



BSA Postgraduate Forum Regional Event

Public sociology and the role of the researcher:
engagement, communication and academic activism

Wednesday 29 March 2017, De Montfort University, Leicester

The event looks at the role of the researcher outside the academy in three related areas: academic activism, public engagement, and methodological approaches to co-producing research.

From an objectivist perspective, activism and academia are seen as fundamentally incompatible (Cancian, 1993): the impartiality and detachment expected of the researcher is situated fundamentally in opposition to the subjective engagement of the activist. This approach has been challenged by researchers across disciplines such as Disability Studies and Gender Studies. They argue that, in failing to challenge mainstream ideologies, the academy perpetuates them (Lynch, 1999). In response, the field has seen the development of interpretivist and participatory research approaches which address positionality, the power relationship between researcher and research collaborators and which provide a framework for the co-production of knowledge (eg Oliver, 1990). Some researchers have gone further, using their work to evidence to directly promote social change, working and volunteering in the field as well as in the academy.

In a research environment dominated by the REF, where the value of academic work is assessed by measurable outcomes, researchers are encouraged to work in a way that meets stringent academic standards, yet which has measurable impact and engages the public (Smith *et al*, 2011; Baim-Lance and Vindrola-Padros 2015). Academics conducting research into social inequalities, in particular, can see research-led activism as a vocation, yet there are fears that this work may affect their career (Flood *et al*, 2013). The institution sets the context for the way we may be active beyond the university: is activism included in what is meant by public engagement, and what sort of activism is acceptable within the academy?

How can a beginning researcher navigate these issues? We have taken inspiration from Zerai's (2007) three ways in which academics can contribute to social change, using them to structure a discussion day about the role of the academic in the world outside the academy. They are: (1) critiquing current practice in academia, (2) using academic expertise to act as consultants to grassroots activists, and (3) applying academic knowledge in the field through direct engagement and advocacy.

The programme

In keeping with the theme of the study day, activities are a mix of talks and participation. The intention is for us to learn from each other.

- Keynote speaker – **Dr Mark Carrigan**, Digital Fellow, The Sociological Review
- Guest speakers – Each speaker will cover one of each theme of the conference as it relates to their own research interests and experience:
 - **Paris Connolly**, Reproduction Research Group, De Montfort University
 - **Mirjam Twigt**, Department of Sociology / Media and Communication, University of Leicester
 - **Perikles Papaloukas**, Applied Social Science, De Montfort University
- Film showing – **Dr Michal Nahman** will lead a discussion based on a showing of her film 'Atomised mothers, isolation, 'austerity', and the politics of parenthood', a film created using a participatory method. The discussion will explore alternative ways of working with participants and communicating research findings to a (non-)academic audience.
- PechaKucha/stand-up session - Postgraduate participants are invited to showcase their own work in this area and to bring ideas about practice to share in a 5-minute talk. There are slots for 8 talks; a 200-word abstract needs to be submitted by **February 24th 2017**. Please contact the organiser for further details.
- Workshops – A workshop session enables participants to focus in on discussing particular areas they want to follow up on in depth. Participants will choose their group on the day.
- Postgraduate participants are invited to present posters. All posters will be accepted. Participants must confirm that they are bringing a poster by **1st March 2017**. Please contact the organisers for further details about format.

Competitions

Participants are encouraged to submit a poster for a poster competition, which will be judged by the conference organisers. All posters will be accepted. Please contact the organiser for details and to submit your abstract.

There will also be a small prize for the best PechaKucha/Standup presentation, selected by a ballot of the conference participants.



Programme

Registration opens at 9am on the day, and the event will finish at around 5pm. A full programme will be released nearer the time.

Getting to De Montfort University

The venue is the Queen's Building room 0.15, on the ground floor (LE2 7DR). It is building 29 on the campus map, and is situated in the centre of campus, next to the Kimberlin Library on Mill Lane, and opposite the Food Village.

Directions to Leicester and to De Montfort University are available online: <http://dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/how-to-find-us/how-to-find-us.aspx>

Information about the accessibility of the building is also available: <http://www.disabledgo.com/access-guide/de-montfort-university/queens-building-2>

Registration

Spaces are limited for this exciting event, so early booking is advised. **Registration closes on March 15th, 2017.**

To book please visit <https://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10624>

Costs

£10 BSA Members, £25 Non-BSA Members. This includes a hot lunch (with vegan and gluten-free options) and refreshments.

Contact the organisers

For further information and to submit your abstract, please contact Sasha Loyal P11238742@my365.dmu.ac.uk