GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT GÖTTINGEN

LEIBNIZ-INSTITUT FÜR BILDUNGSMEDIEN | Georg-Eckert-Institut

Digital Methods in (International and Comparative) Educational Research

Felicitas Macgilchrist
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VIE Winter School, 10 December 2021

What do you associate with “digital methods”?

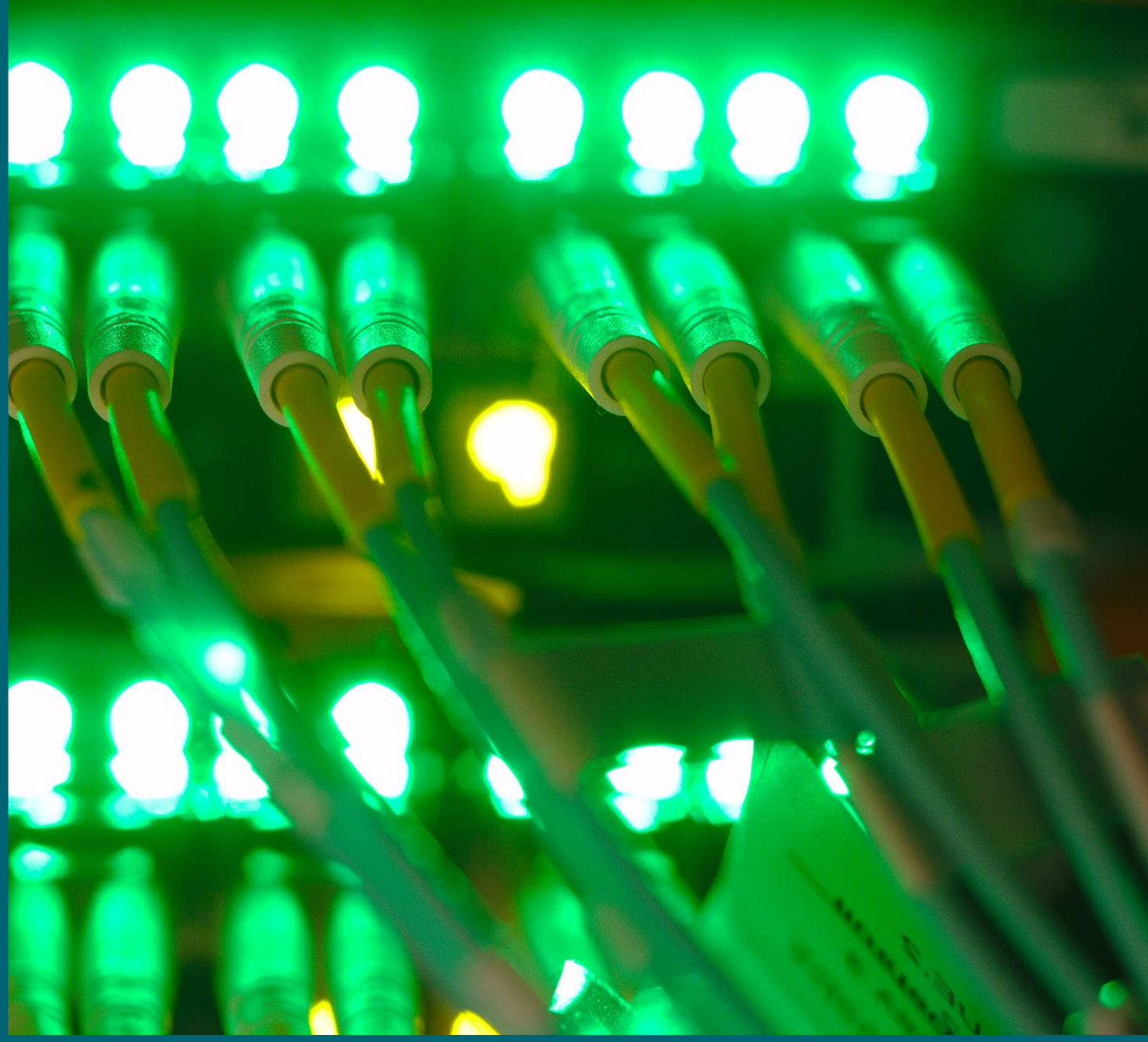


Photo CC-BY-SA Dennisvan Zuijlekom

Digital methods

"By digital methods we mean a series of novel computer-aided methods for the analysis of digital traces, as they are increasingly applied within communication and media research." (ZeMKI, Bremen)

"Digital Methods can be defined as the repurposing of the inscriptions generated by digital media for the study of collective phenomena." (Venturini et al 2018)

Digital methods … seek to learn from the methods built into the dominant devices online, and repurpose them for social and cultural research." (Digital Methods Initiative Amsterdam)

Not just platform dynamics

"At its most basic level [using digital methods] can include the use of digital audio recorders for interviews" (Savin-Baden & Tombs 2017)

"In this collection, we define digital methods as the use of online and digital technologies to collect and analyse research data." (Snee et al, 2016)

Please interrupt, raise questions!

