Utrecht University

Societal impact, public engagement and research ethics in challenging times: for whom, with whom and what for are we co-creating knowledge?

Research Integrity in a Disruptive Academic Context: from AI to Academic Freedom
Netherlands Research Integrity Network
Annual Symposium 2025
17th October 2025

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DIGITAL MIGRATION

Koen Leurs

SAGE

MEDIA, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION IN MIGRANT SOCIETIES

Edited by Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi

Doing Digital Migration Studies

Theories and Practices of the Everyday

Amsterdam
University
Press

This talk

- Case: Smartphone screening of asylum seeker's phones in the asylum procedure in the Netherlands
- Paradoxical moment
- Taking a stance: epistemological considerations
- Ethics: 'do no harm'?
- Politics of impact: what are our rules of engagement?

Case: Smartphone screening of asylum seeker's phones in the asylum procedure in the Netherlands

Luister naar

Gigabytes aan data van asielzoekers doorzocht: geen terrorist gevonden

Dataverzameling Nederland ging, zonder debat, verder dan buurlanden in het vergaren van privacy-gevoelige data uit telefoons van asielzoekers
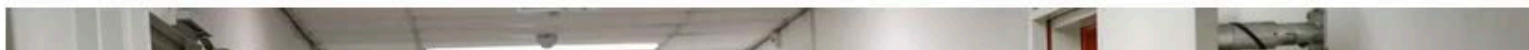
Martin Kuiper & Romy van der Poel
5 januari 2022 · Leestijd 3 minuten

Case: Smartphone screening of asylum seeker's phones in the asylum procedure in the Netherlands

POLITICS | GERMANY

German court rules search of refugee's phone was illegal

Janosch Delcker
02/16/2023

Home Office illegally seized phones of 2,000 asylum seekers, court rules

Secret, blanket policy to take mobiles and extract data from them judged unlawful on several fronts

📷 The high court heard evidence that people were 'bullied' into handing over passcodes so that officials could unlock personal information in the seized phones. Photograph: Carolyn Kaster/AP

Diane Taylor
Fri 25 Mar 2022 15.23 GMT

SWI swissinfo.ch — Swiss perspectives in 10 languages

Swiss Politics

Asylum seekers to hand over smartphones before entering Switzerland

▲ With the spread of social media worldwide, more and more asylum seekers use smartphones and apps to organise their journeys. Keystone / Boris Grdanoski

The Tech Arsenal That Could Power Trump's Immigration Crackdown

Border enforcement agencies have spent billions assembling surveillance tools to track and find people. These could be critical in President Trump's immigration agenda.

A Cellebrite device that extracts data off mobile devices. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

🇺🇸 An official website of the United States government Here's how you know ⌄

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

MENU

Home » Travel » Search Authority » Border Search of Electronic Devices At Ports of Entry

Travel   +

Border Search of Electronic Devices at Ports of Entry

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for protecting our nation's borders and enforcing numerous laws at U.S. ports of entry. CBP's ability to lawfully inspect electronic devices crossing the border is integral to keeping America safe in an increasingly digital world.

All travelers crossing the United States border are subject to CBP inspection. On rare occasions, CBP officers may search a traveler's mobile phone, computer, camera, or other electronic devices during the inspection process.

Case: Smartphone screening of asylum seeker's phones in the asylum procedure in the Netherlands

3
Aanslagen in Parijs

Aan de orde is het **debat** over **de aanslagen in Parijs**.

De **voorzitter**:
Ik heet alle aanwezigen bij dit debat [...]
het bijzonder de minister-president, [...]
dent en de minister van Veiligheid en [...]
hebben zich dertien leden gemeld. E[...]
van vijf minuten per lid. Het woord is [...]
Wilders van de PVV. De heer Kuzu he[...]
een punt van orde.

De heer **Kuzu** (Groep Kuzu/Öztürk):
Inderdaad, een punt van orde. De aa[...]
natuurlijk vreselijk geweest en dit de[...]
ënten om heftig en emotioneel te wor[...]
u en mijn collega's om er extra atten[...]
uitspraken toe te laten die onze parle[...]
ondermijnen.

