas_c@ifs.org.uk

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Bucking the trend: Detecting areas with unusual temporal patterns of disease, crime and poverty

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Place and time are important characteristics of many social and health phenomena. Police constabularies record the location and time of all reported crimes. Date and place of residence are recorded for all births, deaths, cancer diagnoses and many other diseases.

The Office for National Statistics produces annual small area estimates of a range of economic and social indicators, such as unemployment rates, average household income, and so on. In all of these examples, time trends in most local areas tend to resemble each other closely, reflecting national patterns. However, policy makers and researchers are often interested in identifying areas that buck the national trend and exhibit unusual temporal patterns. These atypical trends may be due to the impact of a local policy initiative, or the emergence of a localised predictor or risk factor. Researchers from the BIAS II node of NCRM have developed a new statistical method for modelling short time series data in small areas and detecting those areas that exhibit unusual time trends. The method has initially been applied to an investigation of mortality rates from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

How the detection method works

Our detection method uses Bayesian model choice between two competing space-time models. The first model is a multiplicative decomposition of the area effect and the temporal effect, assuming one single temporal pattern across the whole study region. The second model estimates the time trends independently for each area. An area-specific model indicator is introduced to select which estimate offers the better compromise in terms of smoothness and fit to the data. Classification of a local time trend as "unusual" or not is based on the posterior mean of this model indicator for each area, which represents the probability that the common trend model is appropriate for that area. An important feature of the method is that the classification rule can be fine-tuned to control for the false detection rate.

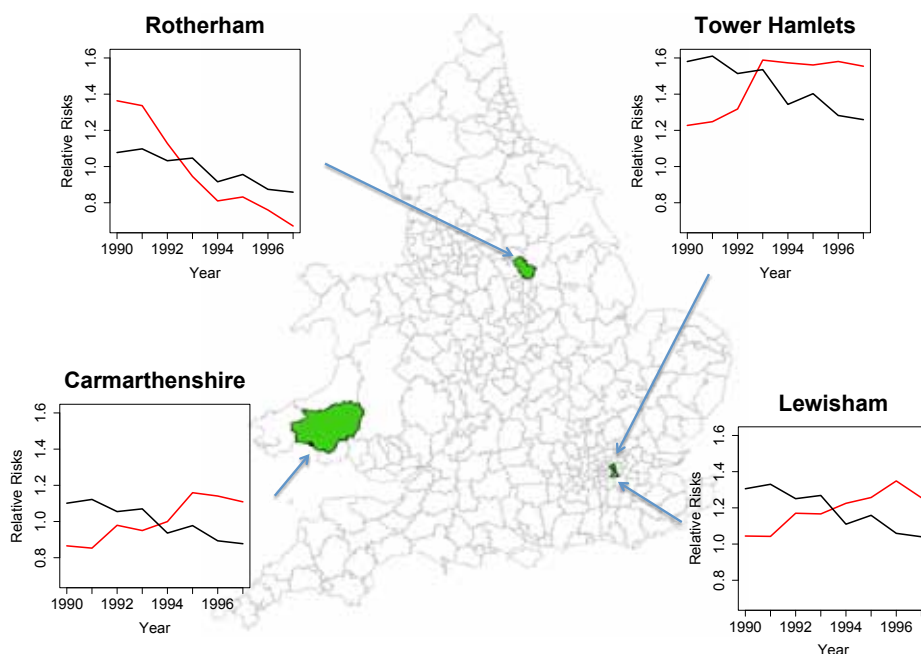


Figure: Map showing locations of the 4 local authority districts detected as having unusual temporal trends in COPD mortality 1990-1997. The separate time series plots show the estimated local trend in each area (red) with the common (national) trend (black) superimposed.

Detecting unusual trends in mortality from chronic lung disease

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is responsible for around 5% of deaths in the UK. Smoking is the main risk factor, but exposure to high levels of dusts and fumes in industries such as coal mining is also associated with higher risks of COPD. Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit was made available for miners developing COPD from 1992 onwards in the UK. As miners with other respiratory problems with similar symptoms (e.g., asthma) could potentially have benefited from this scheme, we used our detection method to investigate whether this policy may have differentially increased the likelihood of a COPD diagnosis in mining areas. If so, one might expect to see a relative increase in rates of COPD diagnosis, and hence COPD mortality, in men living in mining districts. A second goal of this study was to carry out disease surveillance to highlight areas with a potential need for further investigation and/or intervention.

