Dear colleagues,

In this newsletter, we are pleased to share with you the preliminary program for the 2016 ISA Forum meeting to be held in Vienna, Austria, 10-14 July 2016, under the theme “The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World!”

I would like to take this opportunity to share a few reminders with program participants:

- Distributed papers may be given an oral presentation time slot if oral presenters fail to register or to present themselves to the session. All presentations will be featured in the program as well as in the abstract book, regardless of presentation type.
- The deadline for registration is April 5. You can find more information on rates and how to register here: [http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/registration.htm](http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/registration.htm).
- Registration grants are available. We receive a certain amount from ISA to allocate to our longstanding members (eligible applicants must have been members for at least 2 years), which our RC matches while relaxing the eligibility requirement to RC15 membership at the time of application. More information on how to apply can be found here: [http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/grants.htm](http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/grants.htm). The deadline to apply is January 31.
- General information on the conference, including hotel reservations, is available at [http://isasforum2016.univie.ac.at/home/](http://isasforum2016.univie.ac.at/home/).

Finally, I also want to take this opportunity to remind you of our RC15’s latest initiative to facilitate online debate and networking among RC15 members, and particularly reaching out to trainees. I created a LinkedIn group for RC15, where I would encourage you to start discussions, post announcements for recent publications, meetings, or jobs, etc. Fifty-seven people have already joined, and I hope you will do so as well!

I also encourage you to contact me or other board members if you have suggestions of how RC15 could better serve your needs.

Warm regards,

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New Challenges in the French Sociology of Health

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In France, the sociology of health has been greatly improved by the legacy of a researcher generation which legitimated the study of health, disease, medicine and disability and made interdisciplinary and empirical studies two central dimensions of research practice. Since the beginning of the 2000s, sociological research on health issues has been considerably diversified in France, reflecting the recomposition of the health world as much as the transformations in the scientific and institutional contexts in which it operates. This paper is built on recent studies analyzing field research dynamics and thematic network discussions on “Health, medicine, disease and disability” (The RT19) from the French Association of Sociology (AFS).

The sociology of health has come a long way since its emergence in the 1970s, and its institutionalization in the 1980s. The Journal of Social Sciences and Health (Sciences Sociales et Santé), which became the field’s main journal, was created in 1982, followed by the first research center, Cermes, founded in 1986. This center is dedicated exclusively to the relationship between medicine, health, and society. Then, two main characteristics appeared in the sociology of health in France. The first one is the need of interdisciplinary between the social sciences and medical sciences. The second is the use of empirical work largely influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology. Until the early 2000s, this trend was marked by a disinterest in both quantitative work and the problem of social inequality. Nowadays, these two dimensions appear as central issues in many scientific and professional networks (including those of young researchers) and also in the project of many research centers.

Since the 1990s the sociology of health has been gaining a progressive foothold in the world of sociology. Broadly speaking, ours stands out as one of the most important sociological fields in France, even when compared of those of work and occupations, urban or education areas. It is taught in most sociology departments, and publications on tied to our field are common in generalist as much as specialized journals. These elements are supported by significant funding which makes it a privileged field. In addition, sociologists in our field are respected and solicited by medical, nursing and social work training programs; this trend, however, depends largely on the program directors.
Even though the French sociology of health was almost exclusively interested in the medical profession, hospital, social representations of health and illness on its start, it has widely extended since. From the beginning of the 2000s on, illness, mainly through AIDS, cancer and chronic neurodegenerative diseases, has been a privileged subject; some of the phenomena which have been studied include: social construction and experience of illness; organizational, scientific, technical, biomedical innovations; knowledge transformation; collective mobilizations, etc.

Works on medicine and on the hospital have become less frequent. The field of disability, around the work of disability studies, has become a full-fledged object within the domain of sociology and social sciences. A shift and a broadening of subjects and themes have been observed around three major areas:

- Studies about the hospital and health professionals deal less with medical and nursing work than with the effects of policies and standardized scientific processes on health, management, and institutional and professional practices. Studies on informing and educating, related to individual and collective risk management, have grown in volume;
- Extended social and medico-social questioning, legal and legislative fields (work illnesses, judiciarization processes) and environmental studies have helped renew perspectives on social health inequalities and aided in redefining the concept of health as a whole;
- The framing of new questions as social issues, such as the rise of vulnerabilities, new forms of body work, and the internationalization of health issues such as global health.

Sociology of health, illness and medicine is changing, driven by the need to improve our understanding of the human condition in a globalization context. Many of the research issues we face will require social scientists to work in close collaboration with researchers of other disciplines, especially biomedical and natural sciences, and across national boundaries. Take into accounting only that dimension, practice of interdisciplinary in social sciences research is now understood as the 'solution'. This trend meets high and multiple social expectations, which are related to the economic context, new ethical and cultural concerns, and to the rise of inequalities regarding health issues. This practice of cross-disciplinary (multi/inter/trans-disciplinary) is extensively encouraged by funders and by national and European guidelines for research. However, the acceleration of that trend, combined with the transformation funding modes, call into question the practice of interdisciplinary and of sociology: the abilities of the sociologists to work with other researchers with radically different epistemological basis; the risk of neglecting or overinvest certain themes; the sociological treatment of medicine compared to that of health, etc.

In this framework, in association with The RT19 members, we would try to consider these new challenges in the next two years by organizing two conferences. We will aim to a better identification of the health sociological field in France and abroad. We would like to engage a dynamic questioning from the international scientific community about recent cross research developments in social sciences on health, illness and medical issues.
References