De **voorzitter**:
Dank u voor deze oproep. Het woord i[...]

of dat niet het geval is. Om het debat niet te verlengen met
het voorlezen van delen uit een brief die eergisteren ver-
stuurd is, heb ik daarnaar verwezen. In dat kader kwam het
hier op. Dat lijkt mij ook relevant. Daarnaast zijn er een paar
vragen gesteld over de buitengrenzen, maar daar ben ik nu
doorheen. Ik meen alle vragen over het vluchtelingenbeleid
te hebben behandeld en kom terug op twee vragen die
specifiek gaan over de situatie in Parijs.

Minister **Rutte**:
Ja, de politie gaat versneld de identiteitsvaststelling in de
asielprocedure intensiveren. De maatregelen worden per
direct ingevoerd en houden in dat kleding- en bagage-
onderzoek bij het ID-onderzoek worden betrokken. Als daar
aanleiding toe bestaat, dan hoort de politie de vreemdeling
direct. De politie heeft ook de mogelijkheid om gegevens-
dragers, zoals telefoons uit te lezen als dat noodzakelijk
wordt geacht. Daarnaast is er een verscherping aangebracht
op de bestaande instrumenten: het documentenonderzoek

PM Rutte: [emphasis added]

Yes**,** the police will accelerate the identification of identity in the asylum procedure. The measures will be introduced immediately and mean that clothing and luggage examination will be included in the ID examination. If there is reason to do so, the police will immediately interview the foreigner. The police also have the option to read data carriers, such as telephones, if this is deemed necessary. In addition, the existing instruments have been tightened up: the document investigation by the Military Police, for example. These are also linked to the person deployed. That's all happening now.

— Tweede Kamer (2015, p. 23)

Multi-disciplinary and multiple positionalities research team

Koen Leurs

Media & Cultural Studies
Utrecht University

Djamila Schans

Migration policy/research

WODC

Rianne Dekker

School of Governance
Utrecht University

Albert Salah

Information &
computer science
Utrecht University

Kinan Alajak

Media & Cultural Studies

Utrecht University /
Refugee Wellbeing and
Integration Initiative

Universiteiten van Nederland

COMMIT/

Governing the
digital society,
Utrecht University

Methodology

- Semi-structured interviews (*n*=21)