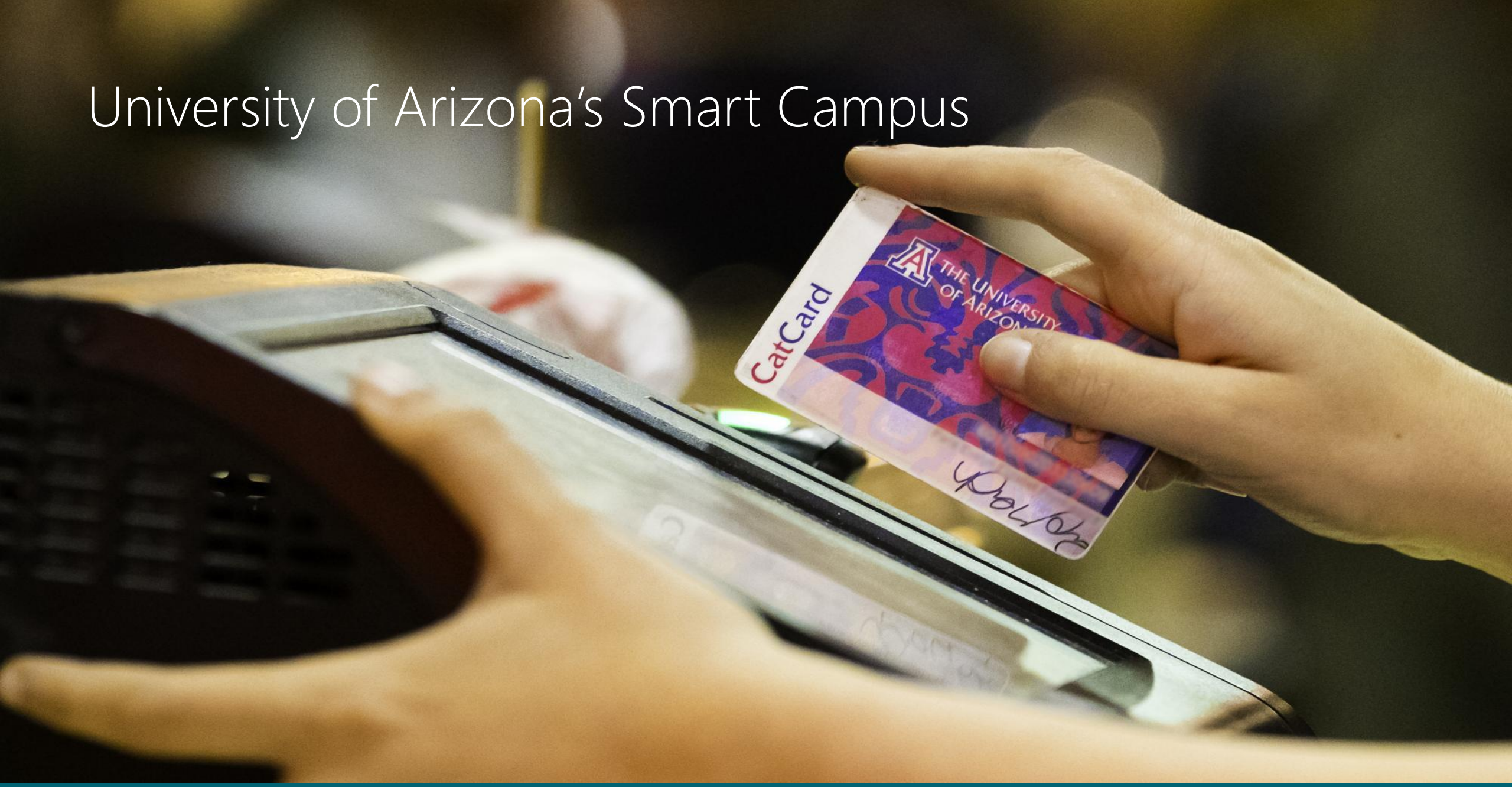
Photo by Simone Secci on Unsplash

I Computational approaches

II Qualitative approaches

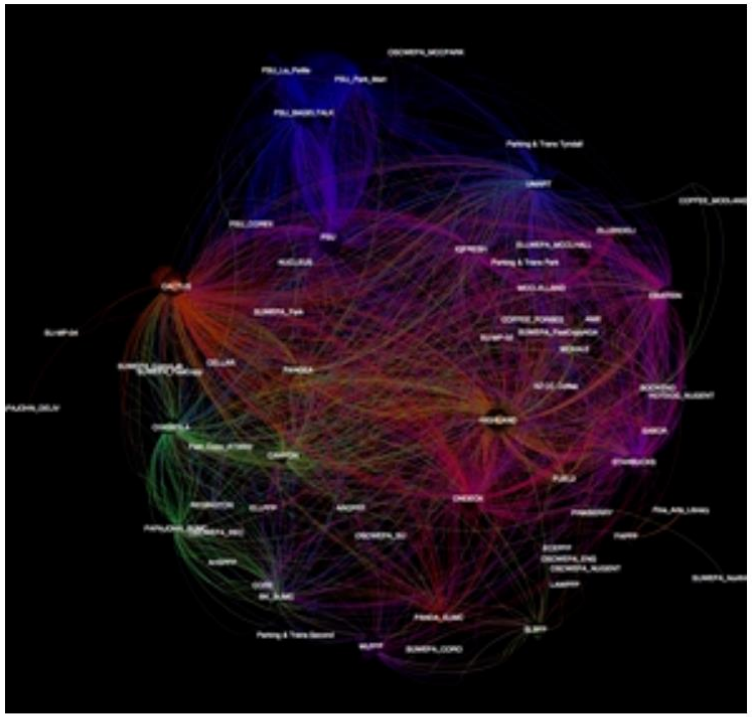
III Post-qualitative approaches

University of Arizona's Smart Campus

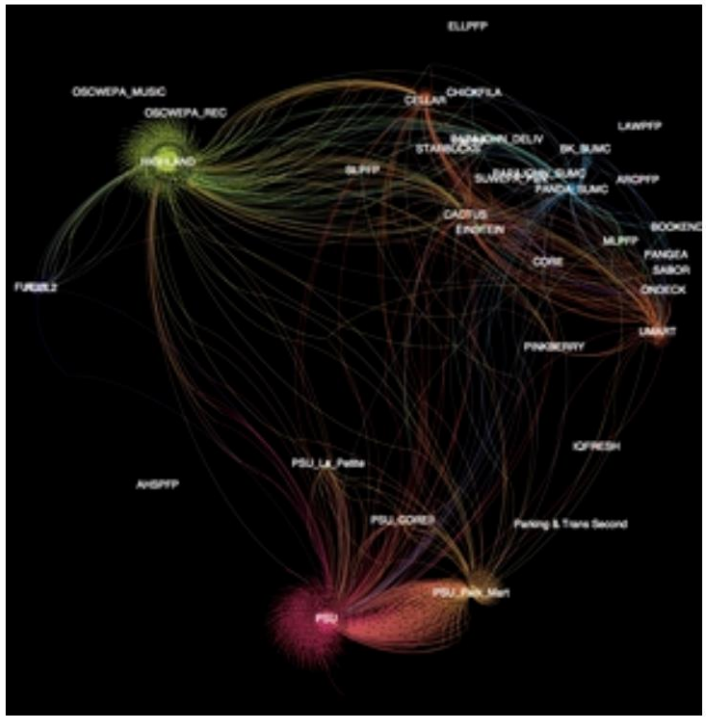


https://news.arizona.edu/story/researcher-looks-digital-traces-help-students

University of Arizona's Smart Campus



This data visualization shows the traffic patterns of UA freshmen, as told by their CatCard usage, in a select area of campus between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on a weekday. (Image courtesy of Sudha Ram)



The traffic patterns of UA freshmen, as told by their CatCard usage, in a select area of campus between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. on a weekday (Image courtesy of Sudha Ram)

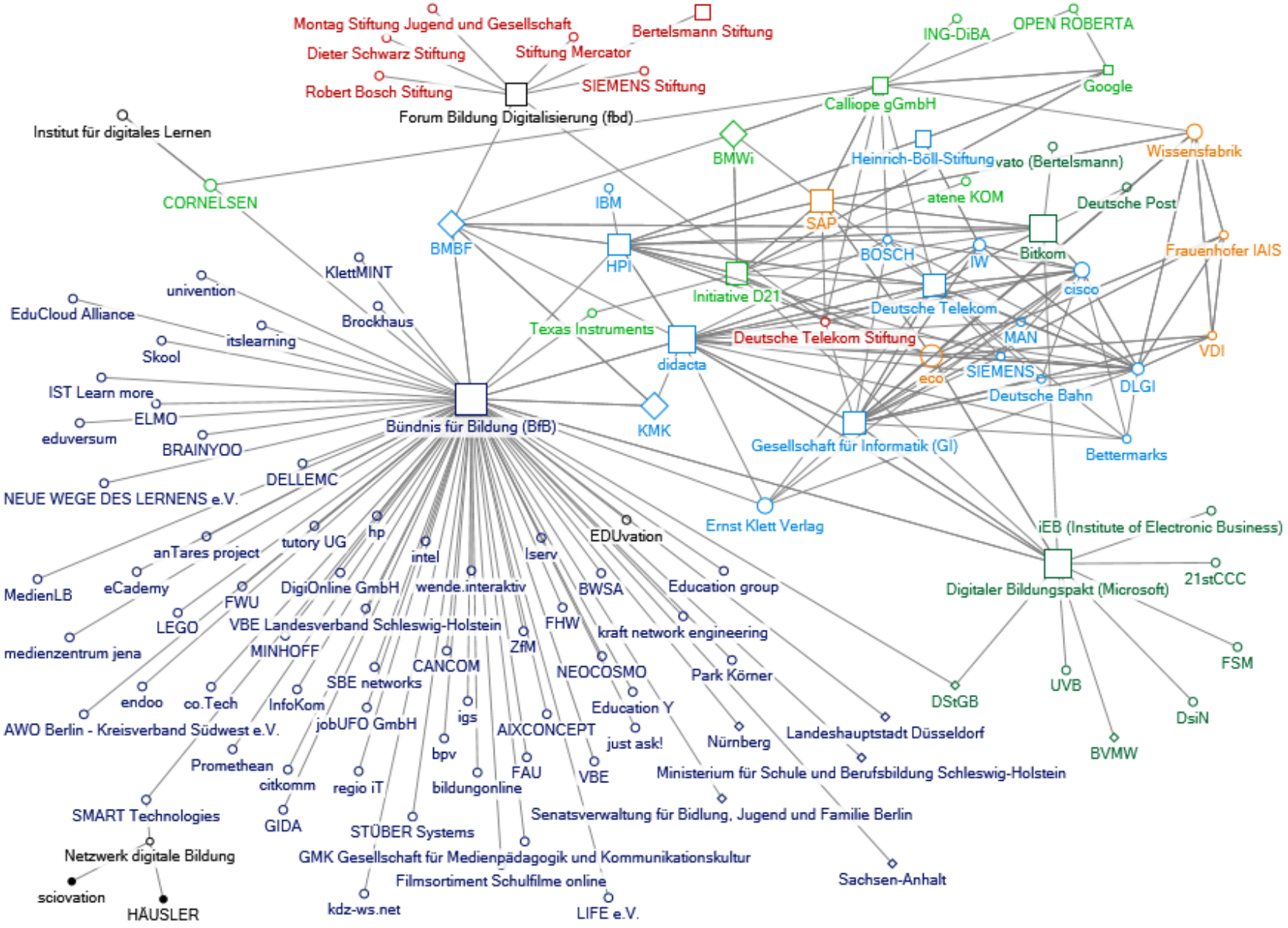
"Of all the students who drop out at the end of the first year, with our social integration measures, we're able to do a prediction at the end of the first 12 weeks of the semester with 85 to 90 percent recall," [Sudha] Ram said. "That means out of the 2,000 students who drop out, we're able to identify 1,800 of them."

I Computational approaches

Social network analysis

Förschler, A. (2018). Das "Who is who?" der deutschen Bildungs-Digitalisierungs-agenda - eine kritische Politiknetzwerk-Analyse. *Pädagogische Korrespondenz*, 58, 31-52.

