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## Final issue of MethodsNews and the new phase of the National Centre for Research Methods

NCRM entered a new phase in January 2020. With the new ESRC award for 5 years we will be focusing on delivering a comprehensive programme of cutting-edge research methods training across the UK. We will not be undertaking new methodological research as part of this award, though there will be some pedagogic research still and the resources linked to our previous research programme will still be available on our website.

We will be delivering face-to-face, online and blended learning which will be embedded in a new online training portal. We will provide a mixture of standalone instant access materials (such as e-books, videos, interactive slide decks) as well as whole modules based within a VLE.

NCRM will be delivered by a partnership of three internationally leading centres of methodological excellence: The Universities of

Southampton, Manchester and Edinburgh. This partnership will be significantly enhanced and expanded to include strategically selected Centre partner institutions who will deliver training locally to ensure geographical and subject expertise diversity. The nine institutions are UCL, NatCen, WISERD, Bristol, Exeter, Essex, Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow.

We will be working to transition the website of the National Centre of Research Methods to reflect the Centre's new focus by summer 2020. We would like to include you in the transition. Please help us to shape the new portal by filling in a short user survey [www.ncrm.ac.uk/surveys/portal](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/surveys/portal).

We will not be publishing the MethodsNews Newsletter in the new phase but we will stay in touch with you via our e-bulletin, website and social media.

## A short history of NCRM

Graham Crow, NCRM, University of Edinburgh

**As the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) approaches the end of its 15th year there are many achievements of which the team can be both proud and confident that they will have an enduring legacy. The NCRM arose out of recognition in the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), its principal funder, and in the broader social science community that the development of research methods and the widespread adoption of these innovations promised to take social science research in the UK to a new level. Expressed in the language of the early 2000s there was the potential to effect a ‘step change’ in methodological competence and capacity.**

The founding NCRM team was able to ‘hit the ground running’ from its inception in 2004 partly because the foundations had been laid through prior ESRC investment in the Research Methods Programme (RMP). From their base at the University of Southampton and with Chris Skinner as the first Director, the NCRM ‘hub’ co-ordinated a wide-ranging programme of research and training in social science research methods. This programme included working with teams of ‘nodes’ based across the UK whose research and training focussed on advancing methodological practice in specific areas. This structure, and its underpinning philosophy of encouraging social scientists at all career stages to update and broaden their methodological knowledge and skills, continued into the second five-year period (2009-14) under Professor Skinner’s successor, Patrick Sturgis. During this time the composition of the nodes evolved, as did the membership of the hub team, but a recognisable NCRM ethos continued. For its third five-year period NCRM evolved further into a new shape, with teams in Edinburgh and Manchester joining Southampton colleagues to extend geographical reach and the range of expertise of the hub, and with funding of nodes replaced by support for methodological research projects, together with revised arrangements for the delivery of training to enhance the social science community’s capacity in research methods.

At its heart, NCRM embodies the belief that robust, powerful and imaginative research methods are needed to keep the work of social scientists both trustworthy and relevant. It also confirms that the advancement of research methods theory and practice is best achieved in an open and supportive environment in which researchers from different disciplines,

sectors, career stages and methodological traditions can come together and learn from each other. The biennial Research Methods Festival, which NCRM took over from RMP, sounded to sceptics ‘a contradiction in terms’ but has in practice been a remarkable event in which the easy engagement of economists with anthropologists, policy-makers with programmers, and research students with more seasoned colleagues fostered a tangible enthusiasm. The photographic, film and other records of these flagship events run by NCRM (first in Oxford and then Bath) stand as evidence of the NCRM ethos writ large, but NCRM has also been about a host of other things. These include undertaking research into improving the range and quality of the contents of the research methods ‘tool box’, delivering stand-alone training events and summer/autumn schools, and developing a body of virtual resources that are available to on-line learners across the world.

This progressively expanding portfolio of outputs saw the NCRM team not only deliver on the project’s initial commitments but also pursue new opportunities as they emerged. Figures on the usage of resources indicated a healthy appetite for learning about research methods (who would have guessed that either videos on structural equation modelling or discussions of qualitative interview samples would prove quite as popular as they have done?) The NCRM website has established itself as a convenient place for people from around the world to access resources about all aspects of social science methods, from short, descriptive explanations of what a particular method involves, through pedagogical aids for teachers of research methods to material furthering debates about the meaning, purpose

and future of social scientific inquiry.