- Repurpose Freedom of Information (FOI) requests as a research methodology

- Having to work with Non-Disclosure Agreements

- Acquiring and reverse-engineering second
hand device hardware & software
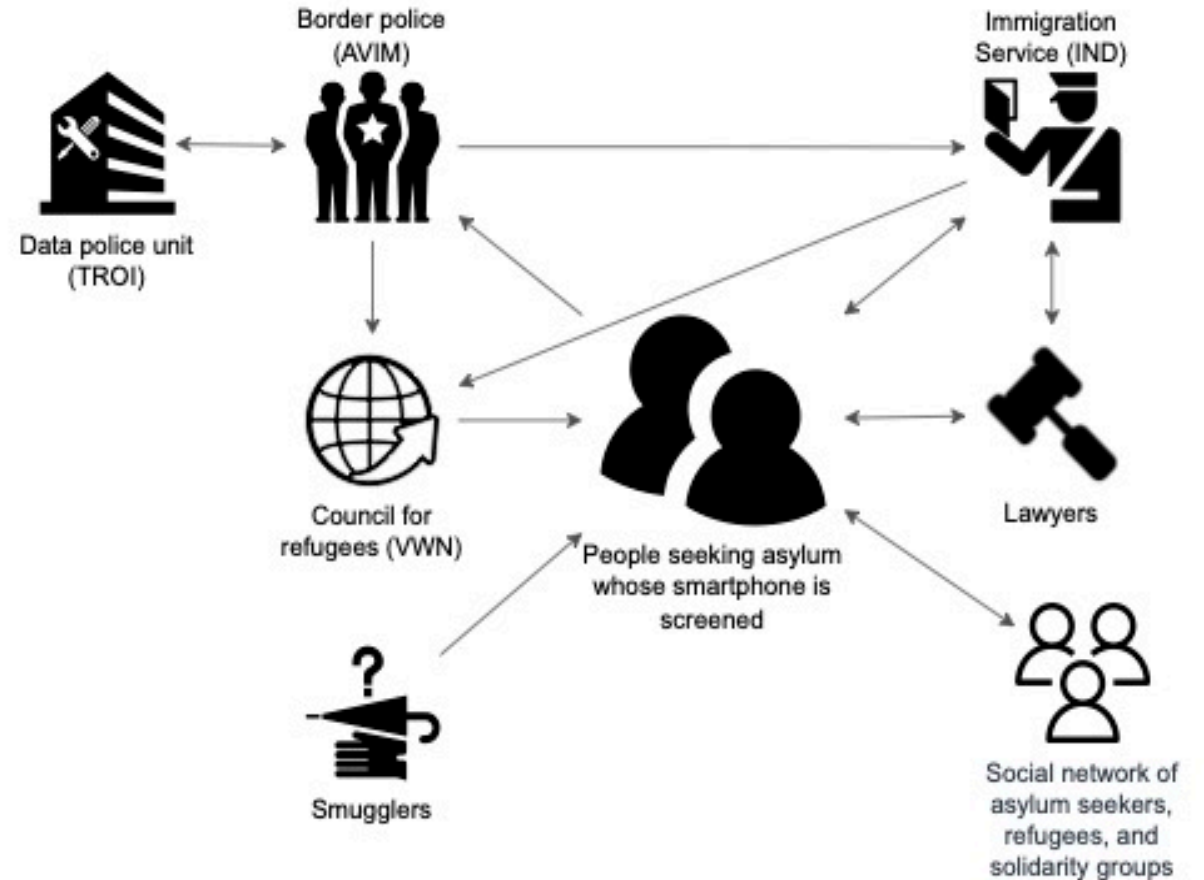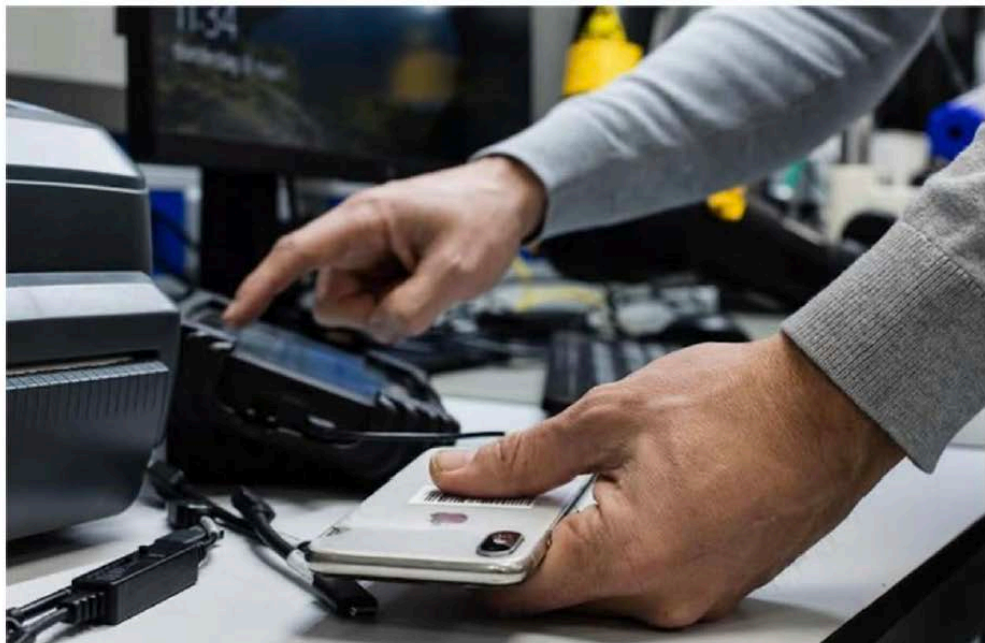
Figure 3. Photo of Cellebrite UFED being used by police officer (source: Instagram post, job posting 'senior digital investigator at human trafficking team' Politie Team Mensenhandel Oost-Brabant https://www.instagram.com/politie_oob_mensenhandel/).

Academic knowledge transfer

Leurs, K., Alajak, K., Dekker, R., & Ali Salah, A. (2025). Encountering the digital border: smartphone screening in the Dutch asylum procedure. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *51*(14), 3649–3674.

Dekker, R., Alajak, K., Leurs, K., Schans, D., & Salah, A. A. (2025). When data doubles narrate asylum: the agency of government officials and asylum applicants in datafied asylum procedures. *Public Management Review*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2561109

Alajak, K., Ozkul, D., Leurs, K., Dekker, R., Salah, A. A. (2024). The dangers and limitations of mobile phone screening in asylum processes. *Forced Migration Review.* *73*(1), 13-17.

Public engagement?

Public engagement: managing relationships & spokespersons

Public engagement: for whom, with whom, what for?

