Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability
Prof. Dr. Jakkrit Sangkhamanee

Head of Local Organising Committee
Chulalongkorn University | Department of Sociology & Anthropology

Call for Abstracts (Deadline: Tuesday, 15.08.2023)

Session "Towards Decolonial Reflexivity. A Dialogic Approach Towards Decolonizing Social Science Methodology"

4th International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (SMUS Conference) & 4th RC33 Regional Conference Asia: Thailand, 23–29.07.2024, hosted by Chulalongkorn University (Thailand)

Dear Colleagues,

We hereby invite you to submit an abstract for "Towards Decolonial Reflexivity. A Dialogic Approach Towards Decolonizing Social Science Methodology" at the "4th International and Interdisciplinary Conference on **Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability**" ("SMUS Conference"), which will simultaneously be the "4th RC33 Regional Conference Asia: Thailand" and take place on site at the **Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University** (Bangkok, Thailand) from **Tuesday, July 23rd, to Monday, July 29th, 2024**.

Session Organizers

1. Gabriel Faimau, University of Botswana (Botswana), faimaug@UB.AC.BW
2. Nina Baur, TU Berlin (Germany), nina.baur@tu-berlin.de

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Session Topic

While there has been a long ongoing debate on decolonizing social theory, the debate on decolonizing social science methodology has just recently started. In this context, in the course of the SMUS Conferences in Botswana in 2021, Brazil in 2022 and India 2023, contributors have identified and further elaborated specific ways of thinking about decolonizing social science methodology but also raised new methodological questions, namely:

(1) The ideological view of decoloniality dismantles "positivist" epistemology and philosophy of science of the Global North and reveals power relations that result in epistemicide. The challenges of this view are (a) that – if one replaces Northern "positivist" epistemologies – then what should they be replaced with? How can this be done better? If relativism is taken seriously, then what is the difference between "fake news" and "alternative facts" and scientific knowledge? Moreover, many research questions in the social sciences require being sure about (dis)similarities between contexts, e.g. in social inequality research. (b) The debate has also shown that the ideological view of decoloniality reproduces the fallacy it wants to overcome by making monolithic assumptions of "Eurocentricsm," "The West" and the "Global North," thus ignoring that positivism has been outdated in Continental European philosophy of science for almost 200 years and that today, there is a variety of epistemic cultures not only in the Global South but also in the Global North (e.g., pragmatism, phenomenology, critical rationalism, critical theory, radical constructivism, relationism, postmodernism, anarchism, epistemological historism, fallibism, evolutionary epistemology, postcolonialism or empirically-grounded philosophy of science). Today, a wide range of epistemological schools exists, and many of those can be much more easily linked to Southern epistemologies than 19th century positivism. So instead of asking how to overcome Northern epistemologies, it might ask: What are the (dis)similarities between specific epistemological schools? How can they productively learn from each other, complement each other, be productively linked, refined and integrated?

(2) Epistemic reconstruction shows how scholars of the Global South are (under)represented in the international system of science. In addition, power relations created by this system of science may have produced Global North scholars acting merely as "messengers" of Northern or Western epistemology. This reconstruction reveals the dilemma that the price of being assimilated to the variants of Western modernity is (self-induced) epistemicide and lack of self-confidence – the price for reconstructing categories of thoughts from one's local and particular tradition, in contrast, makes it hard to link to global social science discourse. So if scholars from the Global South want to be linked to global sociological discourse, how can they be stronger integrated into this discourse? How to change the mindset of scholars of the Global South to be more self-confident? Is it enough to simply differentiate between the "Global North" and the "Global South", or when and how do we need to be more refined in distinguishing scholars' social position, e.g. by differentiating between different countries or world regions of the Global South or by scholars' class, gender and race?

(3) As Gabriel Faimau has argued, the dialogic approach is the most promising, as it aims at decolonial reflexivity. Decolonial reflexivity acknowledges different types of epistemologies and stresses collaboration, conversation and dialogue. From this point of view, the important questions are how to go about this. How can scholars from the Global South become more visible and communicate on eye-level with colleagues from the Global North? What avenues can we explore in order to make dialogue or conversation and epistemological humility possible? Are there practical solutions (e.g. in the way of doing and writing up research and organizing conferences) for furthering this goal? In order to achieve this goal, at least four fields of actions can be identified – the ABCD of decolonising research practice. Papers in this session should address one of these actions and discuss both challenges and possible solutions for these challenges in research practice:

(A) According to Francis B. Nyamnjoh, a first step decolonizing research practice is "asking the right questions." Asking the right questions is about recognizing the embeddedness of social research in cultural values as well as scientific histories that shape the culture.

(B) Following Bagele Chilisa, "building cultural beliefs and values into methodology" is as important. For example, for Africa, Chilisa proposes research practice to draws on African philosophies and worldviews to inform the research design and research process.

(C) "Communicating from the local frame of reference" is as important. Mpoe Johannah Keikelame and Leslie Swartz argue that decolonising research practice "is not as much about the method, but more about the spaces that can enable the research process – and that through this process, researchers' identities also become reshaped or transformed." The dialogic nature of the decolonial reflexivity assumes research methods that recognize local context and empower the dynamic relationship between the researcher and researchee.