Software: UCINet, NodeXL, Gephi or programme with R (e.g. igraph)


Montag Stiftung Jugend und Gesellschaft
Bertelsmann Stiftung
Dieter Schwarz Stiftung
Stiftung Mercator
Robert Bosch Stiftung
SIEMENS Stiftung
Forum Bildung Digitalisierung (fbd)
ING-DiBA
OPEN ROBERTA
Google
Calliope gGmbH
Institut für digitales Lernen
CORNELSEN
BMWi
Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung
vato (Bertelsmann)
Wissensfabrik
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Deutsche Post
IBM
SAP
BMBF
HPI
BOSCH
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Bitkom
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GMK Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur
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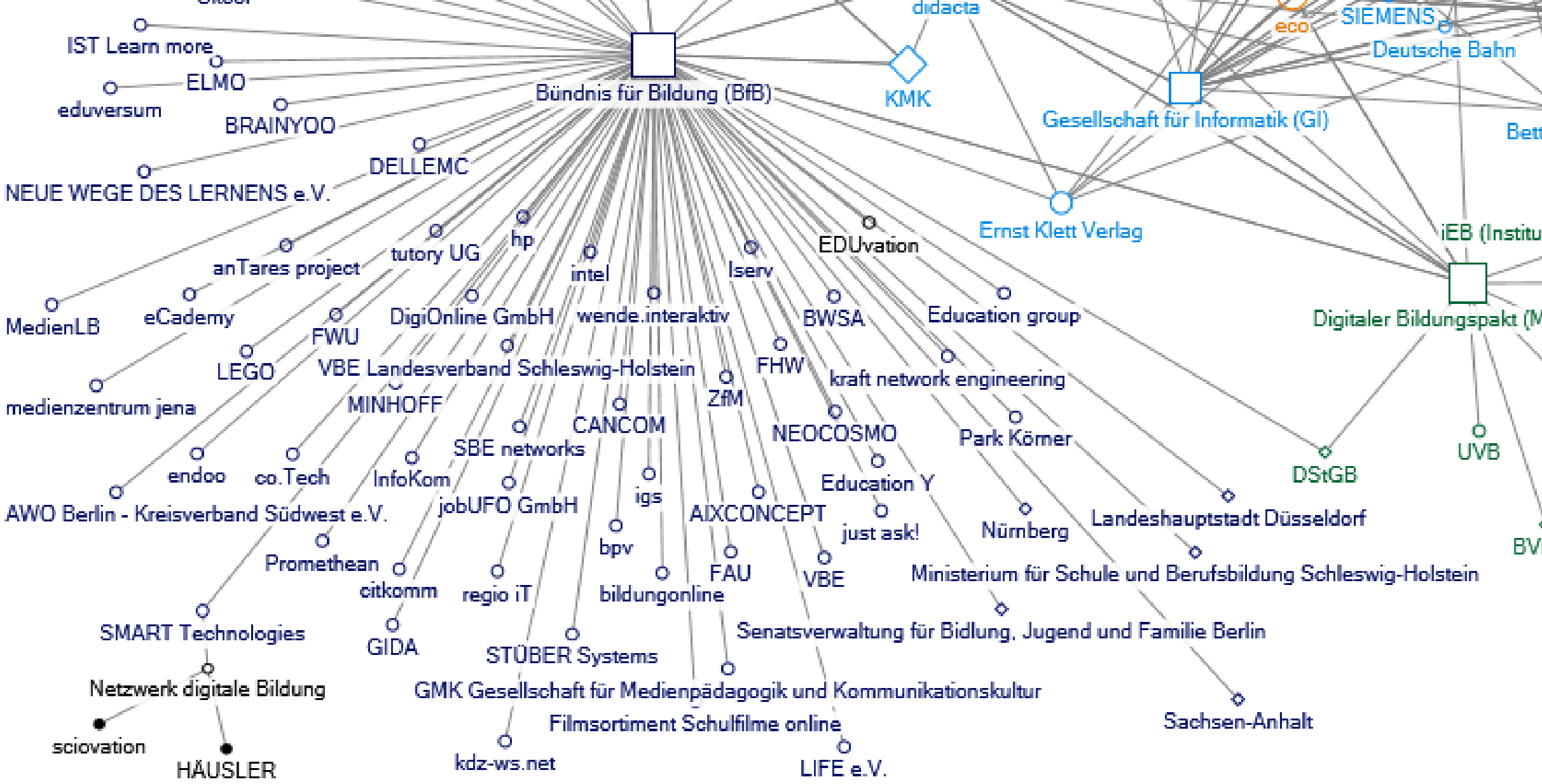
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kdz-ws.net
LIFE e.V.

I Computational approaches

Social network analysis

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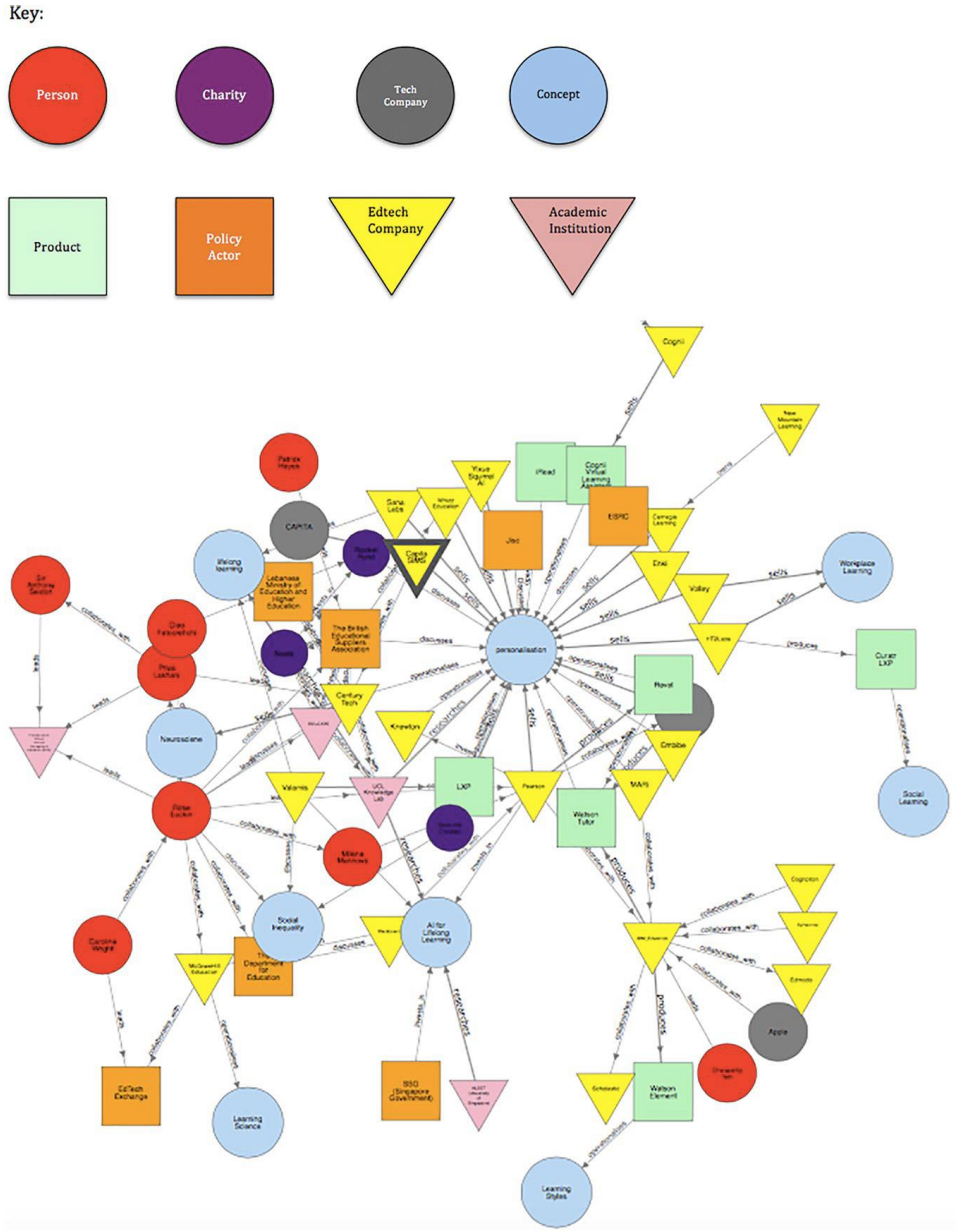
Knowledge graph