- Lack of information provision to (prospective) asylum seekers about process, rights & obligations
- Purposefull policy decision: asylum deterrance mechanism

→ Co-creating information videos

Paradoxical moment

Utrecht University

Mission and vision

In our mission and vision, we are guided by the core values of ambition, engagement, inspiration and independence.

Our mission: what do we want to contribute to the world?

We are working towards a better world. We do this by researching complex issues beyond the borders of disciplines. We put thinkers in contact with doers, so new insights can be applied. We give students the space to develop themselves. In so doing, we make substantial contributions to society, both now and in the future.

Open Science 2030 in the Netherlands

NPOS2030 Ambition Document
and Rolling Agenda

Version 1 | December 7, 2022

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7433767

UNL **Open Science agenda**

Our road map towards structural and sustainable embedding
of Open Science at our universities in the years ahead
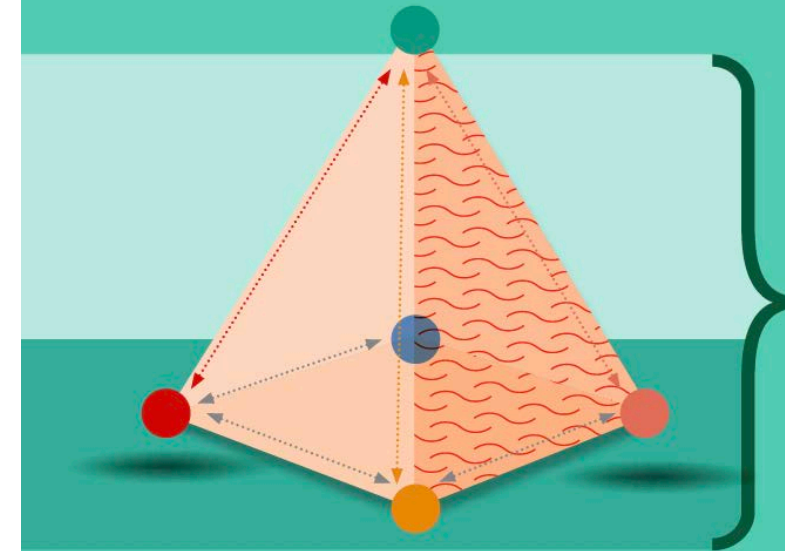
Author: UNL – Chiefs Open Science
Approved by the UNL Board on 8 December 2023 following a positive advice
from the SOO (Education and Research Steering Group), dated 1 December

11 December 2023

The transition towards an open academic culture requires lively networks of Open Science communities [...] ==Engagement with society [...] should be encouraged to provide for open, inclusive, and participatory processes for knowledge creation==

In the university context, three values are key: (1) scientific progress, (2) individual academic freedom and (3) institutional autonomy. [...] The transition to Open Science is explicitly linked to values such as openness [...] ==equality, equity, diversity, inclusiveness, collaboration== and transparency, integrity and ==public interest== / shared benefit.

Open science

Q&A on what you should comply with when applying for funding and implementing your project

Did you know that open science is a ==legal obligation== under [Horizon Europe](#). Its purpose is to foster greater transparency and trust for the benefit of scientific research and for the benefit of EU citizens.

[…] include involving ==all relevant knowledge actors== (including citizens)

==Citizen, civil society==, and end-user ==engagement==: you should provide succinct information on how this engagement will be implemented in your project, where/if appropriate. This may include ==co-design== activities (workshops or focus groups), co-creation activities (citizen science or user-led creation) and co-assessment activities (assisting monitoring, feedback, and evaluation of the governance of projects).

| HORIZON-CL3-2025-01-BM-01 | Open topic on efficient border surveillance and maritime security | 10 000 000 | HORIZON Innovation Actions | 12/06/2025 | 12/11/2025 |

Improved security of EU external borders […] irregular migration or exceptional situations of mass arrivals at external borders […] Sustained and improved surveillance, real-time situational awareness, and reaction capabilities to cope with potential critical situations at the EU external borders

| HORIZON-CL3-2025-01-BM-02 | Open topic on secured and facilitated crossing of external borders | 9 000 000 | HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions | 12/06/2025 | 12/11/2025 |