The detection model was applied to data on annual mortality rates from COPD by local authority district in England and Wales between 1990 and 1997.

Results showed little evidence supporting the hypothesis regarding the industrial injuries policy (only 2 out of a possible 40 mining districts were identified as having atypical trends). However, two unusual districts (Lewisham and Tower Hamlets) with an increasing trend (against a national decreasing trend) were identified in inner London. In fact, Tower Hamlets has been commissioning various local enhanced services to tackle high rates of COPD mortality since 2008. This rising trend could potentially have been recognised earlier in the 1990s through using our detection method as a surveillance tool.

Applications to crime and poverty

BIAS II researchers are currently collaborating with the University of Cambridge and the Cambridgeshire Constabulary to use this detection method to evaluate the so-called "No Cold Calling" scheme, which aims to reduce the risk of distraction burglary and rogue traders to elderly and vulnerable people. We are also working with ONS to use the method to detect areas with atypical time trends in small area estimates of household income.

For further details please see <http://www.bias-project.org.uk/research.htm>

Maximising the impact of online resources

Kaisa Puustinen and David Martin, National Centre for Research Methods

Since 2007 the National Centre for Research Methods has hosted a project, entitled ReStore, to develop a prototype of a service to sustain academic online resources. In October 2010 ReStore entered its second funding period.

The Economic and Social Research Council invests heavily in research methods projects which create online training and resources materials. The development on this type of materials is time-consuming and expensive and often results in excellent resources for research users. They are often completed towards the end of the funding period and user awareness tends to be generated at the point where the original project is ending and the research team have moved on to new commitments. Unattended websites rapidly become unserviceable as links are broken, browser technology changes, university IT services are reorganized and academic content becomes dated.

Sustaining online resources

ReStore is a sustainable repository of online research methods resources which preserves, sustains and actively maintains web resources developed as part of ESRC funding mainly covering research methods in social sciences. These online resources not only provide a valuable personal development resource for researchers unable to participate in face-to-face training, but also provide an important repository of social science knowledge.

Resources in the ReStore collection have been taken on following expert peer review and updating.

The ReStore team have made available a number of online methods resources from past ESRC funded projects. These online resources are in the ReStore repository and they are updated regularly in collaboration with the original web resource authors. The active collaboration between ReStore team and primary project investigators ensures that the contents on the site are up to date and all the links on the site are functional and working as expected. This relationship makes ReStore repository a reliable source of knowledge in research methods both in terms of content quality and availability.

Guidance on online sustainability

The ReStore team not only works with projects that have ended, but we also offer practical guidance on how to build sustainable web resources, covering design principles, accessibility, server and software considerations and intellectual property rights.

One of the ReStore team's most recent outputs is a guidance document "Guidelines for sustainable online resources – Sustainability for ESRC-funded online resources", which is based on our experiences of working with various resource authors, members of digital repository community and intellectual property experts.

A wide range of web content, creators and/or owner and aspects of quality are considered in the guideline document. These guidelines, primarily aimed at the creation of sustainable online resources, address issues which arise at the very start of web resource creation and also those which are faced by authors and content owners at the end of the funding period.

It is to be hoped that research council funding will result in many high-quality and useful web resources, and therefore it is strongly desirable to have a strategy in place for the preservation of the web resource in a way which remains accessible and valuable to users before the team moves on to another project or even alternative employment. These guidelines are intended to address exactly this challenge. Specifically, the document offers to explain, standardise and streamline the process of creating high quality online resources from ESRC funded projects, with a particular focus on research methods. It is not a technical document and in many areas where there are already excellent published guidelines and standards it will direct the reader to these. The guidance document is available online as an interactive document and as downloadable document.

Over the period 2010-13 ReStore will be offering a series of face to face workshops in addition to online guidance through our website. The dates will be announced on the ReStore website, so if you are interested please keep checking the site or get in touch with the team for further information.

