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# Agriculture and Food

The E-Newsletter of the ISA Research Committee on Agriculture and Food (RC40)

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## Content:

- President's Greeting
- Financial and communications report
- Update on IJSAF and new IJSAF editorial board
- Call for abstracts to IRSA and ISA FORUM 2020– deadlines September 27 and 30 2019
- Reports from ESRS in Trondheim June 2019

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## RC40 President's Greeting

Greetings from Ithaca, New York where the fall academic term is about to begin. I enter this academic year excited to work with talented students, advance collaborative research, and pursue opportunities to engage in public and policy debates, all of which are a great privilege. I want to extend best wishes to all RC40 members and encourage you to share thoughts and news with one another through our new and improved website - <https://www.isa-agrifood.com/>. Through collegial exchange, we can support one another, enhance our capacity to produce knowledge, and make a positive difference in and through agrifood systems.

I have been teaching Environmental Governance for more than 15 years, and this is one of the courses I will teach this fall. As I reflect on contemporary governance applied to agrifood, specifically responses to the dual challenges of ecological sustainability and economic justice, I am struck by the prominence of multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSI). MSI are platforms for dialogue and standard setting among a set of interdependent stakeholders. My interest lies in the potential of these initiatives to produce improvements and, more critically, in the possibility that these efforts are becoming institutionalized as a way for firms, states, and consumers to perform engagement with social problems and “sustain the unsustainable”. I think it is essential to reflect on what these initiatives tell us about the capacity of the state - or some other set of forces – to advance social regulation in service of ecology, poverty alleviation, labor, and public health. This summer I have been engaged in a collaboration with Oxfam in their Behind the Brands program (<https://www.behindthebrands.org/>), and I have been following the Accountability Framework Initiative (<https://accountability-framework.org/overview/>) at arm's length. These are prominent efforts in the agrifood sector to enhance transparency of corporate performance in relation to various socioecological assessment criteria. The metrics and information flows are supposedly endowed with the power to spur improvements by motivating executives concerned about their brands and their social right to operate. MSI are an important test of soft law and corporate social responsibility. By extension, it is a test of what can be accomplished with states in the backseat.

MSI are not a new phenomenon, and several of our members have been engaged in relevant research for years. Contemporary and wildly dysfunctional domestic politics in many countries lead me to pay more attention to these governance initiative. I encourage you to email me ([saw44@cornell.edu](mailto:saw44@cornell.edu)) with references, weblinks, teaching materials, and your engagement with MSI. I will collate this information and post it the RC40 webpage (<https://www.isa-agrifood.com/>). It is possible for us to collaborate to create a snapshot of what is happening and to advance understanding of these developments.

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In this RC40 2019 summer newsletter we profile activities at the June 2019 European Society for Rural Sociology conference in Trondheim. We extend an invitation to you to participate in the 2020 ISA Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil - <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/forum/porto-alegre-2020>. Deadline for abstracts is Sept 30, 2019. Additionally, you are encouraged to join the 2020 International Rural Sociological Association (IRSA) meeting in Cairns, Australia - <http://www.irsa2020.com/congress/present-a-paper/>. Abstract deadline is Sept 27, 2019. We introduce the new Editorial Board of the International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food (<https://www.ij saf.org/index.php/ij saf>), the RC40 journal, edited by Raymond Jussaume. Please join RC40 activities at an upcoming conference, engage through the regional networks, and share information through the RC40 website. This organization is what we make of it, together.

Best,  
Steven Wolf (saw44@cornell.edu)  
RC40 President

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## Status on membership, finances and communications

### Membership

The number of members in the RC-40 has, for many years, been gradually increasing. Mid 2019 the number of members were 116, 3 less than when entering the year. It is important that we keep the membership at this level, or preferable higher, to allow for re-funds and grants from ISA that covers the activities level that we want to have. A higher membership also mean a higher activity level at our events, and on our on-line platform <https://www.isa-agrifood.com>.

We want to encourage all to renew memberships when they expire!

