



C-URGE

Anthropology of Global
Climate Urgency

Report & recording on online portal of training module on 'digital ethnography' pre- fieldwork

DELIVERABLE 5.4

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Deliverable 20 – Report + recording on online portal of training module on ‘digital ethnography’ pre-fieldwork.

PROJECT	
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Description

Report + recording on online portal of training module on ‘digital ethnography’ pre-fieldwork

Tasks Achieved in Work Package WP5 – Training

Task 5.13.: Design and implement a training module on digital ethnography pre-fieldwork (KUL) M12 - M 14

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Project summary

C-URGE is an interdisciplinary Doctoral Network (DN) focused on the Anthropology of Global Climate Urgency (2023–2027). Its overarching aim is to respond to the growing call—expressed by European research councils, funding agencies, governments, civil society, and students—for the social sciences to play a more active role in addressing climate change.

Rather than taking the concept of ‘urgency’ for granted, C-URGE critically investigates how climate urgency is socially and culturally constructed, perceived, and lived. In doing so, the project takes on a dual challenge: first, to deepen our understanding of the diverse ways in which urgency is shaped and mobilized in relation to environmental change; and second, to train a new generation of researchers equipped to bridge academic knowledge with practical skills—fostering dialogue across research, policymaking, and civil society.

C-URGE is rooted in a strong and diverse partnership that spans both academic and non-academic worlds. The network connects four European universities—KU Leuven (Belgium), Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (Germany), the University of Catania (Italy), and Uppsala University (Sweden)—with six non-academic partners and the support of an interdisciplinary advisory board. Together, they create a rich environment for learning, exchange, and co-production of knowledge.

The project’s research unfolds across four continents, with 10 Doctoral Candidates (DCs) conducting in-depth ethnographic fieldwork in regions where the effects—and perceptions—of climate change take on complex, locally grounded forms. Through this work, the project explores how different temporalities and meanings of climate urgency emerge and are negotiated in everyday life, while also tracing their broader global entanglements and far-reaching implications.

But C-URGE is more than a research program. It is a space for experimentation, dialogue, and capacity building—where academic training is combined with hands-on experience in organizations engaged in science communication, environmental policy, social transformation, and grassroots activism. This approach ensures that researchers are not only well-grounded theoretically and methodologically but also equipped to move across sectors and contribute to climate action in concrete, context-sensitive ways.

In line with the aims of the European Climate Pact, C-URGE strengthens the links between knowledge and action, offering a transdisciplinary response to the multiple urgencies brought about by climate change. The perspectives and insights it generates aim to inform both public debate and policy innovation—within and beyond Europe.

Introduction

To train the Doctoral Candidates (DCs) in digital ethnography before their fieldwork, the Online Ethnography Training Cycle was developed, organized and hosted by KUL. The speakers were chosen through recommendations by the DCs and Prof. Katrien Pype on the basis of their expertise in different facets of digital anthropology.

To make the seminars engaging, each two-hour session included 1) 1 hour lecture by the speaker, 2) Q&A session and 3) an interactive exercise or activity. As such, the DCs had the opportunity to thoughtfully discuss directly with experts in digital anthropology.

The series offered the DCs a masterclass in digital ethnography from experts in anthropology and beyond, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to conduct online research. Within these interactive seminars, the DCs actively conversed with renowned scholars and learned cutting-edge methods, theories and other insights invaluable to their projects. Springing from this training cycle, the DCs will launch their online research component of their projects and deftly navigate the methodological, theoretical and ethical challenges that arise in their fields.

Program

January 24, 3-5 pm CET

Re-examining Power and Positionality within Digital Participatory Methods

Aparajita Bhandari (University of Waterloo)

Participatory research is a form of research inquiry that integrates, “investigation, educational work, and action”. Within this framework people are not merely the subjects of analysis; instead, they are—ideally—principal actors in the creation, collection, analysis and dissemination of the data. Although participatory research approaches have gained popularity across varying spheres of research—governmental, academia, non-profit—there are still limitations. While participatory research aims to “empower” community members and create a more equal power relationship between researchers and the people that they are studying, many participatory research projects still do not seriously and critically take into account larger matrices of power outside of the specific issue being studied. In this seminar the focus is on interrogating and understanding the complex contours of power that exist between, within and among communities and research actors. We will discuss the varying challenges and limitations—theoretical, material, and ethical—that researchers may come up against when engaging in participatory research, especially within the realm of digital studies and work together to map out solutions and imagine more just alternatives.