In addition to the wide range of resources and events for which it has been responsible, NCRM has also been a learning experience for all concerned. Of the many lessons to be derived from such a large and multi-faceted undertaking, a particularly important one relates to teamwork and the oft-repeated observation that successful collaboration produces results that are greater than the sum of the various parts. Disciplines working together have the potential to achieve more than they would be able to separately, and the same is true for cross-institutional teams (provided inherited rivalries can be put to one side) and for people in different roles.

The thought experiment of where academics would be without administrators and technicians (or vice versa) is a useful reminder of the value of teamwork and mutual interdependence. A particularly memorable autumn school presentation reported a programmer’s perplexed response to a request that a researcher had imagined was simple: ‘But that’s 10,000 lines of code!’ – a story that teamwork ensured ended happily. Such outcomes are by no means inevitable in a field like research methods where innovation is the norm, and is by its nature disruptive of established ways of working. Through facilitating not only the growth of knowledge but also ways for people to adjust to these changing landscapes, NCRM has delivered the ‘step change’ expected of it. Looking ahead, the current NCRM Director Gabi Durrant and her team are well-placed to take things further still as they move into the next phase of challenges and opportunities.



## NCRM people



NCRM Southampton team (from the left): Peter Smith, Melanie Nind, Penny White, Sarah Lewthwaite, Olga Maslovskaya, Alexandra Frosch, Gabriele Durrant, Rebekah Luff, Rachel Ayrton, Graham Crow, Jacqui Thorp and Eva Nedbalova. Missing: Jonathan Earley, Debbie Collins, Eliud Kibuchi, Carli Lessof, Patrick Sturgis, Susie Weller, Rosalind Edwards, Katy Sindall, David Martin (and our visiting fellow Helen Kara)



NCRM Manchester team (from the left): Georgia Chatzi, Mark Elliot, Tina Hannemann, Tarani Chandola, Natalie Shlomo, Claire Spencer. Missing: Sebastian Flennerhag, Duncan Smith

NCRM Edinburgh (no picture): Emma Davidson, Vernon Gayle, Victoria Gorton, Jillian Hart, Lynn Jamieson, John MacInnes, Laura Marshall, Amanda Vettini

# Walking methods in Olympic cities - turning a research article into a video script

Mike Duignan, Coventry Business School, Coventry University

Walking methods have different applications, including in Olympic cities. The 'Olympic city' provides sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists alike a fascinating incubator of social organising and ordering. Considerable planning and energy go in to crafting temporary 'Games spaces' and orchestrating the flows and circulations of people in and out of them. 'Host Event Zones' are constructed, best understood as an invisible regulatory and organisational bubble, home to live sporting, cultural and commercial activity officially sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee. Olympic bubbles enshroud residential areas, public spaces like parks and urban squares – frequently overlapping popular tourist zones, like Rio's Copacabana Beach.

Social and spatial re-configuring, as one would expect, raises some very interesting – often critical – questions. How are these reconfigurations afforded? Who or which actors, human and non-human, enable and fuel change? Why re-configure, and who benefits? Questions breed but more questions. Indeed, the sheer complexity of change produced by Olympic organising partly justifies why they can be understood as 'extreme environments' ripe for social analysis. A key question is: epistemologically and practically speaking, what methods are appropriate for seeking answers or explanations to the many questions?

Walking methods in Olympic cities, a peripatetic tradition, provides but one of the ways scholars of different disciplinary dispositions and conceptual frames can interrogate, as I discuss across the 3-part NCRM series – and – as David McGillivray and I argue in our new article entitled: 'Walking methodologies, digital platforms and the interrogation of Olympic spaces: the '#RioZones Approach''<sup>1</sup>. We argue how traversing spaces targeted during the live staging periods where the physical and symbolic aspects of Olympic organising take full form opens up opportunity to activate research problems and conduct initial critical analysis. This is particularly powerful as part of data triangulation



efforts: exploring, bolstering or simply corroborating data generated via other qualitative techniques like interviewing and survey work – discussed across the 3-part NCRM series<sup>2</sup>.

Following the publication of our article and familiar with the resources they have online, I reached out to NCRM to see if they would help disseminate. With welcoming arms, we batted ideas back and forth, clarified what the contribution of the resource could be, how it connected with other resources available on the NCRM site and worked up a script. Writing a clear and simple script was important as we used a teleprompter to help the flow of filming and alleviate fear of talking to camera! To help curb the anxiety of putting together a resource like this, NCRM provided a detailed 'how to' guide covering how to write the script, alongside a '7 tips for presenters' covering everything from how many words per slide to how best to signpost between content between videos. The 3-part series was filmed in August 2019 at the University of Southampton – providing a unique opportunity to think about the mechanics of how to turn a research article into a video script, easier said than done. Working with the production team, we paid particular attention to how abstract, conceptual and empirical points can be supported

by video and photographic evidence to aid understanding and example arguments made.