Davies, H. C., **Eynon**, R., & **Salveson**, C. (2020). The Mobilisation of AI in Education: A Bourdieusean Field Analysis. *Sociology*, 55(3), 539-560.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Tech Company
Concept
Product
Policy Actor
Edtech Company
Academic Institution
personalisation
AI for Lifelong Learning
Social Inequality
Neuroscience
Lifelong learning
Workplace Learning
Curiosity LXP
Social Learning
LXP
Watson Tutor
Century Tech
Knewton
Valamis
Mishra Mehrotra
Carolyne Vongre
EdTech Exchange
Learning Science
Learning Styles
Watson Element
Apple
Pearson
Coursera
Udacity
Khan Academy
Carnegie Learning
Ellucian
Blackboard
Jisc
Cognii
Cognii Virtual Learning Assistant
Ivy.ai
Sana Labs
Valley
Enki
Riiid
Squirrel AI
iRead
ESPRC
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CAPITA
Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education
The British Educational Suppliers Association
Pass Fellowships
Prize Leavers
Sir Anthony Seldon
Patrick Heyes
Rose Luckin
UCL Knowledge Lab
Wiliam
Miishra Mehrotra
Social Inequality
The Department for Education
McGraw-Hill Education
IMDA (Singapore Government)
Learning Science
EdTech Exchange
Carolyne Vongre
Collaborates_with
Produces
Disrupts
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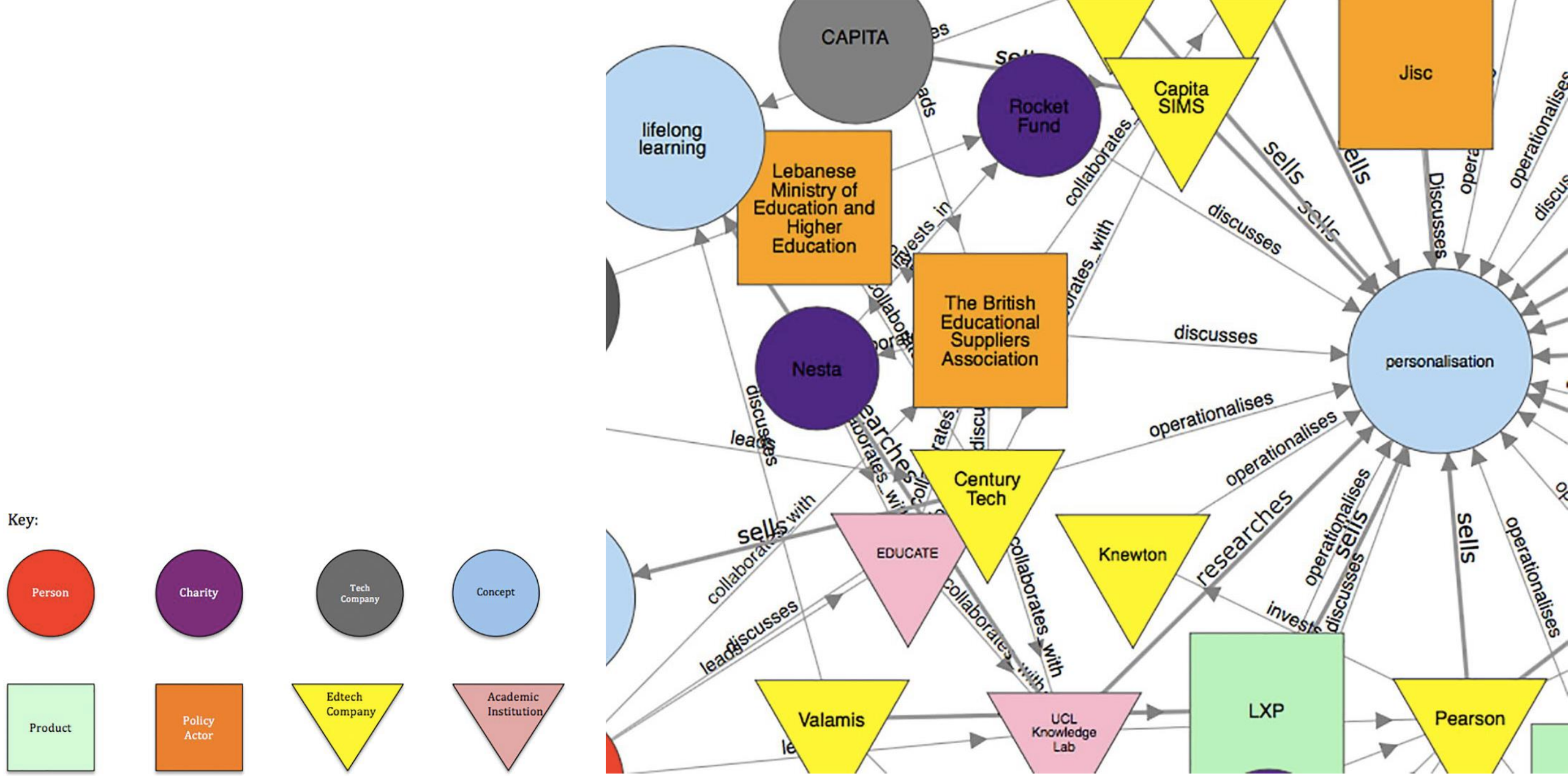
Key:
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Edtech Company
Academic Institution
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lifelong learning
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Rocket Fund
Capita SIMS
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Nesta
The British Educational Suppliers Association
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I Computational approaches

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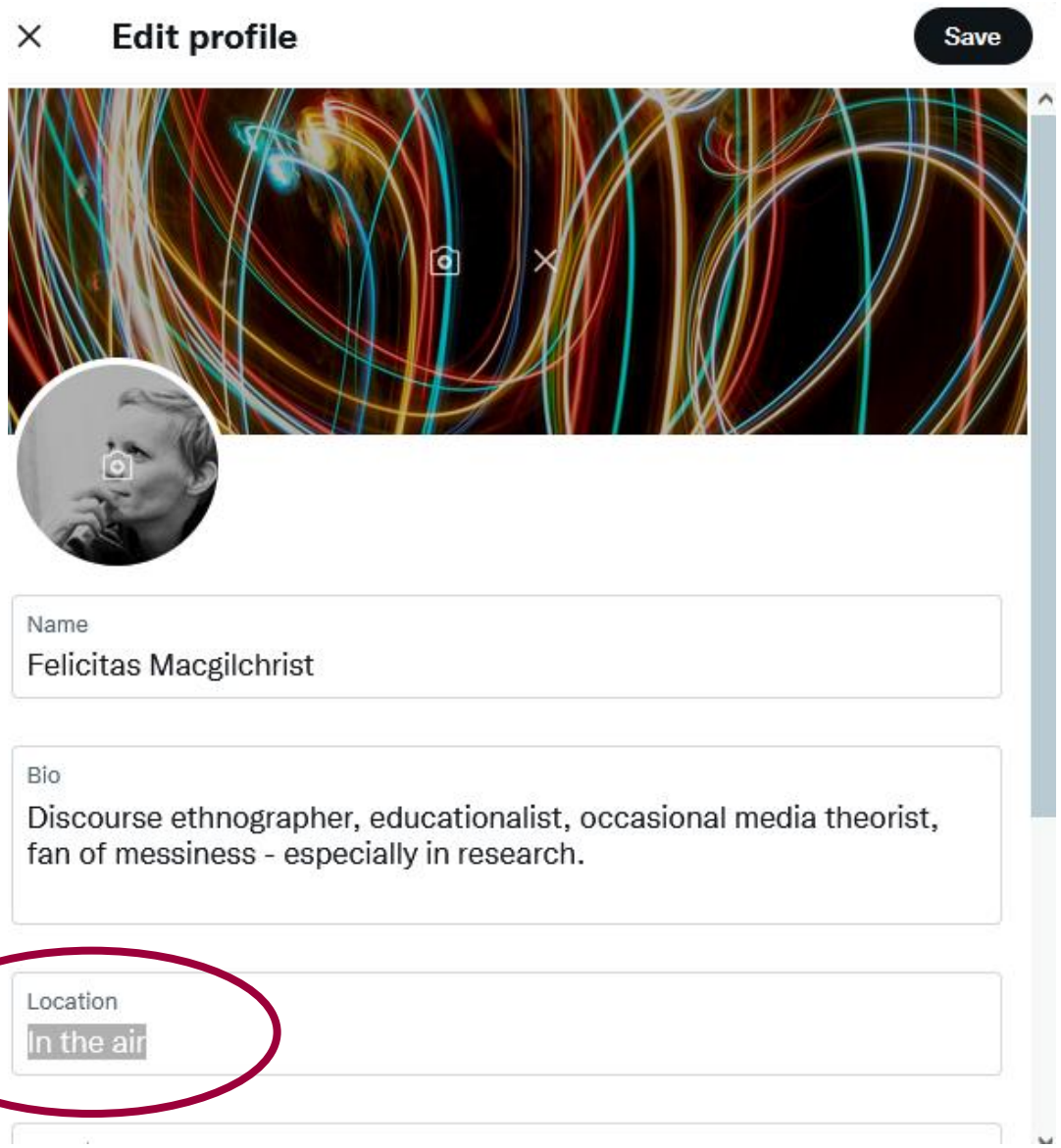
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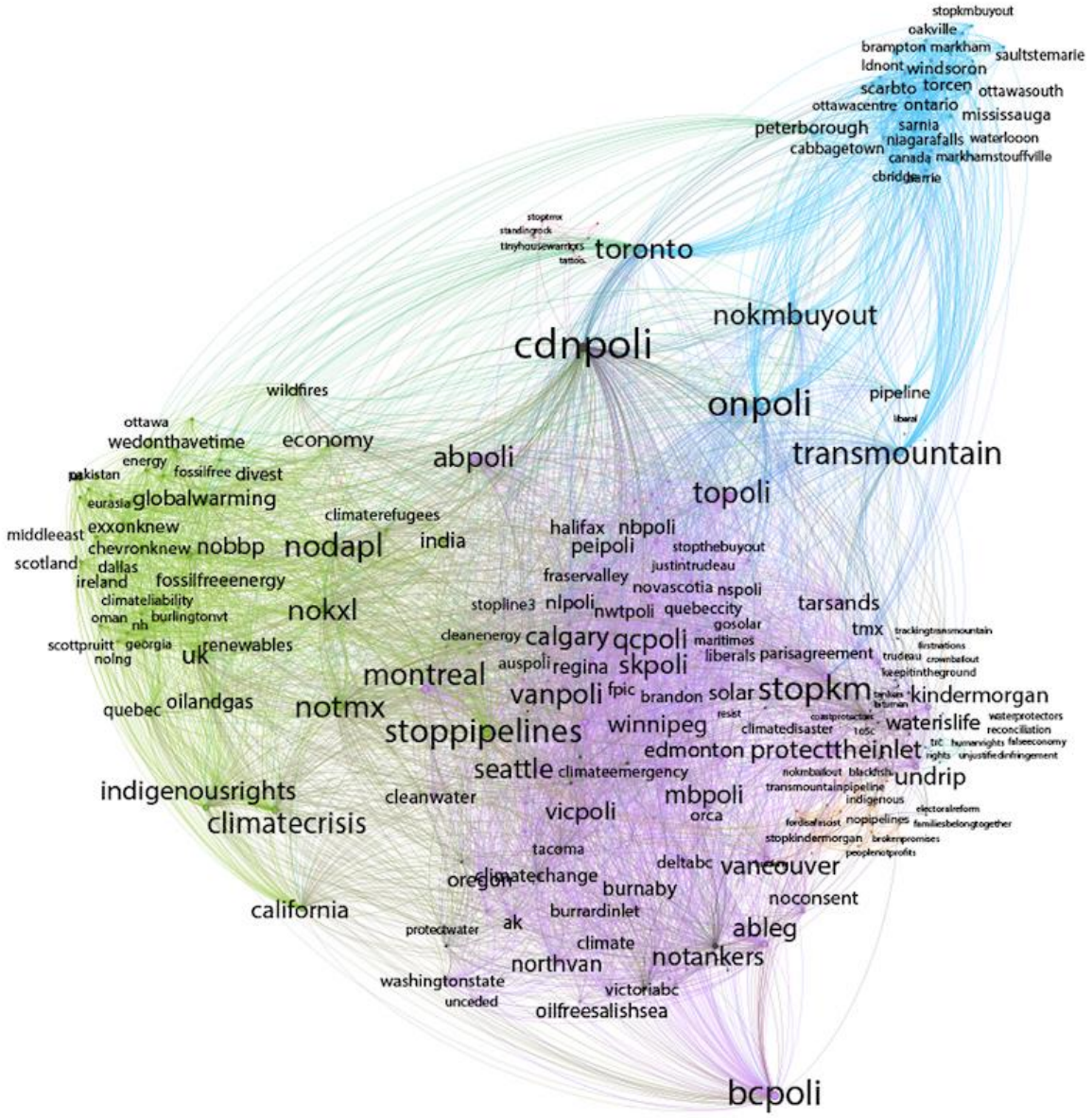
Name
Felicitas Macgilchrist
Bio
Discourse ethnographer, educationalist, occasional media theorist, fan of messiness - especially in research.
Location
In the air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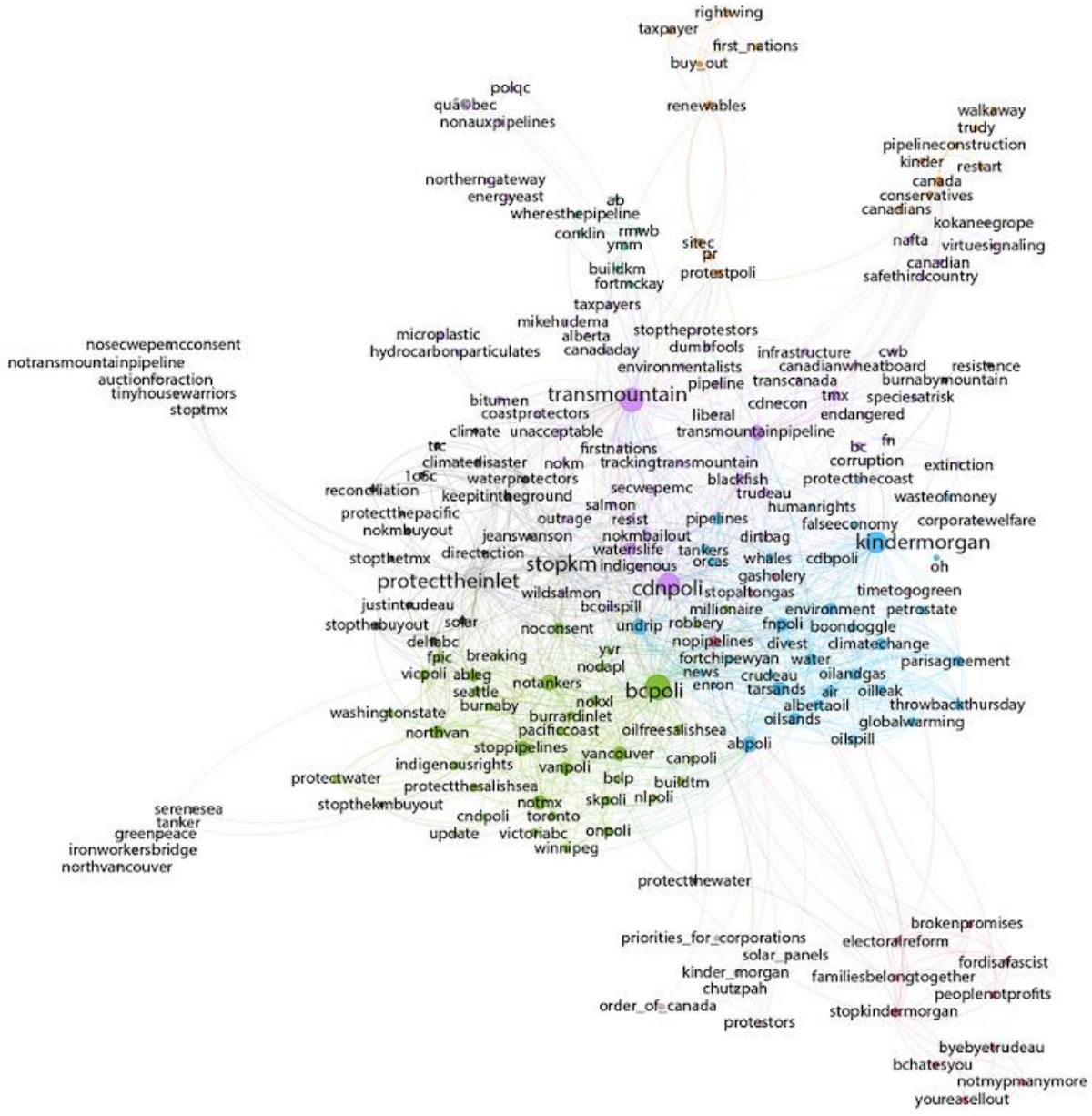
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digital methods
un-typology
critical toponymy

