

# Ethnographies of Algorithms and (Big)Data

## Special Issue *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*

<https://www.mulino.it/riviste/issn/1973-3194> (Official journal site)

<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=20600195513&tip=sid&clean=0> (Scimago journal page)

### Guest editors:

*Biagio Aragona* (**corresponding co-editor**)

Department of Social Sciences - University Federico II of Naples [aragona@unina.it](mailto:aragona@unina.it)

*Adam Arvidsson*

Department of Social Sciences - University Federico II of Naples [adam.arvidsson@unina.it](mailto:adam.arvidsson@unina.it)

*Cristiano Felaco*

Department of Social Sciences - University Federico II of Naples [cristiano.felaco@unina.it](mailto:cristiano.felaco@unina.it)

Introduction

## Call for abstract

We want to invite you to an abstract proposal to the special issue of the journal *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* on **“Ethnographies of Algorithms And (Big)Data”**. This special issue is linked to the same session organized within the 8<sup>th</sup> *Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference* to be held in Bergamo (Italy) on 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

As algorithms and (big)data are increasingly influential on government policy, commercial routines and popular representations of the social world, the need to think critically about their production and consumption is ever more recognized. An empirical effort to investigate the intertwined assemblage of socio-cultural and material entities that shape algorithms and data can be fruitfully detected in ethnography. Algorithms entail processes of sorting, classification and treating that are usually employed to regulate and control a system in real time. The intensive use of computation may call the risk to remove subjectivity from decision-making. Understanding the role played by all the actors (human and non human) involved in the assemblage of data and algorithms is one of the possible objects of ethnographic research. In this view, ethnography seems suit to face some relevant questions of algorithmic decision making. Ethnography is in fact a useful method for uncovering the story behind the production of an algorithm and understanding the human sensemaking that pervades its processes and operations, as well as to critically interrogate the relation between people and computers within their own sociocultural contexts (Kitchin, 2017; Seaver, 2017).

### **Main topics of the special issue**

What are the practices of algorithms and data production and use? How may technical issues impact the shaping of algorithms and data? Who are the actors that participate in the design of algorithms? How do

they interact, and how do communities of experts and stakeholders impact the shaping of algorithms and data? What values are incorporated in algorithms and data?

The role of ethnography on such topics has been recognized (Geiger 2017, Seaver, 2017), and interdisciplinary research in sociology, anthropology, computer science, STS, philosophy and technology, human geography, digital humanities, and data science has been carried out to answer these questions. We welcome therefore submissions from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research fields. Papers in this special issue are expected to advance theories, methods, or applications that develop a critical reflection on algorithms and ethnographic research based on a piece of truly empirical research. Specifically, appropriate topics in this special issue include (but are not limited to):

- Algorithms at work;
- Auditing algorithms
- Building algorithms;
- Construction of meaning from automated Natural Language Processing;
- Retracing cultural, symbolic and normative values in data and algorithms;
- Data Coding;
- The dynamics of data teams
- Definition of commands for Artificial Intelligence;
- Design of machine learning algorithms;
- Digital platforms' analytics design;
- Ethics in automated data production;
- Practices of (big)data management and (big)data curation;
- Practices of access to data and algorithms;
- Pre-analytics of big corpora;
- Software Coding;

### **Guide for submission and deadlines**

Authors are invited to submit by **January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020**:

- **title** and **abstract** of maximum 1000 words (.doc, .docx, .odt, .txt, .rtf). Abstracts must be submitted in English.
- **contact details** (full name, e-mail, post address and affiliation) and those of co-author/s, if any.

Authors who intend to participate to the “Ethnographies of Algorithms And (Big)Data” session of *8TH Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference* and to the special issue, please send an e-mail both to the guest editors (see above) and to the conference committee (erq.conference@unibg.it), mentioning the title of the chosen session in the email subject. Those who will participate to the conference session will have a privileged access to the special issue, but participation to the conference is not strictly required for accessing the special issue. The acceptance of the abstract for the conference does not entail to be included in the special issue.

Submission should be original works and should not have been previously published nor be currently under consideration for publication by other journal and/or conferences.

Acceptance of abstract by **31<sup>st</sup> of January**. If the abstract is accepted, the Authors should submit the **FULL** article by **April 30th, 2020** directly to the guest editors who will forward them to the editors of the journal for evaluation. The maximum length of a paper is 60.000 digits (spaces included), including references, tables and figures. The articles will be double-blind peer-reviewed.

The tentative date for submission of the revised version of the article is **30th June**

### **Important dates**

Submission of abstract: **January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Notification of acceptance of abstract: **January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

Deadline for full paper submission: **April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Provision of first peer-review feedback: **May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Deadline for revised accepted articles submission: **June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information and details.