

Call for Papers – Workshop to Prepare a Special Issue

1–2 December 2026, Osnabrück University, Germany

Data practices from below: Alternative archiving, counter-mapping and social-media activism in response to violence, oppression and ignorance

Organizers: Mert Pekşen and Laura Stielike, IMIS and SFB 1604, Osnabrück University

The current political climate is characterised by strategies of hiding, denying, or legitimizing structural, symbolic, and physical violence against marginalised, racialised, and migrantised groups as well as against growing parts of civil society. In this context, community-driven initiatives that contest power by documenting, monitoring, and exposing acts of violence, oppression, or strategic ignorance have become especially vital. While the current digitalisation has made data practices from below – such as alternative archiving, counter-mapping, counter-surveillance, and forensic investigations – more feasible, affordable, and visible, these practices have a longer history.

Our workshop focuses on current and historical data practices from below. Hereby we mean the production, handling, cleaning, sorting, editing, curating, hacking, repurposing, analysis, and visualisation of data by individual activists, political collectives and community organisations in response to experiences of violence, oppression, or ignorance. Following Scheel et al. 2019, we understand data practices as performative. Therefore, we argue that community-led data practices do not solely make visible incidents of right-wing violence, uncounted migrant deaths, or infrastructures of solidarity, but also have the strong potential to help enact alternative spaces, realities, and imaginations and to create new epistemological and political communities. The workshop brings scholars and activists working on alternative archiving, counter-mapping, social-media activism, and other data practices from below into dialogue, linking, among others, the fields of social movement studies, critical data studies, radical geography, critical migration research, and feminist science and technology studies.

The collective production of data from below often rests on the perceptions and definitions of participants, victims, and witnesses. By documenting a wide range of incidents such as migrant deaths and disappearance, gender-based violence, evictions, and police brutality, such bottom-up databases form a powerful counter-record that makes new forms of politics possible. They generate alternative realities that would otherwise remain invisible or silenced in dominant narratives. Data practices from below operate through several intersecting modes that share commonalities. Counter-mapping projects draw on participatory, bottom-up data (Alderman et al. 2021; Garrido 2021; Swab and Giesecking 2022; Tazzioli and Garelli 2019); social movements and activist

initiatives take monitoring and documentation as one of their main tasks and assemble their own alternative archives (Williams and Drake 2017; Solis 2018; Fife et al. 2023); and digital activists on social media use grassroots accounts to produce counter-narratives (Shahin and Hou 2025; Oumlil 2023; Fabbri 2022). These practices do not only produce tangible outputs, such as maps, archives, datasets, exhibitions, and websites, but they also create living repositories allowing a continuous reorganisation of the data, categories, and definitions. Consequently, a counter-map or an exhibition captures a specific moment in history while remaining open to constant revision. Each refinement of categories or reinterpretation of the underlying data reshapes the output, allowing it to reflect newly emerging realities rather than becoming a static end product.

The ideas for this workshop build on and are developed in parallel and in conversation with many other activists, scholars, scholarly activists, activist scholars, and other thinkers involved in and/or researching counter-knowledge production and (digital) practices of resistance. We build, for example, on reflections on bottom-up data practices and data activism (Milan 2016), the disobedient gaze and forensic investigations (Pezzani and Heller 2013), the politics of knowledge production (Amelung et al. 2024), counter-mapping (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2017; Tazzioli 2023), militant research (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013); reflexivity as critique (Stierl et al. 2025), epistemic and testimonial (in-)justice (Fricker 2007), and technoresistance (Pfeifer and Stielike forthcoming). We are also following and/or participating in recent collaborations and evolving publications and projects, such as, for example, the inventory of counter-practices against datafied migration regimes which is currently being built in the context of the EU COST Action DATAMIG. With this workshop, we want to contribute to the ongoing discussion and explore several aspects in more depth and in a new light:

First, we examine the processes, negotiations, and data practices that generate a range of outputs, including alternative maps, archives, investigative reports, and social media content. Central to our approach is the recognition that data practices and their products are co-constitutive: the ways in which data are gathered, interpreted, and shared, shape and are shaped by the forms of output they produce. Secondly, we focus on the commonalities and differences between the various modes of data practices from below (mapping, archiving, investigating, posting, etc.). We would like to compare their (visual) strategies, possible audiences, participatory potentials, repository functions, and technological dependencies. Finally, we focus on the implications of data practices from below for communities. In other words, we are interested in exploring the community-making function of collective production and processing of data and the complex relations involved in these practices that create, foster, or complicate (new) collaborations, solidarities, and alternative societal imaginaries.

We welcome contributions that engage with one or several of the following questions:

- What kinds of products are the result of data practices from below? How are they being produced and by whom? What are the main forms through which data from below is made legible, distributed and/or visualized?
- What are the pre-structuring effects of data platforms, mapping apps, and archiving infrastructures? Who is involved in the process of (pre-)structuring the data (e.g., defining, categorizing, sorting, hierarchising, tagging)? Which data practices from below are contested – why, how and by whom? What role do categories from the policy field, and from societal/political discourses play for data practices from below?
- What are the practical problems, methodological challenges and ethical risks when activists and scholars collaborate in bottom-up data production or when scholars attempt to use such data? How are unequal power relations, diverging interests and different working cultures negotiated? What risks are involved in the (scientific) production and dissemination of knowledge on data practices from below? (How) can activist data practices profit from scholars (e.g., from their access to scholarly infrastructures or methodological expertise)?
- What are the challenges in relation to missing data, definitions and categorizations, thematic and geographical gaps, and comparability and replicability of data? How do people who produce data from below approach and negotiate these challenges often inevitable in the internal workings of data production processes?
- How are data practices from below related to space? How do data practices and their products – such as maps, archives or forensic investigation reports – create new spaces and reproduce or challenge hegemonic forms of spatialisation?
- What are the community-building effects of data practices from below? How do data practices from below change, challenge, or even endanger communities? What kind of communities are produced through data practices from below (communities of practice, epistemic communities, communities of solidarity, etc.)?
- What are the (potential) political functions of data practices from below and to what extent do they create novel fields for (new) political claims? What are the motivations and political claims, for instance, behind counting migrant deaths, eviction notices, or incidents of misogynistic violence? What are the underlying epistemic claims of making certain incidents and phenomena visible and countable?

The workshop is organised in collaboration with the Reflexivity Lab of the Collaborative Research Centre “Production of Migration” (SFB 1604) at Osnabrück University. The workshop aims to contribute to the SFB’s examination of the processes and dynamics behind the production of migration and migration-related phenomena, and expand the conversation by foregrounding the powerful role of data in shaping epistemic and political realities and communities. By scrutinising how data are generated, for what purposes, and under which epistemic-political agendas, we aim to illuminate the ways in which concrete social phenomena – such as migration, urban segregation, gender-based violence, and digital labour – are actively produced. The workshop will take place in the “Other Epistemologies” Series of the Reflexivity Lab.

The workshop is planned to be a two-day in-person event at the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS), Osnabrück University on Tuesday, 1 December and Wednesday, 2 December 2026.

Building on the contributions presented at the workshop, we are planning to publish a special issue. Participants of the workshop are expected to circulate a shorter version (around ten pages) of their planned contribution for the special issue by 10 November 2026.

The workshop organizers will cover participants' accommodation and catering expenses. Subject to available funding, we may also be able to provide financial assistance for travel costs.

If you are interested in submitting a paper (or other form of contribution) for the workshop, please send a max. 300 word abstract and your short bio by 14 June to Mert Pekşen (mert.peksen@uni-osnabrueck.de) and Laura Stielike (laura.stielike@uni-osnabrueck.de).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.