



UN/CERTAIN CALIBRATIONS

mLAB Residency

Call for Research-Art Collaborations

The mLAB, located at the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern, is pleased to announce the second call for residencies in form of transdisciplinary research collaborations between academia, research, (digital) media, and arts. The residency aims to foster collaborations that experiment with new methodological approaches, forms of knowledge production and science communication.

The mLAB functions as an incubator and actively supports the working process in the form of mentoring and assistance regarding the dissemination and cross-media communication of possible results. The mLAB provides resident teams with time, space and technology to develop independent projects that might consist of actually conducting research together, critically reflecting upon their research and artistic practices, writing or fostering new connections between the arts, media and academia.

During the residency, the selected team(s) are supposed to work for approximately one month at mLAB at the Institute of Geography between September 2021 and February 2022. We expect that the residency will be used to develop insights that will lead to a follow-up project. Whether it will culminate in an artwork, a film, an exhibition, a performance or a research project that involves artistic modes of data collection or dissemination, whether it is establishing a concrete network, writing a grant application, planning a book, a journey, a website or a conference. No final product or presentation is required. Nevertheless, we welcome any kind of public events, lectures, workshops, open reading groups or screenings during the residency phase, which take place at the Institute of Geography and engage with the Institute's faculty and students.

TYPE

Project development

PERIOD

Sep 2021 – Feb 2022

DURATION

1 month or 30 days
spread over a longer
period

DEADLINE

Feb 28, 2021 (11 PM)

TOTAL BUDGET

CHF 12 000

WHO

All disciplines; international; at least one team member must be working or studying at the University of Bern

PARTICIPANTS PER TEAM

2-10

For our second cycle of residencies we invite you to take the idea of **UN/CERTAIN CALIBRATIONS** as a starting point for further reflections.

If you stand at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich these days and look at your GPS coordinates, you will notice that you are not exactly at 0° longitude. The location of the prime meridian—the foundation for global navigation and timekeeping—had to be corrected in the 1980s. The astronomers who originally calibrated the telescope did not take into account certain anomalies and thus made a measuring error. Today, the prime meridian is located 102 meters farther away in a city park and runs exactly through a litter bin for dog poo and it will continue to shift due to plate tectonics in the future. Despite this continuing dynamic adjustment, geographic coordinates are considered a very stable basis for our orientation in the world.

Calibrations—understood by the Cambridge Dictionary as a process to check if a measuring instrument performs accurately—characterizes more broadly speaking **forms of standardization, defining norms and constituting objective knowledge**. In general, instruments are calibrated to guarantee accuracy despite inevitable uncertainty. But a calibration can only be a momentary snapshot and must be repeated continuously, especially when the circumstances change. Therefore, calibrating is a **process that can never be completed**. Yet the desire for certainty and objectivity is an important element of modern ideologies, just like international norms, which seem indispensable today.

Many things can be measured: volumes, temperature, electric voltage, radioactive radiation, or toxic residues. Whether meteorology or analytical chemistry, the natural sciences often value their findings by relating measured and expected values via reference standards. Calibrations are also important in different medical settings for example when bodies are adjusted to biomedical technologies or medication. But calibration is also carried out in the social sciences, for instance in IQ and BMI calculations that define and are organized around statistical norms.

We propose to engage with the concept of calibration to question, extend and discuss topics such as un/certainty, quantification, the making of objectivity and processes of normalization. We invite you to think about calibrations with a two-fold meaning: Powerful normalizing and objectifying tools that are nevertheless **carrying an emancipatory potential**—which lies in the possibility of changing the grounds on which measurements take place.

Related questions could be: **Who is calibrating** and on what base? Who is allowed to (re)define the standard and **what deviates** inevitably from a standard? **How are certainty and objectivity produced** and at the same time challenged by processes of calibration? To what extent can uncertainty be acknowledged and be used productively? How do **social and political calibration processes** look like? In what ways is technology defining its object—what power has calibration on defining established certainties in society? And to what extent can problematic protocols and social policies be reset or nullified? Are there possibilities for **counter-calibrations**? How can a norm be created in which a multitude of individuals can be represented? How would measures based on a speculative understanding of the future look like?

