

COST Action CA19103 - PhD School/Conference Meeting
Royal Holloway, University of London
Friday 24th - Tuesday 28th June 2022

COST Summer School and Conference on LGBTQI+ Methodologies

With sponsorship from COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) and from Royal Holloway, we want to bring together PhD students and Early Career Researchers/Academics in the Summer School, to be followed by an inter-disciplinary conference on the use and integration of different techniques and methodologies. Within the Social Sciences, the disciplines of Management, Sociology, Politics and Economics have all begun to look at issues faced by LGBTQI+ communities, using a range of different methods. Analysis has benefitted from the increased collection of SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) data. A notable example is the UK Census 2021 where the first results from England and Wales will be available this Summer.

Traditional quantitative and qualitative techniques are challenged by the inherent problem of identification. For large datasets, many survey participants decline to answer sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) questions, or may answer them inaccurately. There is no 'reference' sample (we do not know how many sexual minority individuals are in the overall population) to provide a benchmark. In qualitative work, finding an appropriate group of individuals to engage with is highly problematic. This is one reason to explore widely the nature of different methodologies and ways to address these problems.

Potential methodologies for understanding the experiences and difficulties faced by LGBTQI+ individuals and families extend beyond traditional social sciences. There has been extensive work in psychology and a broad range of humanities subjects under the rubric of 'Queer Studies'. This needs to take account of the fluidity and non-binary nature of SOGI attributes.

Organisation

All activities will be in-person at Royal Holloway's campus (accoladed as the most beautiful in England) in Egham, a half-hour train journey from London Waterloo station. Accommodation and meals will be in the Grade 1 listed Founder's Building. The Summer School and Conference are residential. The COST Action is designed to encourage networking, so in-person attendance is viewed as vital. Further, it is hoped and anticipated that the participants will continue to network in the future, building up a strong European and international group of scholars working together.

The Summer School will begin in the afternoon of the 24th June and continue through the morning of the 26th June. It is designed for PhD students/Post-docs/and Early Career Researchers (normally within eight years of the award of the PhD) in the field. This does not mean that individuals need to have LGBTQI+ topics as the primary focus of their PhD or research, but that they have interests in researching in this field and contributing to the

growing body of knowledge and understanding. All disciplinary backgrounds will be considered.

It is expected that normally the participants will stay for the conference on the 27th and 28th June. During the Summer School, participants will engage in active projects and will present their discussions in the Conference (in either a poster or dedicated session).

From the COST Action, academics participating include: Tindara Addabbo (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia), Anna Einarsdottir (University of York), Manwel Ellul (Malta), Jeff Frank (Royal Holloway), André Krouwel (Vrije University Amsterdam), and Sergiu Miscoiu (Babeş-Bolyai University). Royal Holloway has interdisciplinary strengths in related subjects, notably through the Gender Institute, and is world-leading in the relevant disciplines and in the Humanities.

Funding

COST has allocated 15 funded training places to cover room, board and reasonable transportation costs. We anticipate 20 PhD/ECR places, and hope that applicants will avail themselves of national funding opportunities to facilitate additional attendees.

There will also be some support available for Conference attendees and speakers.

Application

This preliminary distribution is made through the COST network, and any informal enquiries can be made to Jeff Frank at j.frank@rhul.ac.uk.

We are developing the web-site and in the near future formal applications can be made through the COST system. Formal applications will have a deadline of the 30th April 2022. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications by the 9th May 2022.

Specific Module Plans

1. Hard to Reach Groups and On-line Surveys (Andre Krouwel)

Increasingly researchers collect data using online surveys, which are much faster, easier to use for the respondents as well as the researchers, cheaper, with better quality of data collection which allows faster data analysis and easily adaptable to fieldwork needs. My workshop/seminar will discuss these challenges that are at the cutting-edge of the online survey data collection and analysis.

I aim to address several questions concerning first the use of online survey methods to address the most appropriate social science questions in the context of developed Western societies as well as newly developing non-Western settings where internet use is still expanding. Second, we aim to address methodological challenges to online surveys in different settings. Third, we would like to discuss how these large datasets obtained via the use of online surveys can best be analysed to yield new information about modern societies

in the West as well as the non-Western contexts. What then are the social science research questions that lend themselves best to be addressed by online surveys?

Hard to reach groups - a term primarily used by researchers to describe groups of people who have been historically difficult to find or contact - such as minority groups including LGBTQ+, people with extreme ideological orientations and so on create even more challenges for researchers in terms of contacting and interviewing, identifying barriers to reaching these population of interest, convincing them to participate and building trust that the collected data is not endangering them. Building trust with interested participants is crucial, especially concerning sensitive questions, as well as cultural barriers and issues of comparativeness that can impact the reliability and validity of the data collected. Moreover, sensitive issues that create conformist pressures upon respondents, geographic areas where traditional surveys are almost impossible to conduct offer best opportunities for exploiting the advantages of online surveys.

It is important for the public interest to include hard-to-reach groups in research because excluding certain sub-populations diminishes the ability to identify groups that potentially have the highest burden of discrimination and precarity and including such minority populations also allows us to better understand why group differences exist. This workshop/seminar will discuss the challenges in recruiting hard-to-reach populations and strategies to overcome those challenges, in particular in the context of online recruitment and surveying. In many countries, sophisticated applications of traditional fieldwork techniques simply are not available due to lack of experience and available fieldwork organization. Online surveys can also best fill the vacuum in the unavailable logistic support for researchers. Our discussion will focus on multiple approaches needed to recruit members of hard-to-reach populations.

Methodological challenges in online surveys most often occur in the design of the online questionnaire as well the sampling of individual respondents. Question wording and online survey page design are both likely to influence response rates, data reliability as well as validity. Comparative best practices should be brought into our discussion and shared for future development by the participants.