I now aim to use the video for helping to disseminate ideas in my paper with David, to help articulate these ideas using a visual method like video, to share on my vlog ([www.michaelduignan.uk](http://www.michaelduignan.uk)) and microblog (Twitter: @michaelbduignan). And, to use as a teaching resource for research students across all levels, including PhD students and faculty. If you have a methodological paper or ideas, I would highly recommend getting in touch with NCRM to see how they could help support and help disseminate your work. Or, if you prefer, drop me a line and I'll happily talk through my experiences with you.

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Vlog: [www.michaelduignan.uk](http://www.michaelduignan.uk)

## References

- 1 Duignan, M., McGillivray, D. Walking methodologies, digital platforms and the interrogation of Olympic spaces: the '#RioZones-Approach'. *Tourism Geographies*, 2019
- 2 To be available from [www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/)

# Methodological innovations and resources: a keynote panel for the World Conference on Qualitative Research

Melanie Nind, NCRM, University of Southampton

**During the third phase of the National Centre for Research Methods the Centre has acted as a focal point for national and international research and training activities in social science research methods. It has driven forward methodological development and innovation through a programme of cutting-edge research, and it has supported capacity building for social scientists through a programme of methods training and development of pedagogic resources. This was the key message that co-directors Ros Edwards, Lynn Jamieson and I took to the World Conference on Qualitative Research in Porto in October 2019.**

The conference presented an ideal opportunity to showcase NCRM work and resources on qualitative research methods to researchers across the world. Conference delegates came from a range of disciplines and career stages to share their work and develop their methodological knowledge and skills. The topics under scrutiny were hugely diverse but the uniting feature was an interest in what qualitative research could achieve.

Our keynote panel session drew on our own research and resource development for NCRM and illustrated some of the variety in qualitative methods development work in NCRM. My session made the case for the participatory potential of focus group methods. This is an interest that has grown through various projects in which I have wanted to understand and enact research that follows an inclusive or democratic turn. I argued that focus groups are an important way of creating vibrant interactive spaces in which best use can be made of participants' potential not just to contribute, but to learn from each other's contributions and come to know themselves and their own situation a little better. Focus groups, which have a history within feminist research and social justice work, can create these spaces, especially when the researcher is alert to their participatory and transformative potential and is open to the idea of hybrids of focus group and other methods. I showed the logic of this and,

influenced by the findings of the NCRM Pedagogy of Methodological Learning study, I used data as my pedagogic hook to demonstrate. It was good to be able to flag the NCRM course and video materials as well as the published papers for those interested to follow up.

Ros Edwards was next up with a paper on her work, with Helen Moewaka Barnes (Massey, New Zealand), Deborah McGregor (York, Canada) and Tula Brannelly (Bournemouth, UK) on developing resources to support research partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. The context here is international research initiatives that seek to address global challenges, which often require collaborations between western-based non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous researchers living in and working with their communities. Despite best intentions, such collaborations may reproduce colonial approaches to knowledge production and use in that the historical, political and social context prevails. In the context of a world conference, delegates were highly receptive to the argument that some world views, methodologies and methods are accorded more legitimacy and privileged over others. They were keen to photograph Ros' images of the graphic materials developed with communications expert Christine Garrington (Maltstore Communications) and graphic artist (Olivia Hicks, Glasgow) to help non-Indigenous researchers think about how they can approach working with Indigenous researchers and communities. Again, the NCRM resources were highlighted.

Next, Lynn Jamieson spoke about our combined work, with Sarah Lewthwaite and Susie Weller, Southampton) to develop materials to support the teaching of the innovative 'breadth and depth method'. This method, developed through one of the NCRM research workpackages led by Ros Edwards and Lynn Jamieson, is designed for researching using large volumes of secondary (archived) qualitative data. The method enables analysis to span several, merged qualitative datasets with the advantage of quality control, associated contextual documentation and meta data, while remaining true to the principles that typically guide qualitative research. The NCRM Open Education Resources were flagged for conference delegates to explore ([www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/teaching\\_big\\_qual/](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/teaching_big_qual/)).

