

Rethinking International Exchange with Digital

Bringing agility and innovation to international higher education



02/2021

swissnex
network 

movetia

Austausch und Mobilität
Echanges et mobilité
Scambi e mobilità
Exchange and mobility

Insights

Methods for conducting virtual fieldwork - now is the time to reexamine and experiment

At the [Leading House for the Latin American Region](#), one of our most important tasks is funding researchers so that they can travel and conduct fieldwork. With travel restrictions and closed archives, the pandemic brought a lot of traditional research to a halt. The reality, though, is that researchers should be prepared to conduct fieldwork in times of crisis of any form: be it pandemics, natural disasters, political upheavals, etc. We should also be reconsidering what type of travel is necessary. Our current priority at the Leading House is helping researchers move forward with their work.

Remote practices have existed for a long time. I find the possibilities of combining digital and analog tools to promote human-centred innovation and discovery very exciting. Cultural probes are an excellent example of this and British professors such as [Helen Kara](#) and [William Gaver](#) have interesting suggestions for creative remote research.

Surprisingly, sometimes people share and learn more when participating in remote-method, open-ended, hands-on assignments than they would in traditional ethnographic exchange. At present, we have academics conducting interviews over WhatsApp or asking participants to share through journal entries. Some researchers have sent a

toolkit with "homework" activities for the respondents, such as writing a poem, taking a photo, making videos of their surroundings, or even building something together. Playfulness invites intimacy.

I learned of one researcher who, when unable to visit an indigenous basket archive, instead learned firsthand, over a series of video calls with the community, how to weave baskets himself, collecting valuable oral histories in the process.

There are also a plethora of digital non-traditional secondary sources to turn to, like chatrooms and forums. As scientists, we need to maintain our rigorous academic standards, but it is worthwhile to reconsider how we use primary and secondary data. Virtual is not a substitute for in-person meetings, but it can be a powerful enhancement for Social Science research. Hopefully, in the future, we will have the luxury to do both.

Dr. Rocío Robinson

Senior Manager AIT Startups. Senior Manager Leading House for the Latin American Region. Lecturer at HSG
rocio.robinson@unisg.ch