We describe our analysis of Twitter toponymics as an “un-typology” in an effort to follow the resistant practices of the Twitter users we are tracing, as well as to ourselves resist the violent standardization, recognition, and categorization inherent to colonialism, which draws land and people into settler structures. […]

In keeping with users’ resistant and flexible usage of the free-form field, we here describe loose clusters of toponyms, rather than outlining strict categories or precisely quantifying toponymic practices, both of which risk reifying categories rather than expressing the fluidity of toponymic resistance […].

I Computational approaches

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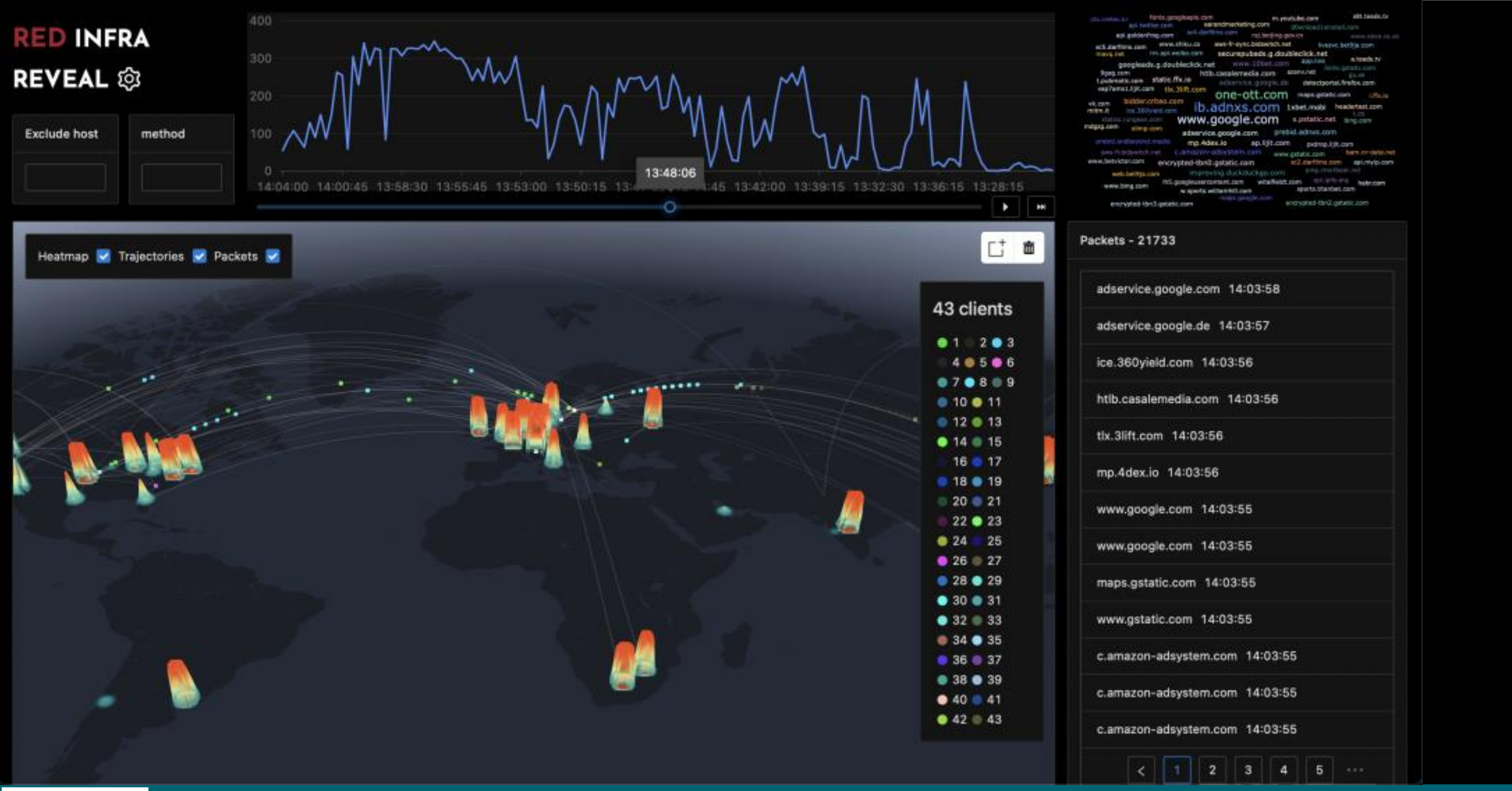
Data packet sniffing	Tools and Workshops from University of **Gothenburg:** https://github.com/paddlelab **Hillman**, T. (2021) https://www.edu-digitalinequality.org/2021/07/23/shining-a-light-behind-the-gui-of-digital-services-used-in-schools/ **Jornitz**, S., & **Macgilchrist**, F. (forthcoming). Datafizierte Sichtbarkeiten: Vom Panopticon zum Panspectron in der schulischen Praxis. *MedienPädagogik*.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I Computational approaches: Some challenges

