

INTRODUCTION



## Novel and Controversial Methods in the Social Sciences: Introduction to Special Issue

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Editing this special issue of *Society and Natural Resources* was especially challenging, as it forced us to grapple with the ways we – as editors, reviewers, and scholars – read, interpret, and ultimately evaluate the scientific endeavors engaged in by our colleagues. We suggest that social scientists are now living in an era of comparative ease with regard to accumulating quantitative and qualitative data from human participants, though, as Stedman et al. point out in this issue, perhaps not via mail surveys. Not only do we now have easier ways of reaching human participants across the globe using online crowdsourcing platforms, we also have many institutions specializing in recruiting representative survey samples across seemingly limitless population subsets. Furthermore, online user generated content from social media sites, discussion forums, blogs and specialized web-based applications allow social scientists to reach and study people where they are, more conveniently than ever before. Yet, this does not diminish the need for or significance of smaller-scale case studies or methodologies like ethnography or community-based participatory research. Such approaches may become even more important for demonstrating precisely the gaps in our knowledge generated by more technologically – not necessarily methodologically – innovative data collection sources.

Our intent in this issue is to bring greater exposure to promising methodologies that are being tested, have been tested but are not yet widely accepted across disciplines, or are being tested for applicability in other contexts. Further, we attempt to enhance collective understanding of what methods are considered valid, and where such methods are headed in the social sciences as they apply to natural resources and the environment. To accomplish this task, we believe that social science scholars may need to examine our own confirmation biases and question our ability to look critically upon the methods with which we are most familiar and our tendencies to be overly critical of those with which we are not. In natural resources fields, interdisciplinary work is often discussed as crossing ecological and social sciences and less commonly as crossing social sciences. As social scientists have proven the relevance – indeed, necessity – of our work for managing natural resources and solving environmental problems, we have also become more siloed. As Abraham Kaplan (2017) said, “The price of training is always a certain “trained incapacity”: the more we know how to do something, the harder it is to learn to do it differently,” and, we suggest, the harder it is to accept that those “different” ways are just as valid even if we do not learn them ourselves. It is our hope

that the collection of manuscripts presented in this issue will help foster interdisciplinary work within the social sciences by exposing readers to novel methodologies.

This issue begins with methods that may be largely unfamiliar to SNR readership. Fernandez-Gimenez, Jennings, and Wilmer (2019) explore how arts-based research, specifically poetic inquiry, can be used across multiple natural resources issues. They draw attention to the ways in which poetic inquiry can be used to understand and communicate the experiences of others, to broaden their and their students' views about what can be considered "research", and to "defy the implicit dualisms between scientist and artist..." Jain et al. (2019) introduce a physiological method for understanding how viewers react to wildlife conservation scenes, and how this method can be used in conservation communication. Bengston (2019) describes the field of futures research and how such methods are classified. Some – like serious games – are likely already known to some readers, while others – like science fiction prototyping – may be less so.

As the issue moves into methods and topics likely more familiar to readers, Chen, Parkings, and Sherren (2019) describe how Instagram landscape photos and captions from two sites were gathered and analyzed to understand landscape activities and values of "younger voices" – a demographic that is often difficult to reach in social science research. Grace-McCaskey et al. (2019) describe two case studies of citizen science, one from the perspective of project managers and another from that of a citizen scientist, and offer eco-ethnography as a tool for designing, doing, and understanding such projects. Stedman et al. (2019) explore how mail survey response rates have declined over time, and discuss solutions and alternative approaches. Finally, Graefe et al. (2019) offer multiple methods that integrate social, ecological, and economic impacts of small-scale race events that are held on public lands.

We hope readers find that this set of articles sparks their interest in new methodologies and provokes new thoughts about how to improve or integrate them with other methods they may already employ.

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