Under this topic, proposals are welcome to address new, upcoming or unforeseen challenges and/or creative or disruptive solutions for improving capabilities of practitioners for the secured and facilitated checks of crossings of external borders.
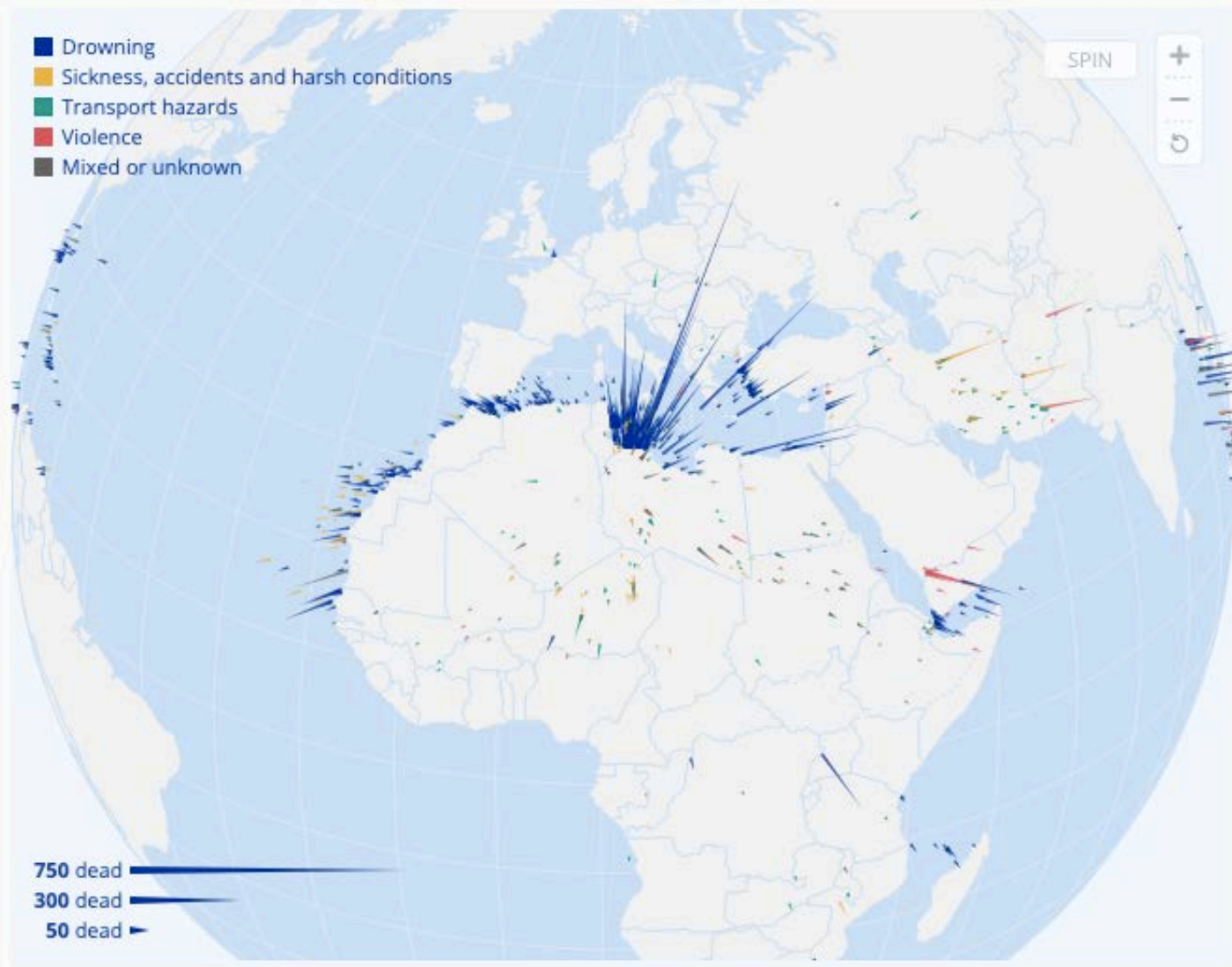
One in four migrant deaths in 2024 took place at the Mediterranean

