

LSE Congress

Position Paper for Department of Methodology

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Introduction

Founded in 1992, the Department of Methodology boasts of providing world-cutting edge research by spreading the importance of integrating both qualitative and quantitative into research methods. In 2021, it contributed to 5 units under the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and ranked 1st in the UK for Social Work and Social Policy and Anthropology, 3rd in Politics and International Studies, and 9th for Sociology and Mathematics research. It is currently the LSE department with the highest ratio of staff count to research contribution, spanning multiple research themes such as inequality, justice, gender, and politics.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also referred to as the Global Goals have been adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, promote peace and prosperity by 2030. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals in total.

Based on the current research outputs and projects of the Department, we chose SDGs 10 and 16 to be the most aligned.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

SDG 10 is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015 which refers to "Reduce inequality within and among countries". The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened global income inequality, partially reversing the progress made in the last two decades and exacerbating between-country inequality.

The department of Methodology has carried out substantial research on inequality. Some of the past and ongoing research projects include:

Understanding Social and Economic Inequality Drivers

The department of Methodology has carried out substantial research on understanding drivers for social and economic inequality. Some of the past and ongoing research projects include:

The Emergence of Inequality in Social Groups

Funded by the Volkswagen foundation, this study under Professor Milena Tsvetkova sought to identify the structural conditions that give rise to inequality and inform policy makers about how to reduce it. This method allows for the construction of "artificial societies", allowing for manipulating structures in parallel worlds, to better identify structural conditions which pave the way for inequality.

The effects of reputation on inequality in network cooperation games

Prof. Tsvetkova investigated the effect of reputational information on inequality in repeated social dilemmas in networks with different dynamics.

ENDOW Project (Economic Networks and the Dynamics of Wealth (Inequality))

Funded by the US National Science Foundation, Professor Eleanor Power co-directed this project which will help understand some of the drivers of social and economic inequality. The data outputs gathered from this project has led to 16 research papers which explored social and economic dynamics.

Developing Latent Hierarchical Network Models for Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Social and Economic Inequality

This project is grounded in the analytical needs of the "ENDOW project," a US National Science Foundation-funded project that primarily examined how network structure, and people's position within that network, is associated with the distribution of wealth inequality both within and between societies.

Progress and Statistics

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, over three fifths of nations with available data experienced higher growth in household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom 40% of the population compared to the national average. However, this trend is being reversed due to the pandemic. Despite some positive signs toward reducing inequality in certain dimensions, inequality within and among countries continue to be a pressing issue prevalent in the status quo. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the first rise in between-country income inequality in a generation and there has been a record increase in global refugee population.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

The department of Methodology has carried out substantial research on justice and strong institutions. Some of the past and ongoing research projects include:

Building Trust and Confidence towards Institutions

Aside from transforming research methods, the department also took part in projects which explored corruption and building trust and confidence towards police and other institutions. For instance, Operation Soteria-Bluestone looks at whether rape victim-survivors experience justice along various behavioural and identity-relevant dimensions and their perception of "good policing". As noted in [The Guardian](#), the deep dive with the academics has helped officers change in six key areas, such as focusing on suspects, disrupting repeat offenders, engaging with victims, learning and development and officer wellbeing, and data and digital forensics.

Artificial Intelligence: Changing Experimental Research

For instance, under Professor Jonathan Jackson's police drone experiment funded by ESRC, they are exploring the use of virtual reality to study the impact of drone surveillance on public attitudes – which not only answers how the use of AI and technology for surveillance affect public perception of the police, but also transforms the way researchers conduct large-scale experiments through virtual reality.

Multiple research papers have also been published which explored [justice theory](#), [vulnerability and victimization](#), and [police legitimacy](#).

Progress and Statistics

According to last year's SDG report, the world witnessed the largest number of conflicts since 1946, with 25% of the global population living in conflict-affected areas. Furthermore, about one-third of the population, mostly women, still feel unsafe walking around their neighborhoods at night which may impact community engagement and mental well-being. Thereby, it is becoming more imperative to end armed conflicts, strengthen institutions, and enact inclusive and equitable legislation that protects human rights and part of meeting these goals is to build trust and legitimacy towards the institutions that uphold peace and justice.

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Benefits of Mixed-Methods Research

One of the main criticisms hindering the progress towards SDG 10 has been regarding the exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups from the research process. The people themselves who are most affected by inequalities are often not included in the research and policy process. It is important to take into account the perspectives of the poor and the under-privileged and give them a voice by including them as research participants for more authentic analysis of the challenges and contexts of inequality. People who are marginalized economically or socially are not only the subjects of policy discussions but also the actors and enablers for SDG10.

The Methodology department has been challenging the status quo through spreading the importance of integrating both qualitative and quantitative – mixed methods research which provides a critical eye, deep production of knowledge and new research techniques in which the research participants get to actively engage with the research process and be at the forefront.

Lack of Data: The Need for Methodology Training

Lack of data is another significant barrier to effective policy design. Some countries do not collect or disseminate disaggregated data for historical and political reasons. The Methodology Department focuses on robust data collection and data analysis. The Methodology Department was founded to fill the gap in methodological training and data analysis. In the late 1980s there were no proper methods training which was a key requisite and requirement for PhD to have formal methods training which led to the development of the Methods Institute. Methodology is an integral part of conducting research and the Department offers rigorous specialized Methods Surgery and Research Workshops that have real world impact towards understanding and combating inequality. It is one of the only few specialized departments in the world.

Beyond Research: Network and Awards

The research conducted by the Methodology contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a number of ways. Several members of the academic faculty serve at the International Inequalities Institute. Dr. Marion Lieutaud from the International Inequalities Institute has been awarded

the Changemaker's fund while Dr. Eleanor Power has received the Leverhulme Trust Research Leadership Award worth £1 million to explore and tackle social inequality in South Asia.

Two Methodology Professors - Jouni Kuha and Kenneth Benoit - are featured in the selection of Impact Case Studies, which highlight the real-world impact of their recent research on improving election [polling methodologies](#) and [Quanteda](#), a cutting-edge tool for text analysis.

Overall, the Methodology Department conducts cutting edge research and provides methodological tools bridging the gap in research.

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