Computational methods

…can seduce into tech-led research

…look too good

…can decontextualize

…suggest “objectivity”

…raise ethical issues of “found data”

…are (semi-)fictional:

> “Networks are both science fiction and the historical present. They describe future projections as though they really existed; they relay past events as if they were unfolding in the present. […]
>
> Technical networks cut continuous space and time into slices of connectivity: they project links and cut noise to create neat lines between transmitters and receivers.” (Chun 2016: 50)

Chun, Wendy (2016). *Updating to Remain the Same*. MIT Press

I Computational approaches

Computational methods

Combined with

… reflexivity

… educational (sociological, media, philosophical and/or theoretical, conceptual, etc.) questions

… interdisciplinarity (?)

Questions & Comments

Photo by Simone Secci on Unsplash

I Computational approaches

II Qualitative approaches

III Post-qualitative approaches

II Qualitative approaches

Walkthrough

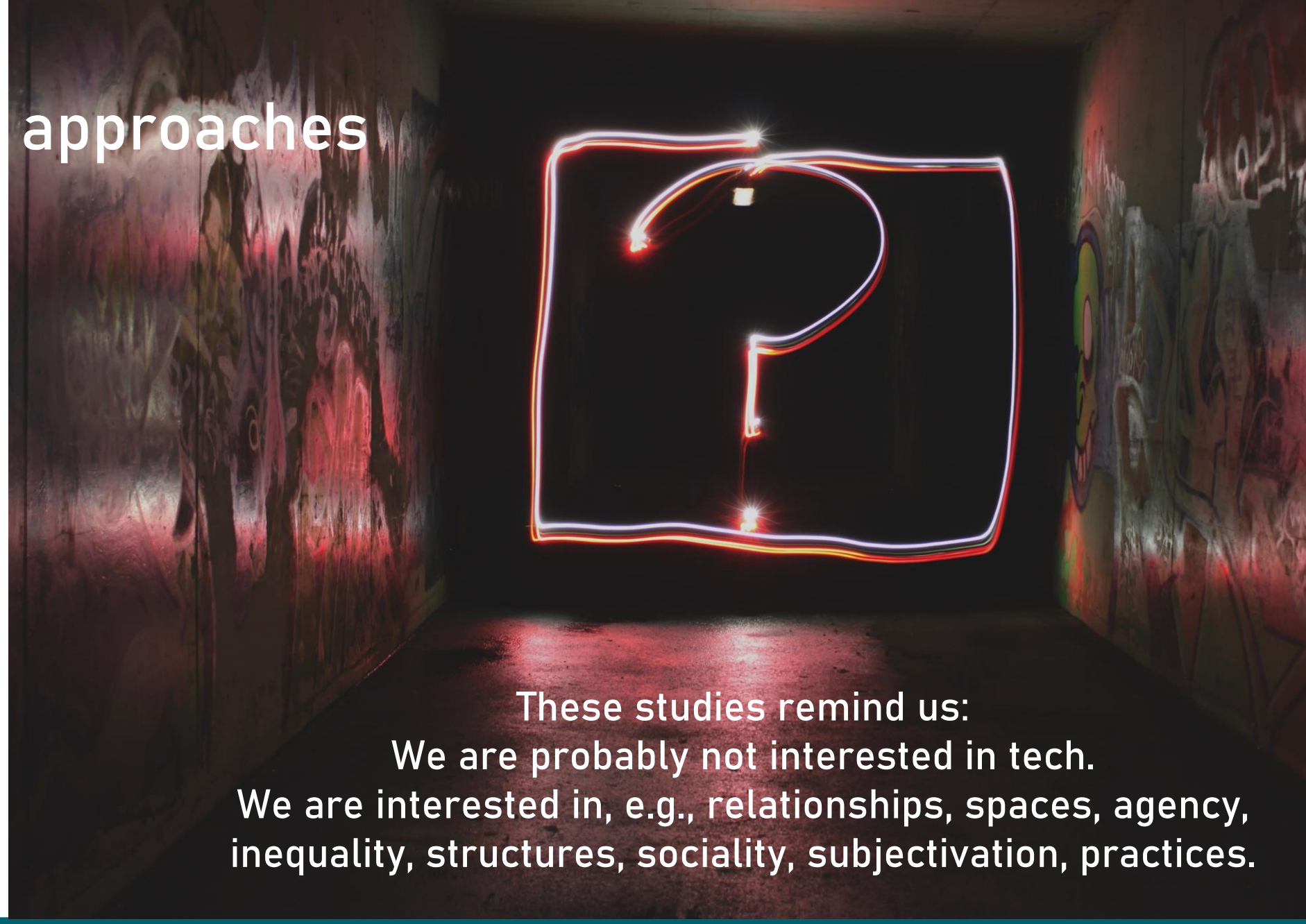
Digital storytelling

Design-Based Research

Online interviewing

&

content analysis,
corpus analysis,
discourse analysis,
thematic analysis,
narrative analysis,
grounded theory,
etc. etc. etc.



These studies remind us:
We are probably not interested in tech.
We are interested in, e.g., relationships, spaces, agency, inequality, structures, sociality, subjectivation, practices.

Photo by Emily Morter on Unsplash

II Qualitative approaches

(Post)digital ethnography

Wang, T. (2013). Why big data needs **thick data**. https://medium.com/ethnography-matters/why-big-data-needs-thick-data-b4b3e75e3d7

Kozinets, R. V. (2020). **Netnography**: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research. Sage.

Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T., & Tacchi, J. (2016). **Digital Ethnography**. Principles and Practice. Sage.

Hine, C. (2015). **Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday**. Bloomsbury.

II Qualitative approaches

(Post)digital ethnography

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Hine, C. (2015). **Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday**. Bloomsbury.

Devs: Unpacking the underpinnings

Dixon-Román, E., Nichols, T. P., & Nyame-Mensah, A. (2020). The racializing forces of/in AI educational technologies. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 45(3), 236-250.

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II Qualitative approaches: Some challenges

Translating methods into online spaces

…can overlook the “mediality” of the exchange

…faces issues of building visibility, trust and intimacy

…needs curating (e.g., music at start of online sessions)

…requires infrastructure (proprietary, open access, storage, GDPR, climate)

…can come with high expectations of digital smoothness

II Qualitative approaches

Translating methods into online spaces

…can also open spaces for exploration, for trial and error experimentation, for embracing uncertainty and for rejoicing in “good enough” data!