Roughly one in 120 people who attempted the Mediterranean crossing died in 2024

https://www.migrationdataportal.org
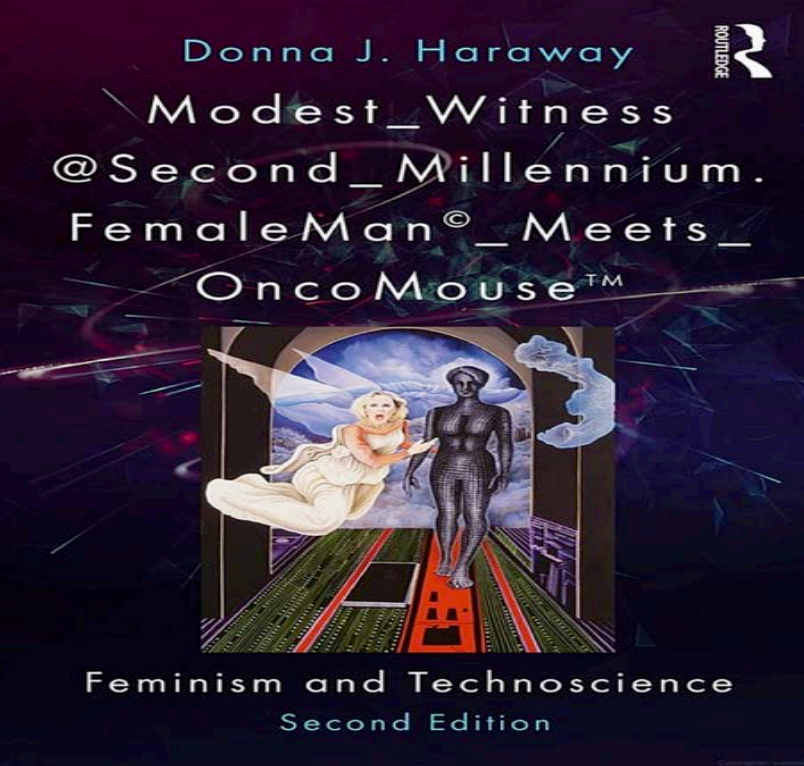
Taking a stance: epistemological considerations

From "God-trick" →
"partial view", as a "modest witness"

"Situated knowledge" →
making accountable, reflexive, located knowledge claims

e.g. reflect on how taking nation state as starting point risks "methodological nationalism"

Wimmer, A.; Schiller, N. G. (2003). "Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology". *The International Migration Review*. 37 (2): 576–610

Taking a stance: epistemological considerations

Cf. Foucault, knowledge = power

"The knowledge which a discourse produces constitutes <mark>a kind of power, exercised over those who are 'known'.</mark> When that knowledge is exercised in practice, those who are 'known' in a particular way will be subject (i.e. subjected) to it. This is always a power-relation." (Hall, in 'The West and The Rest', 205)

e.g. how scholarly use of categories such as refugees, asylum seekers, risks reproducing inclusion & exclusion mechanisms

Crawley, H., & Skleparis, D. (2017). Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(1), 48–64.

ESSENTIAL ESSAYS VOL. 2

Identity and Diaspora
Edited and with an introduction by **David Morley**

Stuart Hall

Making "research hassle" (onderzoeksgedoe"
generative

→ what can we learn?

Do no harm? The impact of policy on migration scholarship

Maurice Stierl
University of Warwick, UK

Abstract

The mass migrations of 2015 were not merely a watershed moment for 'EUrope' but also for the scholarly study of migration to EUrope. With academic expertise and insights becoming much sought-after in the media and political discourse, migration scholarship has gained in unknown popularity over recent years. This current 'migration knowledge hype' has particularly benefited scholarship that claims to be of relevance for EUropean policymakers in finding responses to 'migratory pressures'. This article critically interrogates the increasing intimacy between the worlds of migration scholarship and migration policy and seeks to unpack how the quest for policy-relevance has shaped the process of research itself. The impact of policy on migration research can be discerned when policy categories, assumptions, and needs constitute the bases and (conceptual) frames of research that seeks to be legible to policymakers. However, with EUropean migration policies causing devastation and undeniably harmful effects on migrant lives, what is the responsibility of researchers for the knowledge they produce and disseminate? Should the 'do no harm' principle prevalent in the migration discipline be expanded to also include the potentially harmful consequences resulting from research made relevant to migration policy-makers? This article makes the case for an engaged scholarship that does not shy away from intervening in the contested field of migration with the intention not to fix but to amplify the epistemic and other crises of the EUropean border regime.