Membership to the International Sociological Association (ISA) and RC40 covers a four-year period. ISA membership registration form is available on <https://isa.enoah.com/Sign-In>.

### Finances

RC-40 account. Balance per August 2019 is US\$4379 (account sits in Norway: NOK39221)

By application RC40 have been awarded an activity grant of EUR 1120 from ISA. Half of this remains at ISA upon documentation of activities.

The RC40 EC will allocate money in coming months to a range of possible projects including website, IJSAF, communications, travel grants, and strengthening the regional networks, and these expenditures will be detailed in future newsletters

### Communications

The RC40 website ([www.isa-agrifood.com](http://www.isa-agrifood.com)) is where RC40 communications takes place. On this site, all members can post news, events or other information as they like. We were hoping the forum would be a nice spot for engagement between members. The forum is underutilized and we look for ways to increase members' engagement. Please visit the site and share your thoughts on this matter, or other matters that might interest our membership. We are look forward to seeing you there!

Reported by  
Hilde Bjørkhaug  
RC40 Secretary/treasurer



Sociology of  
Agriculture and Food

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## Update on IJSAF

During the 2018 calendar year, three issues of the International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food (IJSAF) were published. So far this year, one issue has been published, and we anticipate that the second issue for 2019 will be released sometime in September. We are guardedly optimistic that a third issue will be published in December, but we may not have enough manuscripts accepted by the end of the year to be able to publish a third issue this year.

Since January of 2019, we have received 14 submissions, of which 10 were sent out for peer review. This means that we are averaging a little over one article per month that is being reviewed for the journal. This is clearly insufficient for achieving our goal of consistently publishing four issues per year. RC-40 members are *strongly encouraged* to submit work to the journal. In addition, we are in desperate need of reviewers. Currently, each work is reviewed by only two reviewers. Finding reviewers continues to be a major challenge for the journal. If you have not already submitted your form identifying your academic interests to the editorial team, please contact us at [ijsaf@msu.edu](mailto:ijsaf@msu.edu) and we will reach out to you with one of our forms. It is also possible to sign up as a reviewer via our web portal at [ijsaf.org](http://ijsaf.org). Please remember that IJSAF is our journal and in order for it to be successful, we all need to become active in the journal's work.

Under the leadership of Steven Wolf and the RC-40 Executive Committee, a proposed new Editorial Board for the Journal has been put together. We are currently in the process of contacting those individuals and anticipate announcing the names of the new Board members shortly.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Raymond Jussaume  
Editor-in-Chief  
International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food



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ISA FORUM, Porto Alegre; Brazil 14-18 July 2020 abstracts deadline is Sept 30, 2019

The ISA FORUM: Challenges of the 21st Century: Democracy, Environment, Inequalities, Intersectionality

RC-40 has following **paper sessions** announced at ISA FORUM.

- Agrarian Crisis and Farmers Suicide in Asia
- Agrifood Transitions in the Anthropocene
- Alternative Food Networks
- Financialization of the Agri-Food System and Its Consequences
- From Food Utopias to Food Futures: Theory and Practice in Agri-Food Transformation
- Governing Value(s) and Organizing through Standards
- Inequality in Growth and Advancement of Agriculture
- Social Movements as Protagonists of New Agrifood Markets

**A panel session** will focus on the expansion of commodity production and its consequences in terms of land grabbing, deforestation, climate change, rural communities' crisis, economic development & dispossession from the context of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.

Panelist are:

Sergio Pereira Leite - Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro - Brazil.

Carla Gras - National University of San Martin - Argentina.

Valdemar João Wesz Junior - University of Latin American Integration - Brazil (but, Paraguai).

Paulo Niederle will chair the panel.

Note that we also have an **RC40 poster session** at this FORUM

<https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/forum2020/webprogrampreliminary/Symposium606.html>



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## IRSA Cairns, Australia 8-12 July 2020- abstracts deadline is Sept 25, 2019

The deadline for IRSA, Cairns abstracts is Sept 27, 2019. I urge you to circulate the link <http://www.irsas2020.com/congress/present-a-paper/> through your networks and to consider attending yourself. The following RC40 sponsored sessions are planned for this meeting, and it is important to encourage people to be aware of these opportunities to engage.