The discussion between ourselves as the panel and the very engaged audience reinforced the practical uses of the methods and resources in people's own various research and teaching endeavours. The publically funded model of nurturing methodological expertise that NCRM represents was attractive to delegates from the Asian Qualitative Research Association as a possible model. Invitations to events and countries far and wide ensued and highlighted issues of how regional and national centres for methods development can be funded, supported and enabled to collaborate. Despite rain in Porto like I have never seen before, and not enough time and space for networking conversations, this was a highly successful trip that indicates the need for methodological capacity building to reach worldwide.



# Remembering Kandy Woodfield

Debbie Collins, Director of NatCen Learning and NCRM doctoral researcher

**In 2019 we lost a member of our community whose work and company has enriched our lives. I refer to Kandy Woodfield: social researcher; trainer; CIPD professional; author; blogger; thought-leader, advocate and friend of NCRM. I had the pleasure of working with her for over a decade. Her enthusiasm, warmth, humour and sharp intelligence made her someone you wanted to spend time with. And she inspired many of us reach to beyond what we thought we were capable of, to push boundaries and to work together to bring about positive change for individuals, communities and wider society.**

From the outset of her career, Kandy combined social research with teaching and learning, undertaking research that gave voice to marginalised and hidden groups. Her academic research career began in the field of violence against women and spanned various areas of socio-legal research. She joined the (then) Qualitative Research Unit (QRU) at NatCen Social Research in 1997,

going on to become Deputy Director of the QRU, where along with colleagues she pioneered the development of NatCen's software tool for qualitative data analysis – FrameWork (now part of the NVivo analysis package). In 2006, whilst still Deputy Director of the QRU she founded NatCen Learning. Her passion for teaching and learning was instrumental in forging lasting partnerships between NatCen and many organisations, including Cardiff, Edinburgh and City University's QStep centres, and with Sage.

In 2012 she co-founded, with Sage and the Oxford Internet Institute the New Social Media, New Social Science (NSMNSS) international network. Funded by NCRM, the network sought to address the question: 'should social science researchers embrace social media, and if we do, what are the implications for our methods and practice?' The network produced numerous outputs, including a blog<sup>1</sup> that is still going strong, and engaged with the wider community through its Twitter account - @NSMSS.

In 2015 Kandy became Head of Social Sciences at the Higher Education Academy before moving on to lead Learning and Development at the Samaritans and establishing her own consultancy. She remained actively involved in NSMNSS, editing The Ethics of Online Research<sup>2</sup>, writing her blog 'Pushing at the Edges'<sup>3</sup> and remaining 'passionate about learning, leading change and helping people identify their strengths and reach their goals'. Kandy was a champion for high quality, ethical, social research and training. She is sorely missed but lives on through her many achievements.

## Reference

- 1 <http://nsmnss.blogspot.com/>
- 2 <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/The-Ethics-of-Online-Research/?k=9781787144866> doi/10.1108/S2398-60182018000002013/full/html
- 3 <https://pushingattheedges.blog/author/kandywoodfield/>

## MethodsNews Newsletter 2004 - 2020

The 2020: 1 is the last issue of the MethodsNews newsletter. In the new phase of the National Centre for Research Methods the main focus will be on innovation-driven training in research methods. We will continue communicating with you via our website, social media and monthly e-bulletin. We have enjoyed producing the MethodsNews and we hope we can stay in touch with you via our other channels.

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# The NCRM International Visiting Exchange Scheme

Tarani Chandola, NCRM, University of Manchester

**The NCRM International Visitor Exchange Scheme (IVES) was set up as an important pillar of the NCRM's international strategy. The NCRM team wanted to promote and foster formal links with overseas experts and centres of methodological excellence. We also wanted to give social science researchers a chance to work with international methods experts. So we launched the scheme in 2015 with two components: a) an incoming visiting scholar awards for noted overseas experts working at the forefront of key methodological areas to visit a UK centre of methodological excellence in the social sciences, and b) an outgoing visiting scholar awards for early researchers from the UK in the social sciences to visit a centre of methodological excellence outside the UK.**

Early feedback from our stakeholders strongly suggested it was important to broaden out the category of early career researchers to include mid career researchers (up to 8 years from their PhD) which we did. We ran the scheme annually, with the last IVES competition held in 2018. The scheme has funded six inward and six outward scholars in total. For details and project descriptions, see the dedicated webpage available on the NCRM website<sup>1</sup>. We were delighted to fund a number of projects on topics that went far beyond the NCRM team's expertise.

