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# Ethnographic approaches in social work research

Date & time: Friday March 17, 2023 from 9u30 - 12u30 (Brussels time)

Join for free: <https://ugent-be.zoom.us/j/92695993717?pwd=dlNuQks1Rmg5ZDNSYzFVejAzVUppQT09>

Meeting ID: 926 9599 3717

Passcode: 2XTyYtr5

## 09.30 - 09.45 - Welcome and introduction: Prof. dr. Rudi Roose (Ghent University, Belgium)

## 09.45 - 10.30 - Prof. dr. Robin Vandevooardt (Ghent University, Belgium)

- ***Ethnographic approaches to migration and social work***

While ethnography has long been associated with anthropology, it has become an increasingly common practice in a variety of disciplines, including social work and migration studies. Today, ethnography appears in many shapes and forms, all of which revolve around long-term engagement with particular actors, spaces, objects, discourses, and/or practices. While ethnography is often used to unearth tacit constellations of power and meaning, it poses distinct challenges in terms of negotiating access, building trust, and positional ethics. In this talk, I will explore the complexity of contemporary ethnography in research on migration and social work, by drawing on examples of how refugees perceive and interact with social workers; why return councilors are (not) confronted with the typical dilemmas of street-level bureaucrats; how (digital) legal procedures lead their own social lives; and how those without formal rights build a home in the most unlikely places.



**Robin Vandevooardt** is an Assistant Professor in Migration and Refugee studies, most of his research and teaching focuses on the politics of borders, humanitarianism, solidarity, migration policy, and critical theory. He is currently conducting and supervising ethnographic research: migrant solidarity movements combining humanitarian with political action, and the impact of migration-related policies on the lived experiences of asylum seekers. Before joining the Centre for the Social Study of Migration and Refugees (CESSMIR) and the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, and Conflict and Development at the UGent, he worked as a postdoctoral researcher at Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre and the University of Antwerp's Centre for Research on Ecological and Social Change.

## 10.30 - 11.00 - Break

## 11:00- 11.45 - Prof. dr. Sarah Murru (KU Leuven)

- ***Using Institutional Ethnography to Research Social Work: On the Social Organization of People's Everyday/night Lives.***

Institutional Ethnography (IE) is a methodology-of-inquiry developed by feminist Canadian scholar Dorothy Smith, which has proven to be very useful to the study of social work. Designed as a Sociology for People (Smith, 1987), IE starts inquiry from the standpoint of people, seeks to define a problematic in their everyday life experiences, and from there, aims to uncover how institutions rule and shape people's lives in specific ways that are not always in their best interest. Institution, in IE, is to be understood largely such as the institution of health care, family, education, business corporations, government and so on. In other words, IE will start from the local site of people's embodied practices, which are considered to be coordinated by something beyond their own motivations and intentions, and will move to uncover, or connect these practices to, the translocal site of objectified social relations such as the discourses, ideologies, or rules that shape the local activity. With this perspective, IE does not consider discourse and concepts to be descriptive of experience; rather, it understands them as organizers of it (Murru, 2021). In this presentation, I start by outlining what IE is all about – in terms of ontology as well as praxis – by focusing among others on its conceptions of “work”, “coordination of people's work through texts”, and “ruling relations”. I then present examples from the field of social work that have been researched with IE and end by highlighting the potentials and limits of this approach for future studies of social work.



**Sarah Murru** is an Assistant Professor in Sociology at KU Leuven, member of the Center for Sociological Research (CeSO) and a research associate to the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Families and Sexualities (CIRFASE) at UCLouvain. Her expertise lies in the fields of Resistance Studies and Gender Studies, especially Feminist research and Institutional Ethnography. She has also worked on migration and mobility, as well as on youth and family research. As an institutional ethnographer, she is interested in understanding how institutions socially organize people's everyday lives. She has co-edited two volumes entitled *Resistances: Between Theories and the Field* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020) and *Excluding Diversity through Intersectional Borderings: Politics, policies and everyday experiences in Europe and beyond* (IMISCOE, 2023).

## 11.45 - 12.30: Questions and debate