January 31, 3-5 pm CET

Infrastructuring Collaborative Hermeneutics: Databasing Double Binds while Pursuing PECE

Mike Fortun (UC Irvine), Kim Fortun (UC Irvine), Brandon Costelloe-Kuehn (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), and Lindsay Poirier (Smith College)

In this presentation we discuss digital infrastructures as an “experimental system” for producing, curating, communicating and politically activating ethnographic knowledge. We focus on our design, development, and use of the [Platform for Experimental Collaborative Ethnography](#) (PECE), open source software supporting virtual research environments for cultural anthropologists, historians, cultural heritage scholars, and community organizations that working with—and openly share—diverse data (including extensive “unstructured” data) largely through interpretive methods. We present the multiple uses and ends of PECE: as a practical project to technically infrastructure ethnographic data sharing and collaboration; as a research project to explore and understand the limits and valences of digital space for archivization and knowledge production; as an inquiry into the intellectual, social, and political consequences of different data cultures and language (semiotic) ideologies; and as an experiment in counter-hegemonic forms of scholarly work, from community archives (such as the [Formosa Plastics Global Archive](#), focused on activist data collection in highly

polluted fenceline communities) to new forms of peer review and open access publication.

February 7, 3-5 pm CET

The intelligent termination of the stupid human civilization

Franco Berardi

Journalists and scientists discuss the dangers of unbridled application of Artificial Intelligence and about the need of ethical regulation, but military figures are not detained by this kind of doubts and hesitation. They cannot hesitate because of the fundamental rule of competition: the enemy might implement this technological possibility, so I cannot renounce to develop it. This is why the talk about developing or not certain applications of AI is nonsense. This why all the talk about ethical development of intelligent technology is bullshit. Intelligent technologies will be developed exactly because they are dangerous, exactly because they are deadly. The general function of the inorganic intelligent entity is to introduce the information order into the drive organism. The automaton has an ordering mission, but it encounters a factor of chaos on its way: the organic drive, irreducible to numerical order. The automaton extends its dominion into ever new fields of social action, but fails to complete its mission as long as its expansion is limited by the persistence of the human chaotic factor. Now the possibility arises that at some point the automaton will be able to eliminate the chaotic factor in the only possible way: by terminating human society. We can distinguish three dimensions of Reality: the existing, the possible and the necessary. The existing (or contingent) has the characteristics of chaos. The evolution of the existing follows the lines of the possible, or those of the necessary. The possible is a projection of will and imagination. The necessity is implicit in the strength of biology, and now also in the strength of the logical machine. The cognitive automaton allows us to foresee the extermination of the contingent by the necessary, which naturally implies an annulment of the possible, because there is no possible without the contingency of the existent.

February 28, 3-5 pm CET

Whatever works: digital ethnography as a flat methodology

John Postill (RMIT University)

In this talk I draw from twenty years practising digital ethnography in the UK, Malaysia, Indonesia, Spain and Australia to appraise this methodology, with social movement research as the focus. I start with a brief overview of digital ethnography as a fuzzy, free-spirited variant of qualitative research. I then compare two projects of mine separated by a decade: a hybrid (online/offline) study of Spain's indignados movement in the early 2010s (Postill 2018) and a recent online 'lurking' study of the anti- woke movement. I argue for the versatility of digital ethnography as a 'flat methodology' that need not elevate any one method above others, not even participant observation (Postill in press). This agnosticism gives researchers a license to do 'whatever works' – if they can overcome, that is, the epistemological and institutional anxieties that often go with this seemingly anarchic way of doing things.

March 6, 3-5 pm CET

Social (Media) Distancing: On digital espionage and ethics in the field

Jennifer Cearnls (UCL)

While anthropology has long privileged physical proximity and presence as a central tenet of ethnographic method, digital methods can also afford a certain sense of social distance, which in fact can be beneficial to the research process. This talk will draw on my experiences of fieldwork both online and offline amongst marginalised groups in Cuba and its diaspora in Miami to explore the ways in which digital distance can level the relationship between researcher and researched, and ultimately lead to a more ethical way of carrying out fieldwork amongst vulnerable communities.

March 27, 3-5 pm CET

Researching Materiality Digitally

Hannah Knox (UCL)