ELIGIBILITY

Reflecting its inter- and transdisciplinary character, the mLAB welcomes **applications from a wide spectrum of disciplines** (social science, humanities, natural science, interdisciplinary fields, arts, media), research interests and questions.

Eligible for proposals are teams of which at least **one team member must be working or studying at the University of Bern**. Other team members can be artists and researchers from all kind of disciplines, **inside or outside the university**, from Bern or another part of the world, students, academic personnel, pedagogues, activists, journalists, cultural workers, architects, writers or designers. Everyone should be willing to engage in collaborative and artistic practice. There are no restrictions regarding age or origin. We cannot provide a guarantee for entry and visa but will do our best to support you in case of any problems. The group size should be between 2 and 10 participants.

BUDGET & FACILITIES

Projects with a budget of **up to CHF 12,000** can apply. This is also the total amount available for one or more projects in this round. The budget can be spent on the basis of a pre-agreed budget plan. The budget size does not affect the chances of approval. The jury reserves the possibility to modify the proposed budget. This budget is used to cover materials, books, travel, and honorariums for guests, but also to pay for travel and accommodation in Bern, should individual participants not be local. The mLAB does not own any guest apartments. An honorarium can also be paid to team members at their own discretion. However, employees from the University of Bern or other universities holding a position are not entitled to pay themselves salaries or honorariums.

The mLAB provides a **pool of equipment** to realize film and audio projects and is equipped with several workstations with common video, sound editing and DTP software which can be used 24/7, with consideration of other activities taking place there. Furthermore, the Institute of Geography offers additional infrastructures such as a library, labs, etc., which can be used on request.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

The complete application (all in one PDF file) should be sent via email to **mlab@giub.unibe.ch** until **February 28, 2021 (11 PM)**. It can be written in English, German or French and should consist of:

1. a text (maximum 4 pages) that

- describes the general working theme
- refers to the topic of UN/CERTAIN CALIBRATIONS
- outlines a realistic work plan, times and working methods, with regard to the complexity of the research and the duration of the residency (we expect total working days equivalent to 1 month, to be completed in consecutive working days or spread over a longer period)
- speaks about how you want to work together
- characterizes the follow-on project
- involves a budget proposal

2. a short text that describes the **professional / research background** of the individual team members (one paragraph per person)

3. CVs (maximum 3 pages per person)

Optional: A documentation of previous projects, texts, images, videos, own web pages, links

A jury of experts from different fields will review the submissions and inform the candidates as soon as possible.

CONTACT

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The mLAB – where geography, art and media collaborate

The mLAB at the Institute of Geography is an experimental space that encourages researchers to develop new modes of collaborative and collective work and to critically use arts, media and digital research methods as an integral part of their work, promoting unorthodox coalitions of aesthetics and geography.

Besides making research results visible, the focus is also on sensorial routes of knowledge creation. Digital methods and artistic perspectives enable a different kind of research. They place the researchers and the researched personalities in a completely different way at the center and in relation to each other. They open up spaces for the invisible and the unspeakable and provoke new forms of approaching a theme.

The main questions are: How can we create points of access for outsiders to the terrain of our research? What role can contemporary digital media practice play in collecting, analyzing and communicating data? What does artistic research mean in different academic fields? How can different kinds of data material (quantitative, qualitative, visual, digital) be handled aesthetically? How can art help to generate another sense of meaning alongside mere logics of utilization?

The mLAB was created as a creative and inclusive laboratory by the units Critical Sustainability Studies and Social and Cultural Geography of the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern and is currently run by the artist Mirko Winkel. It comprises a large team of scholars whose interest is to discover new directions and imaginative formats within and beyond geography.

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