**Helen Johnson** (University of Brighton) visited the Cultures Lab at McGill University, and produced research on Poetic Autoethnographies and the methods of collaborative poetics. Her research explored approaches to fostering research collaborations that explored experiences of discrimination and privilege through live spoken word performances. Another project on methods of live audience participation was carried out by **Michael Schober** (from the New School for Social Research), which explored methods for tracking audience participation unobtrusively in live performances. He used new tools for combining and simultaneously visualizing multiple

fine-grained data streams, e.g., facial expression, breathing and movement, from the perspective of any audience member or the performer.

**Juan Grigera** (UCL) visited the Department of Sociology, John Hopkins University to explore Natural Language Processing Methods that enables machines to read newspapers more efficiently. **Michelle Fine** (City University of New York) and **Jill Bradbury** (Witwatersrand University) ran a two day methodology colloquium and gave a short class that explored the methods of participatory action research and social science advocacy through varied narrative research approaches, such as visual, ethnographic, longitudinal, digital, and multi-modal methods. **Mick Couper** (University of Michigan) contributed to the use of new technologies for data collection, such as new mobile and digital technologies, in longitudinal surveys such as Understanding Society. **Arkadiusz Wiśniowski** (University of Manchester) visited the School of Demography at the Australian National University to explore how to incorporate uncertainty about future events into population projections. These uncertainties related not just to future events, but to imperfect data collection mechanisms, natural fluctuations in the data, and uncertainty about the method used to forecast future.

**Robert Ackland** (from the Centre for Social Research & Methods, Australian National University) gave a master class for social scientists on the use of cutting-edge computational methods on digital social science data. The objective of the class was to have social scientists join in the digital science and data revolution, so that social scientists researching with big data, in addition to researching about big data. **Ben Domingue** (Stanford University) also gave a masterclass to social scientists on the biosocial data revolution, with details on the methods of incorporating genetic data and analysis into social science research.

**Jonathon Nagler** (from New York University) explored how social media data, primarily Twitter and Facebook posts, can provide a new way of measuring public opinion,

addressing one of the key challenges that arises from Twitter data with regard to bias and representation through incorporating geolocation data of the tweet. **Alasdair Jones** (London School of Economics) visited Professor Jennifer Curtin and Professor Peter Davis (COMPASS, University of Auckland) to develop methods for integrating qualitative research into policy evaluation research. **Alexandru Cernat** visited the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research to explore the possibility of Adaptive Survey Designs (data collection in multiple stages and applying different strategies for particular groups of respondent and stages) in order to address the challenges faced by all survey research organisations in terms of increasing costs and non-response of participants. **Jenny Douglas** (The Open University) visited the DC CFAR Social and Behavioral Sciences Core (George Washington University) to explore how intersectionality-informed methodological frameworks that can be used to investigate the intersections of race, class and gender into ethnicity in health research.

The NCRM team can genuinely say that we could not have planned this large array of methods topics and experts by ourselves. Poetry slams, participatory action methods, tracking breathing and movement, new forms of digital social and health data, combining methodological approaches to understand, evaluate and forecast, these are some of the new methods of interest in the social sciences. This level of international engagement with new social science methods and approaches was only made feasible by the open annual call for IVES. We hope that we will be able to continue this level of international engagement and support for early and mid career social scientists in the future.

## Reference

1 <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/IVES/home.php>

## NCRM training in 2020



**Introduction to Latent Class Analysis**, Alexandru Cernat, 3 - 4 February, Southampton

**Using Smartphone Sensors, Apps and Wearables in Social Science Research**, Bella Struminskaya and Florian Keusch, 19 - 20 March, London

**Introduction to Spatial Data and Using R as a GIS**, Nick Bearman, 7 May, Cardiff

**Interpretive Political Science Intensive Course**, Rod Rhodes, Jack Corbett, John Boswell, Tamara Metze, 15 - 17 June, Southampton

**Co-Producing Research with Communities: Lessons from the Productive Margins Programme**, Jenny Barker and Helen Thomas-Hughes, 29 - 30 September, Bristol

To find out more about our training courses and events and to register please visit [www.ncrm.ac.uk/training](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/training). New courses are continuously organised and added to the database.

### ABOUT NCRM

The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) was established by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2004 and was originally coordinated from the University of Southampton.

Since 2014 NCRM has been a partnership between three universities with international reputations in methodological research and training in the social sciences: Southampton, Manchester and Edinburgh.

This year NCRM is entering a new phase with an ESRC award for 5 years. This new phase will focus on delivering a comprehensive programme of cutting-edge research methods training across the UK.

We will not be publishing the MethodsNews Newsletter in the new phase but we will stay in touch with you via our e-bulletin, website and social media.

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We would like to include you in the development of our new training portal. Please help us to shape the new portal by filling in a short user survey.

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