- Angol Naswem and colleagues will lead a session, “Examining the role of traditional African social systems in the development of Sub-Saharan African communities”.
- Alessandro Bonanno and Maki Hatanak will lead a session on “Corporate domination in agri-food”.
- Simon Fielke heads a large group of collaborators offering a session on “The quest for responsible digital agri-food innovation”
- Evan Bowness and Dana Xodó, along with others from Univ of British Columbia will lead a mini-conference and a post-graduate workshop on “Visual Methods in Transdisciplinary Research”. These two events are co-sponsored by RC40 and Australasia Agrifood Research Network.
- Hart N. Feuer, Kyoto University, Japan and Eric Olmedo, National University of Malaysia will lead a session on Urbanizing rural and Indigenous food knowledge
- Hugh Campbell, Katharine Legun, James Hale, and Paul Stock from Otago and Kansas, are organizing a session on farmer ontologies
- Doug Constance and Allison Loconto will lead a video enabled joint session that links ISA Forum and IRSA participants. More info TBA!

As part of the *IRSA 2020 XV World Congress of Rural Sociology in Cairns, Australia*, **RC40** and the **Australasian Agri-Food Research Network** invite abstracts for a mini-conference on the exciting theme of *transdisciplinary visual methodologies*. We’re also hosting a separate (post)-graduate student workshop for students exploring and using visual methods. See below for more details.



RC40 mini-conference and (post)-graduate student workshop at IRSA  
<http://www.irs2020.com/program/mini-conference/>.

Images, both iconic and ubiquitous, are a powerful tool for social movements. As social movements have become increasingly visual, so has community-engaged scholarship. Visual sociology uses imagery (photos, videos, graphics, live performances) to answer sociological research questions and offers an innovative approach to food and social movement studies, especially as a way to enrich and support transdisciplinary and community-based research partnerships.

These unique conference events will bring together diverse visual and community-based scholars, activists, and artists working in the area of the sociology of food and agriculture to explore the role -- and facilitate the use -- of visuals in community-engaged research. In particular, we invite submissions with an emphasis on the role of visuals for food movements in bridging the urban-rural divide.



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Participants will deeply engage with the challenges of and opportunities for visual-based research by raising and addressing questions such as:

- What do transdisciplinary research partnerships that include both urban and rural participants look like, and why are they important for rural-focused, urban-focused and relational agri-food scholarship?
- Where do visuals appear during the transdisciplinary research process -- from generation of research questions to data collection to knowledge mobilization -- and how can they support community-engaged research partnerships? What visual research methods are best suited to transdisciplinary research?
- How do we visualize agri-food issues? How do images (dis)connect urban and rural social struggles? How can visuals be mobilized across the rural-urban divide through research partnerships for food system transformation?
- How can images be used to increase dialogue between different knowledge systems, economic spaces, and sites of food movement struggles?

We welcome abstract submissions of 300 words or less on these or related topics from:

- Community members or scholars engaged in transdisciplinary research projects with a visual component (for the mini-conference)
- Graduate/post-graduate students using or considering transdisciplinary visual methods (for the workshop)

Please indicate if you intend to participate in the mini-conference or the (post-) graduate student workshop. Up to six papers will be considered for a special issue in a journal. We hope you'll consider joining us for this innovative and important dialogue on visuals, social movements, and transdisciplinary research.