Research methods online resources in ReStore

ReStore repository holds research methods online resources, and the collection will be steadily growing over the period 2010-13. Current resources are:

- Geographical Referencing Resources for Social Scientists (GEO-REFER)
- Methods for the Analysis of Media Content
- Practical Exemplars for Survey Analysis
- Focusing on the Case in Quantitative and Qualitative Research
- Archiving and reusing qualitative data
- Trials in Public Policy: Training in pragmatic social interventions



Further information

You can view or download guidelines for building sustainable online resources in <http://www.restore.ac.uk/guidance>

To find out more about ReStore project and to use the available online resources please go to <http://www.restore.ac.uk>

Social Statistics: SAGE benchmarks in social research methods series

Social Statistics. SAGE Benchmarks in Social Research Methods series. Roger Penn & Damon Berridge (Editors). Four-Volume Set (2010). ISBN 978-1847873569

In 2007 Sage publishers approached NCRM affiliated Roger Penn and Damon Berridge (Lancaster University) with a request to create a series that would cover 80 key articles in *Social Statistics*. It was decided that four volumes were needed, each of which would be largely self-contained and could be read independently of the other volumes but would form a coherent account of the 'canon' in social statistics. During the initial selection process Penn and Berridge consulted colleagues in the UK and USA. Different experts had different views as to what the 'canon' comprised and therefore it was decided that the series would be broadly chronological and would map the key stages in the evolution of social statistics as a discipline.

The first volume *The Fundamentals of Descriptive Statistics* include a range of the classic, key articles from early twentieth century by Palin Elderton, Yule, Pearson and Fisher. Most of these articles involve the analysis of problems derived from genetics, epidemiology and public health. Many were also driven by practical considerations in these substantive areas. The volume charts the early development of descriptive summary statistics based upon cross-tabulations and also examines

the subsequent development of statistical methods for hypothesis testing involving the chi-squared test.

The second volume *The Development of Statistical Modelling* charts the development and application of a formal modelling paradigm, which had many advantages over the earlier phase of descriptive statistics and concomitant hypothesis testing. These included the possibility of multivariate analyses whereby a series of explanatory variables could be examined simultaneously and their relative effects disentangled. The paradigm also allowed for controls and the examination of interactions between explanatory variables within a modelling framework. Much of the work in this volume originated in the USA. This phase also coincided with, and in many ways was underpinned by, the development of powerful mainframe computers.

The third volume *The Statistical Modelling of Longitudinal Data* charts the emergence and development of longitudinal/event history modelling, which was developed explicitly to measure the relative effects of explanatory variables over time. However, such developments generated a new set of statistical problems, including the issues of initial conditions, state dependence, residual heterogeneity and attrition/dropout. This volume presents the major contributions in which these issues have been addressed by social statisticians.

The fourth volume *The Statistical Modelling of Ordinal Categorical Data* focusses on the modelling of ordinal data, which Penn and Berridge regard as the central challenge for contemporary social statistics. Traditionally, ordinal categorical data in the social sciences have either been collapsed into binary categories (logistic regression) or been treated as continuous (normal linear regression). Neither of these methods is satisfactory: the binary transformation ignores ordinality, whilst the continuous model relies on scoring systems that are often inappropriate. The volume presents the major contributions to this cutting edge within contemporary social statistics.

A central theme throughout the series is the collaboration between the development of social statistics and substantive social science questions. New statistical methods make possible new forms of analysis which in themselves generate new ways of conceptualising phenomena. These twin aspects of the development of social statistics are closely connected with technologies able to implement them. Indeed, what counts as the state of the art at any given moment becomes routine practice within a generation.

Mixed methods training and capacity building

Vanessa May, Realities node of NCRM, University of Manchester

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in one study is becoming increasingly fashionable within the social sciences. Yet little systematic training is offered in how to do such mixed methods research.

Part of the remit of the Realities node is to offer training and capacity building within qualitative methods, and one of the areas we are particularly focussing on is mixed methods. In these training and capacity building events we have particularly wished to focus on the practical aspects of doing mixed methods work, because although these are vital for the success of any project, they are rarely written about in research publications. The practical issues facing mixed methods projects

are likely to be relatively complex given the fact that these often involve teams of researchers from different disciplinary and methodological backgrounds. As a result, team members may have divergent expectations of what teamwork should look like. Take for example the issue of hierarchies and power relationships – in some disciplines teamwork is expected to be more egalitarian than in others. Add to this that team members may not be familiar with each other's epistemological approaches, techniques of data collection and analysis, or vocabularies, further complicating communication within a team. The importance of a collegial environment where team members can discuss their divergent approaches in a respectful manner should not be underestimated.