Online surveys typically get significantly larger datasets compared to the traditional methods. Rendering these data representative via different statistical techniques continues to be a challenge. This is even more difficult for minority groups and hard-to-reach populations. How do you address issues of representativeness, robustness of findings and cross-national comparability? Hence there is a need to discuss various weighting techniques and alternative methods, including methodologies from statistics and survey design.

Finally, we need to address the societal and political context in which we collect data in our era. While online polling provides ample opportunity for researchers, it is hardly a safe and trusted environment for many. Not only are many worries about privacy issues when disclosing personal information and opinions, for LGBTQ+ populations such disclosure might entail additional risks. This is even more the case in intolerant environments and countries experiencing democratic backsliding and from more authoritarian regimes with varying degrees of economic development, internet access and other resource inequalities.

2. Using multiple methods to generate holistic understanding (Anna Einarsdottir)

Building on an Economic and Social Research Council funded study into LGBT+ employee networks in the National Health Services, United Kingdom, this session explores the value of using multiple methods to offer a better understanding of how networks are run and what they can do to improve relationships between colleagues, and ultimately, improve the wellbeing of LGBT+ employees. To achieve this, four objectives were set. First, establish a baseline understanding of how LGBT+ employee networks operate. Second, map network membership and explore ways of addressing insufficient representation of different groups within the networks. Third, explore what support is in place to achieve the network's vision and what barriers exist to realise this vision, and finally, examine ways of using LGBT+ employee networks to address negativity towards sexual and gender minorities more effectively. Given the broad remit of the research and the importance of generating impact, a multimethod approach was adopted to produce diverse datasets comprising two online surveys, 9 case studies (consisting of participant observations and semi-structured interviews) and 120 short video messages. The session will address the following issues:

- Project objectives, why multimethod approach?
- Research design
- Developing meaningful survey questions (for whom) for different purposes
- Gatekeepers and survey fatigue
- Obtaining network/group consent
- Observing meetings and the level of participation
- The role of researchers, from participatory to advisory?
- Insider/outsider status
- Challenges around (in)visibility
- Who do we interview? Why?
- Feeding back to networks (both the good and the bad)
- Public visibility and impact, using alternative creative methods (video booth)
- Transgressing the classic quantitative and qualitative divide
- Ethical challenges around informed consent, identification, research role, visibility, inclusion/exclusion of videos
- Using film for dissemination

3. Well-being at work, human resources practices and perceived discrimination (Tindara Addabbo)

The proposed session aims at addressing the interaction between perceived discrimination, with special regards to sexual orientation, well-being at work and human resource practices. A secondary data source will be used for the purpose: the sixth wave of European Working Condition Survey, collected in 2015 (a new survey should be issued this year). Analysing the content of EWCS a critical assessment on how quality of work can be defined and to what is missing to answer the research questions.

The module will alternate lectures, teamwork and laboratory sessions. At the end of the module a debate on the results will be held in order to suggest policies in the light of the results achieved and to design new research.

After completion of the module the trainees will improve their knowledge on the following concepts:

- well-being at work (multiple dimensions, determinants, measurement)
- human resource practices and their expected interaction with dimensions of well-being, job characteristics and perception of discrimination
- theories of discrimination with special regards to the labour market and techniques to measure discrimination

Methodologies

Quantitative methods ranging from descriptive statistics, to limited dependent variables and latent variables models (the latter will be used to estimate the impact of perceived discrimination on variables not directly observed). Laboratory session will be held in STATA but also during classes use of excel to analyse metadata will allow researchers less familiar with quantitative methods to take part to the sessions.

Amongst the soft skills that the module aims at improving

- Team work
- Problem solving
- Critical analysis
- Mutual respect

4. Theoretical models of LGBTQI+ Issues (Jeff Frank)

Within the Economics literature, there has been limited theoretical modelling of LGBTQI+ issues. While this is somewhat reflective of a general shift to 'natural experiments' and seeking to rely upon identification through 'difference-in-difference' models, there is an argument that we need to go deeper into understanding how LGBTQI+ individuals structure their lives and their households/families to reflect ongoing challenges.

This discussion includes issues of how sexual orientation and gender identity relate to other equality and diversity characteristics, intersectionality and also the policy measures that can address equity and efficiency in workplace and other organisational structures.

5. Focus Groups as Research Instruments. Case Study: The (non-) Participation of Sexual Minorities' Associations to French Grand Débat (2019) (Sergiu Mişcoiu)

A focus group is a research method that brings together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting. The group is chosen due to predefined demographic traits, and the questions are designed to shed light on a topic of interest. Focus groups are a type of qualitative research.

While this tool is particularly useful for determining the motivations of individual and collective action and behaviour, Focus Groups are not extensively used beyond sociological and marketing research. However, they could be efficient for understanding the reasoning of different social actors while interacting with each other, and more particularly the challenges of the excluded and marginalized persons and groups, such as, in many cases, the LGBTQI+.

In my exposé, I will explain the way FGs can be employed in order to analyse some essential aspects related to sexual minority inclusion. I will use as case study the involvement of the sexual minorities' NGOs in one of the most extensive (but also most contested) public deliberative-like consultations – the 2019 Grand Débat in France – in order to highlight the way FGs can reveal the expectations, the perceptions, the intentions and the motivations for action of sexual minorities' individuals and representative associations.

Conclusion

However, this Summer School is all about people working together. It remains the case that there is perhaps a surprisingly limited number of people researching on these topics, and we want to bring together established academics, PhD students and Early Career Researchers to start a cohesive, multi-disciplinary collective. We will also be involving public and private sector organisations with expertise in the area.