Keywords
Policy-relevant scholarship, migration 'crisis', migration knowledge hype, research agenda, harm

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APPROACHES TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE

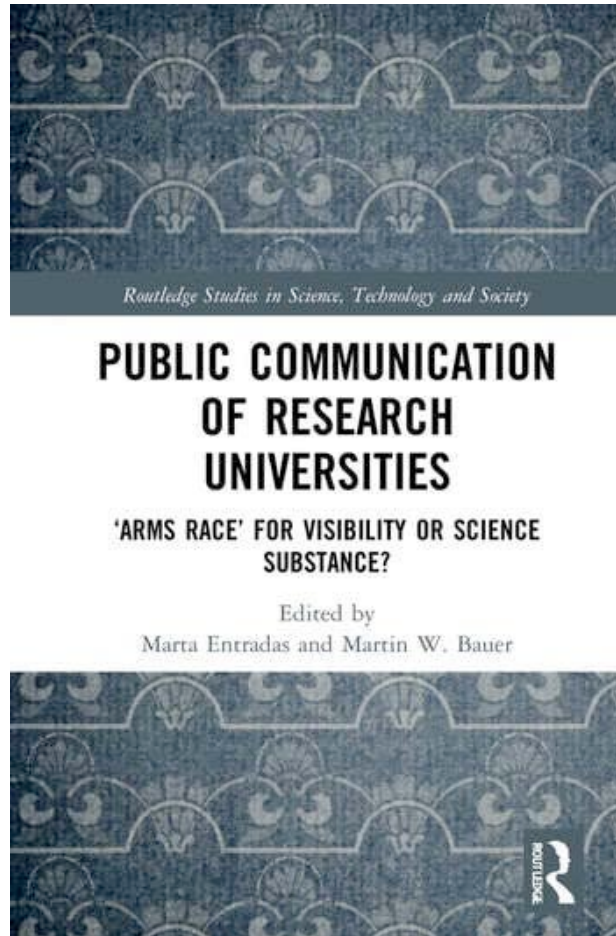# Research Methodologies and Ethical Challenges in Digital Migration Studies

Caring For (Big) Data?

Edited by Marie Sandberg · Luca Rossi · Vasilis Galis · Martin Bak Jørgensen

OPEN ACCESS

palgrave macmillan

# Politics of impact & rules of engagement of public engagement

"There is a <mark>Terra nullius</mark> a "nobody's land" in terms of institutional public engagement implementation and coordination. This Terra Nullius sits between an "arms race" to public engagement resources at the level of RIs, "boots on the ground" of individual researchers and the "top marching orders" from the top policy stakeholders—namely, the Ministry and the Research Funding organisations."

Russo, P., Bergsvik, R., Cramer, J., Kerkhoven, A., & van den Oever, S. (2022). Public engagement at research institutes in the Netherlands: Fertile territory or terra nullius? In: M. Entradas & M.W. Bauer (Eds.), *Public Communication of Research Universities* (pp. 153-167). Routledge.

Politics of impact & rules of engagement of public engagement

"<mark>the socially engaged researcher interacts with different stakeholders and is confronted with differing – at times competing – agendas</mark>. Researchers engage in the 'politics of impact'. This engagement raises issues about the changing role of researchers and calls for revisiting their capacities, their ability to maintain integrity, their objectives and how these affect the core mission of truth seeking and fact finding."
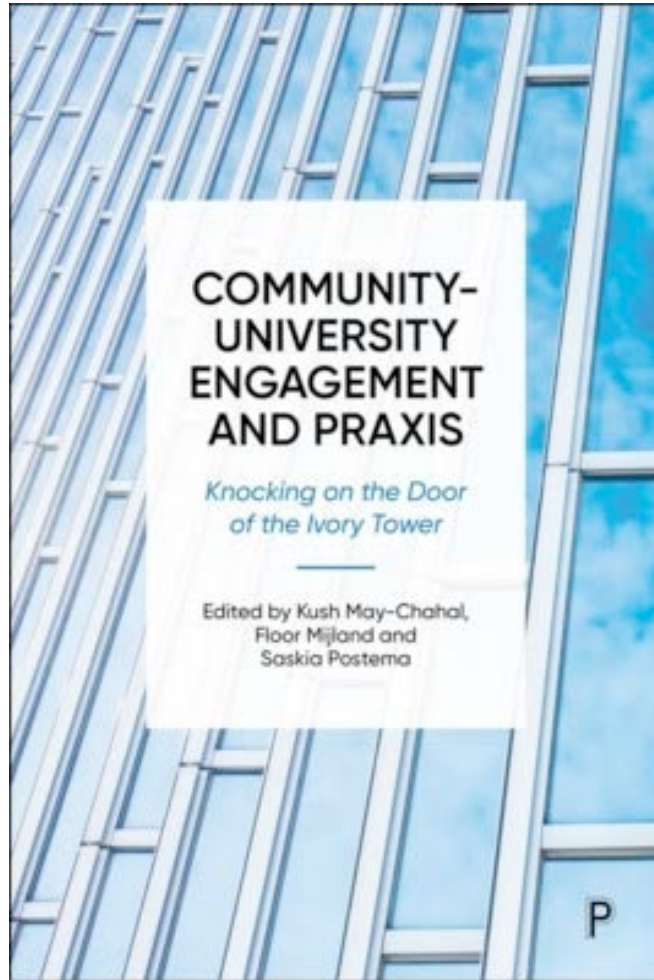
Meijer, A., Schäfer, M.T. & Bex, F. (2026). Rules of Engagement: Preserving Academic Values in Impactful Collaborations with Public Sector Partners. In K. May-Chahal, F. Mijland and S. Postema *Community-University Engagement and Praxis.* Policy Press.