Such an environment can in no small way be aided by how the principal investigator manages the team's work. Our discussions with the participants have also highlighted how important it can be to feel part of a research community. Because mixed methods research is not an established approach, researchers doing such work can find themselves in the peculiar situation of not quite knowing how to write up their findings, or where to publish their work. In addition, many of the participants expressed feeling quite isolated in doing mixed methods research, particularly if they were PhD students or early career researchers.

Realities is running a training workshop on Doing Mixed Methods Research on 18 March 2011 in Manchester.

A reflection on being a SIMIAN User Fellow

Dr Mark Temple, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, Public Health Wales

After graduating from medical school (six years), I worked in Hospitals (five years), and then General Practice (11 years), before migrating into Public Health medicine (15 years). Therefore, I am indoctrinated into the medical response of conditioned reflexes to problems presented to me.

However, I have become steadily more concerned by the increasing pressure to follow seductively uniform (sorry, variation free) "evidence based" protocols, as my experience both as a patient and as a doctor has been that the best outcomes rarely result from blind adherence to "best practice".

I applied for a SIMIAN user fellowship, hoping to gain some "time out" to allow thinking time and to restore my cerebral functions after 37 years. I wondered if simulations based on the interactions of individual patients might help me understand outbreaks of disease better and hence help to improve practice within NHS health protection units.

As a world-weary medical veteran of too many NHS reorganisations based on business models, each alleged to improve health services effectiveness, my expectations were low. I sneakily suspected that, following the forecast and evident failure of the modelling fraternity to predict the course of the 'flu pandemic we were then battling with, any model I conceived or produced would have no utility. But I would at least be in a strong position to say that, having considered the subject carefully, my criticisms were born of practical experience.

Attending the University of Surrey for Agent Based Modelling training, I was struck by how ready everyone was to help me learn to conceive, build and test a model. My take home message from the day was simple, "Think hard and then think even harder still". Email questions were promptly and helpfully answered. I subsequently attended a meeting at the University of Leicester where again I met people with refreshingly different outlooks who willingly contributed to each others' thinking, openly and without point scoring. However, I noticed that, unlike in my workplace, there appeared to be no agreed method of appraising models, akin to the "Critical Appraisal" approach that

is widely accepted in medical research. Furthermore, journals do not appear to require authors to provide sufficient information to encourage readers to replicate their methods.

Thus when, to my considerable surprise, my model of a TB outbreak in a closed adult community seemed to fit my experience of investigating these, this lack of appraisal framework troubled me, as I had no mechanism to reassure myself that I had really produced something useful. The model showed that chance defines the outbreak size much more than I had imagined, and the effect of the risk factors was marginal, reminding me of Napoleon's dictum that he wanted lucky generals. Perhaps patients should seek lucky doctors! The size of the outbreak, before presentation of the first case, is not determined by good or poor practice. However, it appears that altering the case finding mechanism may improve the chance of shortening the outbreak. I realise now that my understanding of TB was shallow to an extent matched only by the power of models to throw light on this ignorance!

So what remains after this short period of exposure to non-medical academics? First, to be practical, the model suggested a modest change in how we ask people about their contacts in cases of TB, encouraging colleagues to ask patients about the contacts of their direct contacts. Whilst this data may not always help identify more infected individuals, the model suggests it will, over time, generate a modest improvement in the completeness of detecting infected people (who can then be treated before they become ill or infect others).

Secondly, my model demonstrates how variable the outcomes can be, despite the same initial starting conditions. The distribution of outbreak sizes is not an exponential decay or even an uni-modal curve. This surprised many of us but on reflection fits with our experience.

Next, with a colleague in Public Health Wales, we try to produce and publish a framework to allow health care staff to assess the utility of computer models in the hope that the debate will spread the benefits of greater understanding of both their strengths and weaknesses. It hopefully will lead to an agreed yardstick that we can compare models against.

SIMIAN User Fellowships

SIMIAN (Simulation Innovation), an NCRM node, sponsors two or three 'User Fellows' each year.