Questions & Comments

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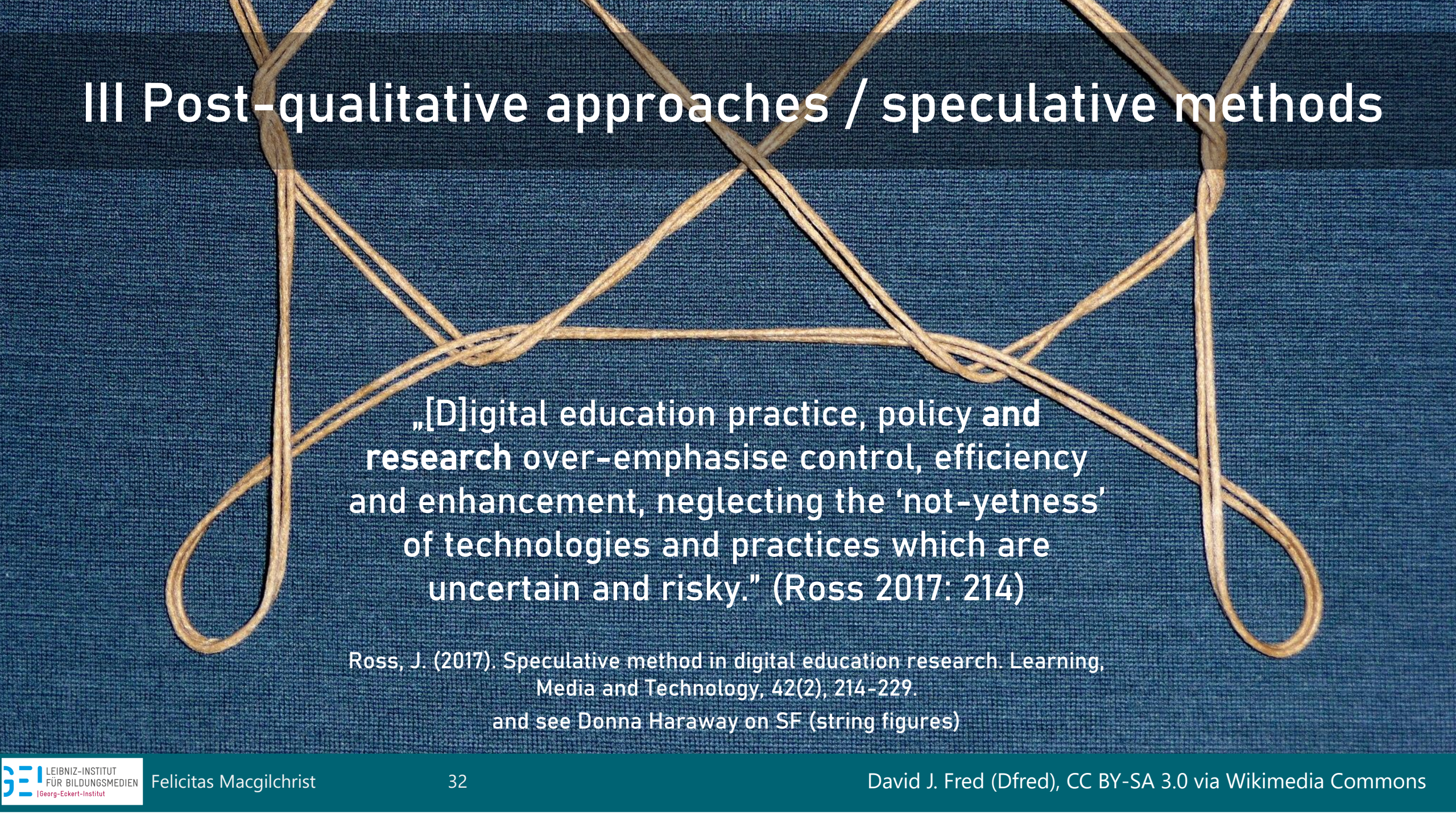
I Computational approaches

II Qualitative approaches

III Post-qualitative approaches (incl. speculative methods)

III Post-qualitative approaches / speculative methods



„[D]igital education practice, policy **and research** over-emphasise control, efficiency and enhancement, neglecting the 'not-yetness' of technologies and practices which are uncertain and risky." (Ross 2017: 214)

Ross, J. (2017). Speculative method in digital education research. Learning, Media and Technology, 42(2), 214-229.

and see Donna Haraway on SF (string figures)

David J. Fred (Dfred), CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

III Post-qualitative approaches

Design oriented methods	Allert, H., & Richter, C. (2020). Learning Analytics: subversive, regulierende und transaktionale Praktiken. In S. Iske, J. Fromme, D. Verständig, & K. Wilde (Eds.), *Big Data, Datafizierung und digitale Artefakte* (pp. 15-36). Springer VS.
Speculative ethnographies	Dai, Y., & Arnberg, B. (2021). "We Have to Survive, First": Speculative Ethnographies of Chinese Student Experience During COVID-19. *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies.*
Social science fiction	Costello, E., Brown, M., Donlon, E., & Girme, P. (2020). 'The Pandemic Will Not be on Zoom': A Retrospective from the Year 2050. *Postdigital Science and Education.*
Digital fieldwork	Gabrys, J. (2021). The Forest That Walks: Digital Fieldwork and Distributions of Site. *Qualitative Inquiry.*

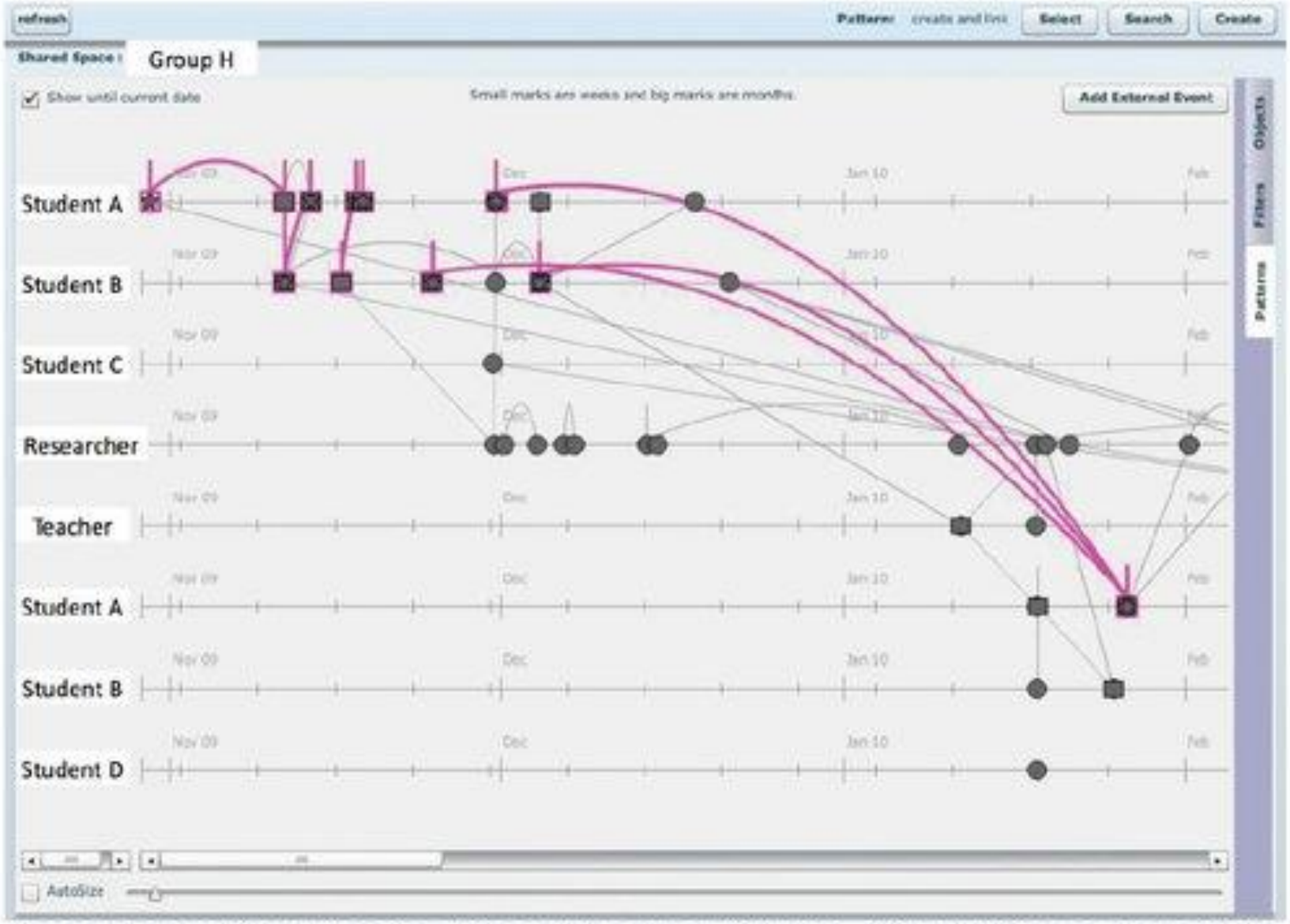


Figure 2: Sceenshot of the Timeline-Based Analyzer (TLBA), highlighting a user-defined pattern.

III Post-qualitative approaches

Design oriented methods	Allert, H., & Richter, C. (2020). Learning Analytics: subversive, regulierende und transaktionale Praktiken. In S. Iske, J. Fromme, D. Verständig, & K. Wilde (Eds.), *Big Data, Datafizierung und digitale Artefakte* (pp. 15-36). Springer VS.
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Digital fieldwork	Gabrys, J. (2021). The Forest That Walks: Digital Fieldwork and Distributions of Site. *Qualitative Inquiry.*

The Pandemic Will Not be on Zoom

The Pandemic will not teach you algebra when old people equal zero
The Pandemic will not prepare you for jobs that do not exist yet when jobs do not exist
The Pandemic will not give you tenure
The Pandemic will not be graded
The Pandemic will not be sponsored by TurnThemIn,
RetinaScanMyEssay or X-RayedLearner
The Pandemic will not cite your work
The Pandemic will not be patented, copyrighted, contained or explained
The Pandemic will not be described in 500 words by next Friday
because the Pandemic will not be on Zoom

Costello et al (2020)