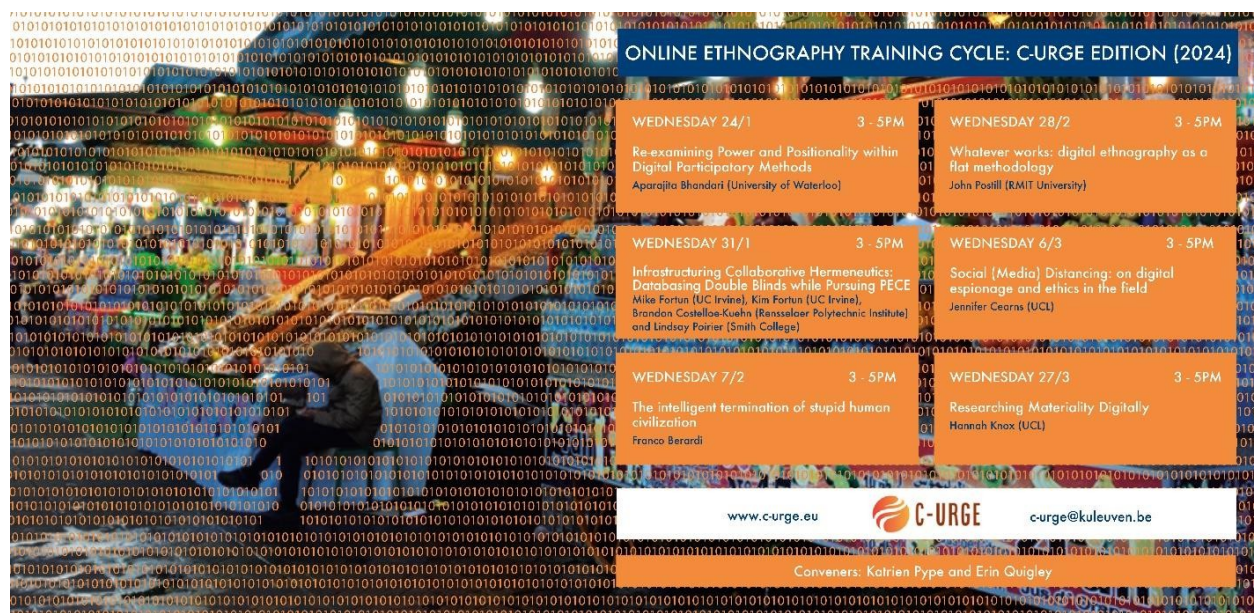
In this seminar we will explore methods and approaches for understanding material relations using digital tools. Many anthropologists have turned their attention in recent years to analysing social life through a materialist lens. Drawing on approaches from STS, material culture studies, environmental anthropology and the anthropology of infrastructure, anthropologists have become well versed in analysing how social relations are produced, challenged and mediated through materials – from concrete to sand, mould to dust, water, heat or energy. But our experience of materials is not only immediate and embodied but is frequently itself mediated through digital systems of analysis and representation. Climate is a perfect example of this, an aggregate of traces collected around the world, modelled through statistical analysis and formed into computational projections. How as anthropologists should we make sense of such materialities in their digital mediation?

In this seminar we will explore how digital systems are mediating materialities and with what social effects. We will consider some of the approaches that have been taken to digital materiality, from critical analyses of power and control to collaborative practices of digital activism. We will then have the opportunity to discuss how you anticipate digital materiality might manifest in your research, with a discussion about ethnographic and collaborative possibilities for analysing and engaging these processes.

To prepare for this seminar I would like you to think about how materiality figures in your own PhD project. What kinds of materials are people you are doing research with focused on? What are they trying to do with or on these materials? In what ways are these materialities digitally mediated? Who are the actors involved in the mediation (people, platforms, devices, methods)? Who is included/excluded by these digital mediations? Do you think ethnography could contribute to making these mediations better? How would this be done in practice?

Advertisement and Communication

To advertise the training series, C-Urge commissioned a poster to be made by a graphic designer. This was published on the C-Urge website and LinkedIn page as well as advertised at KU Leuven in the Faculty of Social Sciences monthly newsletter, in the Department of Anthropology mailing list and on the screen displays around the Faculty of Social Sciences campus.



ONLINE WORLDS/ CONNECTED LIVES

CASES AND CONVERSATIONS IN DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY



The advertisement on the C-Urge social media included a brief text description to quickly grab attention:

“

Organized by KU Leuven, this seminar series will explore pressing ethical, theoretical and methodological quandaries in digital ethnography. We are delighted to welcome the speakers of these six sessions who will present their expert insights and experience on topics such as collaborative and

”

participatory research, digital tools, power dynamics, and more. Drawing from these reflective dialogues, the C-Urge PhDs will launch their own research projects in light of accelerating socio-environmental change and climatic urgency around the globe.

The Online Ethnography Training Cycle: C-Urge Edition (2024) was open for external participation. Participants included master's students, PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and professors from KU Leuven and beyond. This allowed for a stronger outreach of C-Urge activities with wider academic networks. All the seminars were recorded and uploaded to the C-Urge website: <https://www.c-urge.eu/copy-of-training-series>

List of abbreviations

CS	Citizen Scientist
DC	Doctoral Candidate
DN	Doctoral Network