User Fellows, who come from outside academia, have the opportunity to engage in an agent-based modelling project of their own choosing. SIMIAN provides mentoring, advice, and an environment away from the pressures of everyday work.



To apply, see <http://www.simian.ac.uk>

*Brick model by Nathan Sawaya
<http://www.brickartist.com>*

Finally what I gained the most from this experience was being encouraged to think again and having my grey cells recharged. Whilst I trust some good will follow from this, I am convinced that extending this chance to others outside the full time research community is essential. My conviction is based on the observation that we have become driven by a blinkered short term focus on immediate outcomes and ignore excellent work being done in other fields. This refusal to work across specialities makes knowledge and methods common in one school of excellence unavailable to those in another. I hope other research councils will copy this approach by NCRM; it both helps to build on research by developing its use in practice and, by cross fertilisation, increases the chance of new discoveries being made.

I would like to thank Professor Nigel Gilbert and Dr Edmund Chattoe-Brown, Dr Christopher Watts and Dr Corrina Elsenbroich at the Centre for Research in Social Simulation, Lu Yang, the SIMIAN training manager, Dr. Roland Salmon at PHW NHS Trust, and all my colleagues and fellow patients in the Welsh NHS who encouraged and supported me during the fellowship.

Social science resources at the British Library

Sarah Evans and Sophie Villiers, British Library

The British Library (BL) has vast resources for research in social science which could add value to the work you do, from newspapers, to pop videos; and from official publications to oral history interviews. However, this considerable breadth and depth sometimes makes it difficult to know where to start.

Our collections of government material are particularly strong, and we collect from many foreign governments. For example, we have a very large collection of United States government material - one of the largest (if not the largest) collections of this kind of document outside the USA.

Many of us at the BL have particular affection for our collections of recorded sound. For example, we hold the recordings made during the A.C. Haddon expedition to the Torres Strait in the late 1890s. As well as this, 240 ethnographic wax cylinder recordings are featured on the Archival Sound Recordings web site for you to listen to in your own time. All recordings on Archival Sound Recording are available for free to staff and students UK higher and further education institutions.

At the BL you can also listen to the oral history interviews on topics of national importance which we collect and archive. For example, a current project is underway to record life history interviews with women who were activists in the second-wave feminist movement in the UK. Many of the recordings we hold are available for secondary analysis and are also a great resource for those studying the oral history and life history methods. They can be browsed via our sound archive catalogue.

We have been paying attention to social research methods over the last couple of years, and have published topical bibliographies on qualitative and quantitative methods to support research and teaching. These bibliographies are easy to find using the search function from our home page and are intended to be useful to a range of researchers. To complement this, we are building up our collection of social science research methods reference material in our reading room.

British Library's photographic collections have particular emphasis on early photography and photographs of former British colonies. Contemporary sociologists, human geographers and other social scientists are increasingly

using these materials to make connections between the organization of domestic and personal life in the past and in the present.

Our Management and Business Studies collections are very strong, including extensive collections of market research reports, company annual reports, patents and trade directories in the Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) onsite in London. On the 14th October 2010 we launched our Management and Business Studies Portal which is a one-stop shop for accessing an enormous range of research documentation.

You can find out more about the BL resources through our webpages. Please feel welcome to visit the BL when you are in London.

British Library resources

- Social science pages
<http://www.bl.uk/socialsciences>
- Archival Sound Recordings
<http://sounds.bl.uk/>
- Photographic collections
<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/>
- Management and Business Studies Portal
<http://www.mbsportal.bl.uk/>

Methods network in Manchester

Methods@manchester is a virtual network that supports, highlights and promotes methodological expertise and innovation at the University of Manchester. The network was started in October 2009 with funding for three years.

The purpose of this network is to focus on methods where the University of Manchester academics have particular expertise. The project has set up a web site that draws together resources and activities within the network. Each method has its own web page, audio-recording and, in some cases, video-recording. Featured methods include social network analysis, structural equation modelling, ethnography, narrative analysis, multilevel modelling, creative interviewing, event history analysis, ethnomethodology, and many others.