Politics of impact & rules of engagement of public engagement
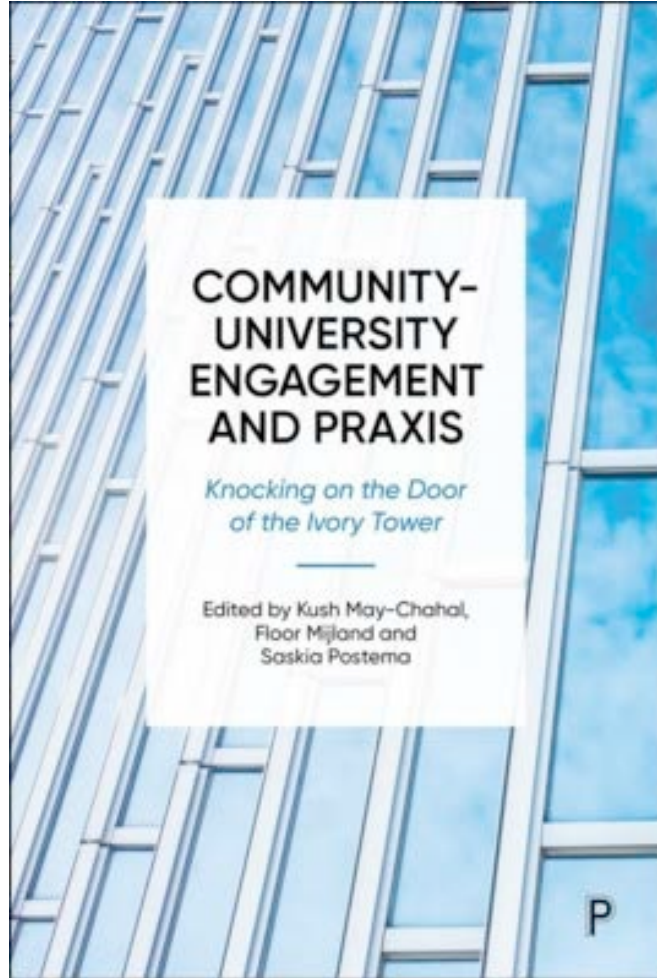
1. *Safeguarding independence:*
    Ensure that the research – formulating questions, gathering, analyzing data and presentation of outcomes – is not unduly influenced by external stakeholders.
2. *Procedural guidelines:*
    Ensure that external stakeholders know and agree with existing academic codes of conduct.
3. *Collective reflection with collaborative partners:*
    Acknowledge the need for collective reflection around dilemmas and create room for this reflection in collaborations
4. *Professional competence:*
    Ensure formative training for developing professional attitude and awareness of the academic ethos.
5. *Personal autonomy:*
    Allow researchers to refuse a collaboration with certain stakeholders on ethical grounds (veto right), without it hurting their career prospects.

Meijer, A., Schäfer, M.T. & Bex, F. (2026). Rules of Engagement: Preserving Academic Values in Impactful Collaborations with Public Sector Partners. In K. May-Chahal, F. Mijland and S. Postema *Community-University Engagement and Praxis.* Policy Press.

Thank you for your attention

- Paradoxical moment won't go away soon
- Research and activism not binary opposites
- To pursue impact/co-creation/public-engagement, we need to establish rules of engagement

Utrecht University

Sharing science, *shaping tomorrow*

Get in touch: k.h.a.leurs@uu.nl