(D) Decolonizing research practice is not about getting rid of the existing methods but "diversifying the existing methods".

About the Conference

The "Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability" (GCSMUS or SMUS) together with the Research Committee on "Logic and Methodology in Sociology" (RC33) of the "International Sociology Association" (ISA) and the Research Network "Quantitative Methods" (RN21) of the European Sociology Association" (ESA) will organize a **4th International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability ("SMUS Conference")**, which will simultaneously be the **4th RC33 Regional Conference Asia: Thailand**, and take place ***on site*** at the **Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok, Thailand) from Tuesday, July 23rd, to Monday, July 29th, 2024**. The seven-day conference aims at continuing a global dialogue on methods and should attract methodologists from all over the world and all social and spatial sciences (e. g. anthropology, area studies, architecture, communication studies, computational sciences, digital humanities, educational sciences, geography, historical sciences, humanities, landscape planning, philosophy, psychology, sociology, urban design, urban planning, traffic planning and environmental

planning). The conference programme will include keynotes, sessions and advanced methodological training courses. With this intention, we invite scholars of all social and spatial sciences and other scholars who are interested in methodological discussions to suggest an abstract to any sessions of the conference. All papers have to address a methodological problem.

Please find more information on the above institutions on the following websites:

1. Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (GCSMUS): https://gcsmus.org/
2. ISA RC33: http://rc33.org/
3. ESA RN21: www.europeansociology.org/research-networks/rn21-quantitative-methods
4. Chulalongkorn University: https://www.chula.ac.th/en/

If you are interested in getting **further information on the conference** and other GCSMUS activities, please **subscribe to the SMUS newsletter** by registering via the following website: https://lists.tu-berlin.de/mailman/listinfo/mes-smusnews

Submission of Abstracts

If you are interested in **presenting a paper in any SMUS Thailand 2024 session**, please submit an **English-language abstract** containing the following information to SMUS Thailand via the official conference website (https://gcsmus.org/conferences/thailand/submission/) between **24.04.2023** and **15.08.2023.**

- Mention the Session Number and Name
- Paper Title
- Speakers (= name(s), email address(es), institutional affiliation(s))
- 100-200 Word Abstract (= short description of the proposed talk. The abstract should explain which methodological problem is addressed, why this is relevant, how the paper refers to the session and what the general line of argument will be.)
- Only one submission per individual will be entertained.

Please note that all sessions must adhere to the **rules of session organization** comprised in the RC33 statutes and GCSMUS Objectives (**see below**). Please note that you can give a **maximum of two papers** at the conference, including joint papers. The conference organizers will inform you if your proposed paper has been accepted for presentation at the conference. For further information, please see the conference website or contact the session organizers.

Please also kindly **forward this call to anybody to whom it might be of interest**.

Rules for Session Organization

1. There will be no conference fees.
2. The session organizers and speakers will be expected to provide for their own funding for accommodation and travel expenses. However, members of SMUS partner institutions will be able to apply for a travel grant via their home institution. In addition, there will be travel grants for non-SMUS scholars from India who present a paper or organize a session. Travel grants will be high enough to fully cover travel costs and living expenses. Details on the application process will follow in autumn this year.
3. The conference language is English. All papers therefore need to be presented in English.
4. All sessions have to be international: Each session should have speakers from at least two countries (exceptions will need good reasons).
5. Each paper must contain a methodological problem (any area, qualitative or quantitative).
6. There will be several calls for abstracts via the SMUS, RC33 and RN21 Newsletters. To begin with, session organizers can prepare a call for abstracts on their own initiative, then at a different time, there will be a common call for abstracts, and session organizers can ask anybody to submit a paper.
7. SMUS, RC33 and RN21 members may distribute these calls via other channels. SMUS members and session organizers are expected to actively advertise their session in their respective scientific communities.
8. Speakers can only have one talk per session. This also applies for joint papers. It will not be possible for A and B to present at the same time one paper as B and A during the same session. This would just extend the time allocated to these speakers.
9. Session organizers may present a paper in their own session.
10. Sessions will have a length of 90 minutes with a maximum of 4 papers or a length of 120 minutes with a maximum of 6 papers. Session organizers can invite as many speakers as they like. The number of sessions depends on the number of papers submitted to each session: for example, if 12 good papers are submitted to a session, there will be two sessions with a length of 90 minutes each with 6 papers in each session.
11. Papers may only be rejected for the conference if they do not present a methodological problem (as stated above), are not in English or are somehow considered by session organizers as not being appropriate or relevant for the conference. Session organizers may ask authors to revise and resubmit their paper so that it fits these requirements. If session organizers do not wish to consider a paper submitted to their session, they should inform the author and forward the paper to the local organizing team who will find a session where the paper fits for presentation.
12. Papers directly addressed to the conference organising committee, suggesting a session. The conference organizers will check the formal rules and then offer the paper to the session organizer of the most appropriate session. The session organizers will have to decide on whether or not the paper can be included in their session(s). If the session organizers think that the paper does not fit into their session(s), the papers has to be sent back to the conference organizing committee as soon as possible so that the committee can offer the papers to another session organizer.