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Doing Research in Complex Interwoven Research Engagements

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Abstract. When we conduct empirical work within CSCW research, we engage ourselves with various people, fields, domains, and topics which are part of the contexts which we study and/or are designing for. In many situations, the field, we study comprises interwoven multiplicities of technologies, artefacts, infrastructures, and people, which cannot easily be separated during fieldwork, in the analysis of the data, or in the write-up and presentation of the results. In these situations, we as researchers, produce specific engagements with our context of interests - and these engagements shape and challenge the kind of research we can do, are allowed to do, ethically can do, ethically are allowed to do, as well as what we want to do. In this panel, we will discuss what it means to do research as complex interwoven research engagements, and which methodological and ethical challenges which arises.

Interwoven Research Engagement

Can all empirical CSCW research be characterized as complex interwoven research engagements - or what makes empirical CSCW research into a complex interwoven research engagement? Multi-sited ethnography and design stipulates that the nature of the ‘field site’ cannot easily be bounded into one specific place or space for examination (Bjørn & Boulus-Rødje, 2015; Williams, Lindtner, Anderson, & Dourish, 2014), but instead is a social construction made for analytical purposes by the researchers (Blomberg & Karasti, 2013). The ‘field site’ is constructed through the choices and actions of the researcher, and past decisions shape future potential actions (Bjørn & Boulus, 2011). The ‘field site’ is shaped by the research interest, epistemological interests, and the theoretical assumptions arriving with the researcher. The perspective and positioning of the researcher matters for what is made visible or invisible when engaging with the field site, and thus matters for which kind of results can arrive from this work.

In this panel, we will discuss the methodological and ethical challenges which arrive when CSCW researchers enters complex interwoven engagements with their empirical field site. We will do this by asking and reflecting upon a set of questions across the various field sites, research interests, and epistemological positionings, which the panelists bring to the field. Together, the panelists bring experiences from multiple empirical cases, from different countries, within/outside organizations, focusing on understanding practice (Bjørn & Christensen, 2011; Bjørn, Scupola, & Fitzgerald, 2006; Borsotti, 2018; Borsotti & Bjørn, 2022; Boulus-Rødje, 2018; González-Pizarro, Figueroa, López, & Aragon, 2022; Muralidhar, Bossen, & O’Neill, 2022) and design of technologies (Bardzell et al., 2017; Green et al., 2017; Nov, Arazy, López, & Brusilovsky, 2013; Tandon, Siri, Mehra, & O’Neill, 2019). We will bring in our experiences and specifically reflect upon the challenges which arrive when we study our own organizations, political contexts, vulnerable populations, or online politics.

Together we will discuss the following questions:

- What makes your research a complex and interwoven research engagement?
- What are the common characteristics of the three types of complex and interwoven research engagements in this panel?
- Which methodological challenges are you experiencing in your research engagement?
- Which ethical challenges have you experienced in your research engagement?
- What are the lessons learned based upon your experiences in engaging in interwoven research relationships you would like to share?

Finally, we will discuss with the ECSCW2022 audience: Which methodological and ethical challenges arises when engaging in complex and interwoven research engagements?

Panelists

Pernille Bjørn (panel chair) is Professor and Deputy Head of Department for Research at the Department of Computer Science, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Her research spans multiple areas within CSCW including global software development, healthcare technologies, tech entrepreneurship, cooperative virtual reality, and equity in computer science. Most recently, she is starting up a new research project focusing on artistic explorations of the future of work in hybrid settings. Together with associate professor Nina Boulus-Rødje, she leads the Danish part of the ERASMUS+ FESTEM research project, where they explore tech entrepreneurship in Palestine.

Valeria Borsotti is a PhD candidate at the Department of Computer Science, University of Copenhagen (Denmark). She researches how socio-technical systems shape opportunities and constraints for equity, particularly in the domain of computing education. Her research is situated CSCW and feminist/queer HCI. Valeria is also interested in exploring experimental ethnographic methods. Valeria's research is part of the FemTech program directed by professor Pernille Bjørn. FemTech is a practice-based research programme that addresses the problem of how to facilitate inclusion in computing.

Nina Boulus-Rødje is Associate Professor in the Sustainable Digitalization Research Group, and the Director of Studies for Informatics (BSc) and Digital Transformation (MA), at the Department of People and Technologies, Roskilde University (Denmark). Her research is situated within CSCW and HCI, with special interest in tech entrepreneurship in developing countries, ethnographies of technologies, digital transformations, and sustainable digitalization. She co-leads the Danish part of the ERASMUS+ FESTEM research project.

Claudia López is an Assistant Professor at the informatics Department, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María (UTFSM) in Valparaíso, Chile. She is also an Associate Researcher at the Chilean National Center for Artificial Intelligence (CenIA), where she works on Human-centered AI. Her research focuses on designing and empirically evaluating social technologies for local politics and small organizations. She is an active member of the CSCW/HCI community in Latin America and participates in several initiatives to increase the participation of women in computing. She serves as program co-chair of ECSCW 2022.

Dr Jacki O’Neill is founding Director of Microsoft Africa Research Institute (MARI). She is passionate about designing technologies which enhance, rather than remove, agency and create sustainable futures. She brings this passion to the MARI where she is building a multi-disciplinary team, combining research, engineering, and design to solve local problems globally. An ethnographer by trade, her research aims to drive innovation in order to make the best possible technologies for work, health and society. Before leading the MARI, she was a Principal Researcher in the Technology for Emerging Markets (TEM) area at Microsoft Research India. She has led major research projects in the future of work from new labour platforms to workplace AI and chat; digital currencies and financial inclusion, and Global Healthcare.

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