III Post-qualitative approaches

Design oriented methods	Allert, H., & Richter, C. (2020). Learning Analytics: subversive, regulierende und transaktionale Praktiken. In S. Iske, J. Fromme, D. Verständig, & K. Wilde (Eds.), *Big Data, Datafizierung und digitale Artefakte* (pp. 15-36). Springer VS.
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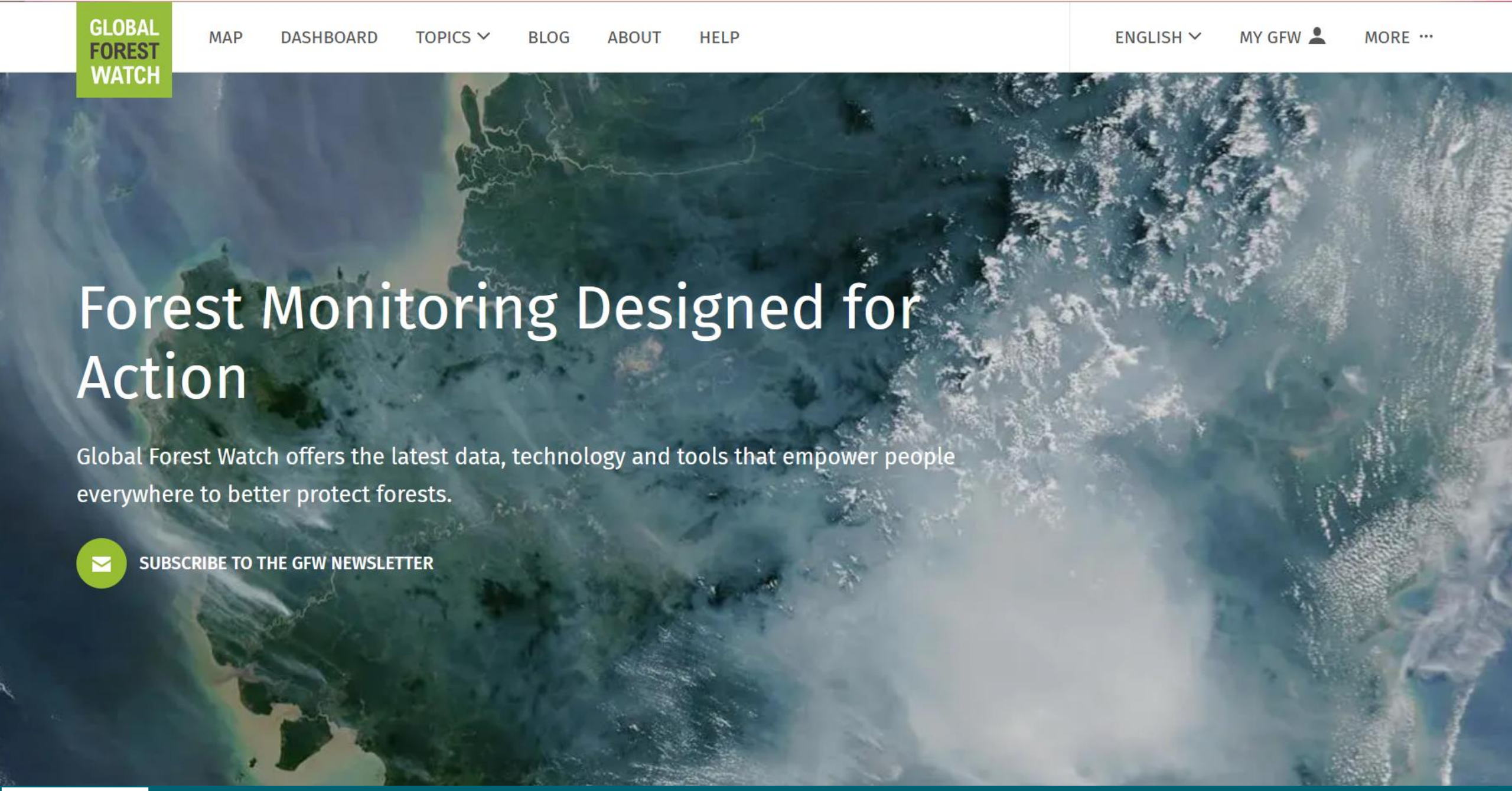
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III Post-qualitative approaches: Some challenges

Post-qualitative / speculative methods

…can lack rigour for some scholars (has been called “methodologically generous”, “methodologically imprecise”, Truschkat & Bormann 2013)

…can lapse into manifestos

…have to remember their research question

III Post-qualitative approaches

Post-qualitative / speculative methods

…can also open spaces for exploration, for co-creative trial and error experimentation, for embracing uncertainty, for rejoicing in “good enough” data and for researching otherwise!

…can decentre humans and ”dismantle the usual understanding of bodies in sites that lead to unexamined understandings of sensing and knowing” (Gabrys 2021)

…can enable a postdigital overcoming of online/offline, real/virtual, analogue/digital binaries

…are attractive to schools as project partners

Questions & Comments

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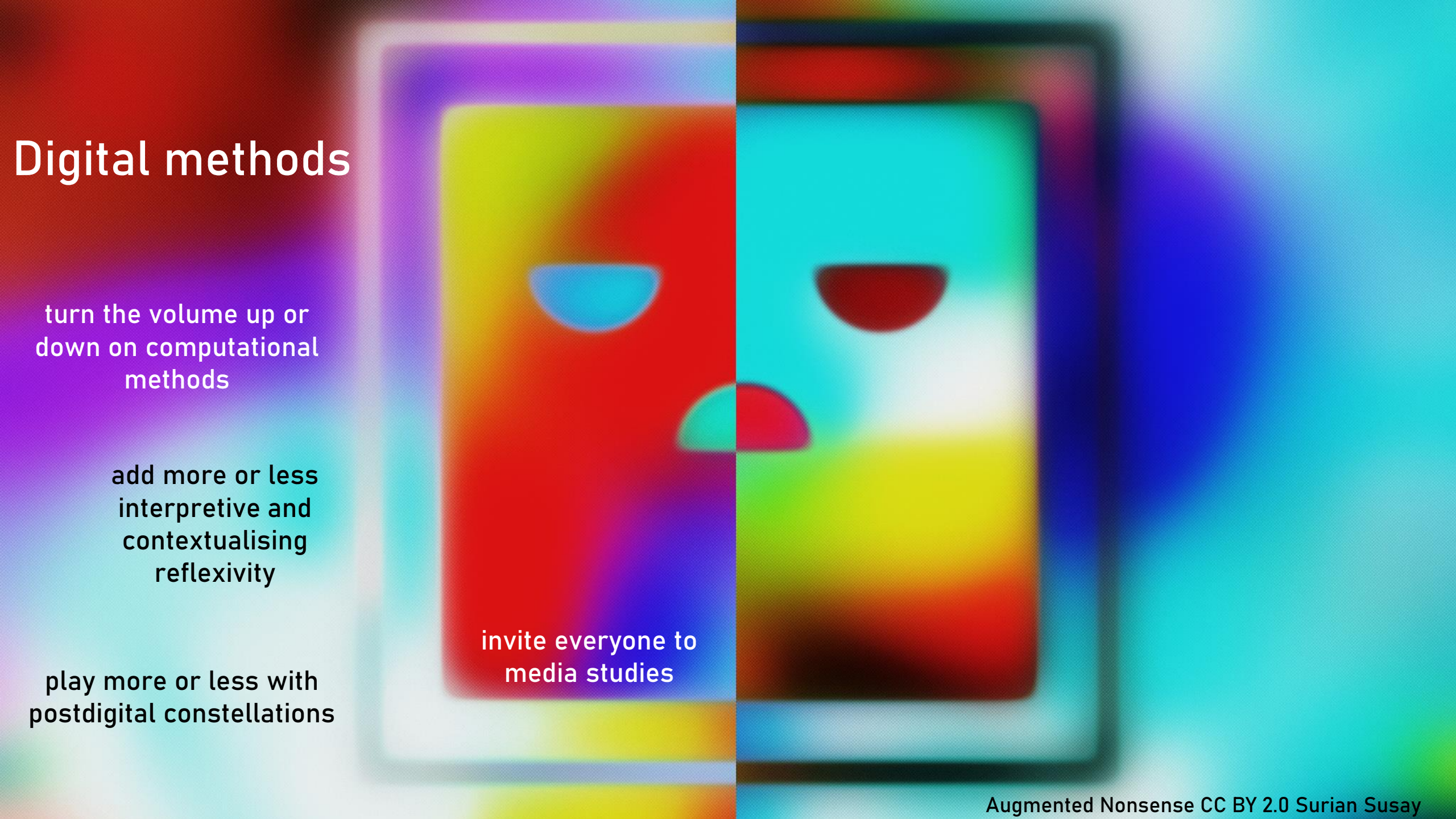
Digital methods

turn the volume up or down on computational methods

add more or less interpretive and contextualising reflexivity

play more or less with postdigital constellations

invite everyone to media studies



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- How can digital methods be made visible for comparative and international education research?
- How can we use computational methods without chunking too neatly; how to retain the “leaks” (Chun 2016)?
- How to account for the "mediality" of (online) spaces of exchange?
- How to document “how users may shift their worldviews to accommodate the underlying logics and implicit presumptions of the algorithms they use regularly" (Gillespie et al 2014: 187)
- How to make yourself visible as a "participant" in online participant observation / ethnography?
- How to build trust in online settings?
- How to create "gaps" and openings in online settings preceding an online interview?
- How to find methods courses or curricula? E.g. https://wiki.digitalmethods.net
- Should we orient to other disciplines for inspiration? If so, which ones?

- What key methodological competencies should educational researchers develop today?
- How can these be taught / learnt?
- Do we need theory first?

- How to centre ethics?
- How to contextualise and theorise?

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