In September 2010 a Methods Fair was held for the first time. This event included short talks by students and staff to explain

why they use the methods they do, and workshops on topics such as qualitative comparative analysis, multilevel modelling and doing fieldwork. The network also organises informal workshops throughout the year on topics such as ethical issues of Internet research, running focus groups, and using Nvivo. These are organised in response to expressed needs by staff and students. Workshops and seminars on national resources such as the British Cohort Studies and the Economic and Social Data Service are also part of the methods@manchester events programme.

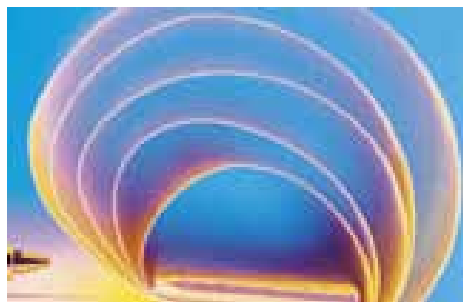
The University of Manchester has a rich mix of disciplinary expertise and they are committed to promoting linkages across disciplines. For example, in November methods@manchester network held a one-day workshop that brought together about 50 researchers with an interest in multilevel modelling. Following an introductory talk by Harvey Goldstein, there were a series of presentations

using a variety of models and software from across the University. The event also drew attention to the enormous range of multilevel modeling online resources developed by the LEMMA II node of NCRM. In addition to NCRM contributions to methods@manchester events, University of Manchester, with partners at the Universities of Essex and Sheffield Hallam, holds an NCRM Network for Methodological Innovation award to 'Promote methodological innovation and capacity building in research on ethnicity'. The final conference is on 11 March 2011.

Although difficult times lie ahead, methodological excellence and cross-disciplinary collaboration will be more important than ever. Methods@manchester aims to secure a strong future, beyond 2012, with a combination of internal support and collaboration and external grants.

Further information about methods@manchester is available in <http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk>

Research methods toolkits from Realities



Transcribing your own qualitative data

Never the most glamorous of research tasks, transcribing interview or focus group data can be a low point in any project. This toolkit includes useful information and advice on everything from project planning, advice on equipment and software and expert tips on how to speed up your transcribing.

Using email interviewing

An essential text to read if you are considering using email interviews in your research. Lucy Gibson draws on her own experience of using this approach as part of a mixed-method study of older music fans. Includes information on practical and methodological considerations for research design, planning, data collection and analysis.

Using phone interviews: new Realities toolkit

This toolkit by Annie Irvine explores the use of telephone interviews in qualitative research. It discusses the practical and methodological advantages of the approach, including minimal travel time and cost and increased anonymity for participants. The two main methodological objections to telephone interviews are traditionally: the difficulty of achieving rapport with participants; and the lack of non-verbal communication. The toolkit discusses whether these concerns are well-founded, and suggests that their significance may have been exaggerated.

Using walking interviews

Andrew Clark and Nick Emmel discuss experiences of using walking interviews in outdoor urban environments. This toolkit focuses on the practicalities of conducting these interviews and on ways of thinking about the data produced in the method, which was used as part of the Connected Lives project.

Practical considerations of leading and working on a mixed methods project

This toolkit offers a practical guide to help prepare for, design, carry out, and generally survive a mixed methods project by identifying some of the key challenges that these projects have to contend with. These include: the importance of teamwork; the need to allow for extra time; issues around data analysis and integration; and publishing from mixed methods projects.

Using blog analysis

This toolkit draws on experiences of a study in which blog analysis was used alongside interviews to explore young people's representations of their gap year experiences. The toolkit outlines the methods employed in the project and suggests the sorts of questions that can be answered using blog analysis alongside the issues that might arise.

Download these toolkits, and others from the series at <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/resources/toolkits>

ABOUT NCRM

The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is a network of research groups, each conducting research and training in an area of social science research methods. The Centre is coordinated by the Hub at the University of Southampton.

The Centre brings together researchers from across the UK with a wide range of research methods expertise, at the frontiers of developments in research methodology.

NCRM disseminates innovations and developments in research methods through training courses and events and through other direct engagement with researchers, but also by cooperating with other organisations and initiatives with an interest in social science research methods.

NCRM was established in 2004 as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) strategy to improve the standards of research methods across the UK social science community. The Centre acts as a strategic focal point for developments in research, training and capacity building related to research methods, both at the national level and cutting across social science disciplines.

For more information about NCRM and its activities please see our website <http://www.ncrm.ac.uk>

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