**Organizing Team:**

- Evan Bowness (PhD Candidate, Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability, University of British Columbia, [evan.bowness@gmail.com](mailto:evan.bowness@gmail.com))
- Dana James (PhD Candidate, Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability, University of British Columbia, [dana.m.james91@gmail.com](mailto:dana.m.james91@gmail.com))
- Dr. Hannah Wittman (Professor, Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, University of British Columbia, [hannah.wittman@ubc.ca](mailto:hannah.wittman@ubc.ca))
- Dr. Annette Desmarais (Associate Professor & Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty, Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba, [annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca](mailto:annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca))
- Dr. Ilyas Siddique (Adjunct Professor of Agroecosystems at the Department of Crop Science, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, [ilysid@gmail.com](mailto:ilysid@gmail.com))
- Dr. Ian Mauro (Filmmaker, Associate Professor and Co-Director of the Prairie Climate Centre, University of Winnipeg, [i.mauro@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:i.mauro@uwinnipeg.ca))
- Natalie Baird (Masters Student and Community-Based Visual Artist, Environment and Geography, University of Manitoba, [natalie.k.baird@gmail.com](mailto:natalie.k.baird@gmail.com))

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## RC40 affiliated working groups at IRSA:

### **Title: Examining the role of traditional African social systems in the development of sub-Saharan African communities**

#### Organizers:

Dr. Fridah M. Mubichi-Kut- African Rural Sociologist Association ([fmubichikut@gmail.com](mailto:fmubichikut@gmail.com))

Dr. Adolphus Angol Naswem- African Rural Sociologists Association ([angolnaswem@gmail.com](mailto:angolnaswem@gmail.com))

Ms. Maria L. Quinhentos – IIAM Mozambique ([luzquinhentos@gmail.com](mailto:luzquinhentos@gmail.com))

Dr. Yassine Dguidegue – University of Missouri ([yd5yb@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:yd5yb@mail.missouri.edu))

#### Description:

African explorer, Sir Henry Stanley (1878) described Africa as the “dark continent” primarily due to the dark, deep, murky and impenetrable forest. Today, conventional scholars and development “experts” continue to present Africa as a dark continent riddled with political strife, corruption, ethnic conflict, poverty and famine among other problems. Seeking to challenge this notion, various African scholars have more recently proposed we view Africa as a “bright continent” due to the sustained development seen at the village level (Olopade, 2014).

Despite the limited development efforts realized at the national level, many of the African communities have remained resilient in times of prolonged droughts due to existing traditional social systems/ institutions that lessen the negative effect of poor governance and failed state institutions. Examples of these social systems include the “*kanju*” in Nigeria, “*mwambowathu*” in Malawi and “*ubuntu*” in South Africa, which promote collective solidarity, access to bonding and linking social capital and communal development.

Knowing that the majority of Sub-Saharan Africans reside in rural areas, it is important for development scholars to better understand how traditional African institutions most successfully adopt to new agricultural policies that affect for example, access to land, labor, capital, insurance (risk pooling) and social protection which promote rural livelihoods. This session, therefore, invites papers that highlight the role traditional African institutions play in rural development and/ or rural sustainability in the urban century. Possible topics include, but not limited to;

- gender equity
- food security / sovereignty
- economic development
- Environmental conservation
- technological innovations
- resolution of farmer/herder conflicts over resources
- rural-urban migration

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**Title: Urbanizing rural and Indigenous food knowledge****Organizers:**

Hart N. Feuer, Kyoto University, Japan

Eric Olmedo, National University of Malaysia

As a consequence of the world obesity crises and the turn toward artisanal food, an opportunity for the re-valorization of indigenous food systems and their constituent agri-biodiversity has emerged. Urban areas have historically served as a central space of culinary integration and consolidation, but renewed interest in wild foods, ethnobotany, and orphaned crop species have encouraged public health officials, restaurateurs and individuals to seek out and consult Indigenous food knowledge and intact rural agri-food knowledge systems. The result, in a wide range of countries, has been attempts to martial historical dietary conventions to help resolve public health challenges while also stemming the loss of important food crops and culinary traditions. These efforts have included, among others, attempts to re-activate rural areas with distinct food histories and to encourage social integration with ethnic minority groups. An exciting process of (re)discovering edible wild plants or marginal food crops has been vigorously pursued in high cuisine but is now becoming more mainstream. In parallel, new risks, including cultural appropriation and commodification of local products have also emerged. Nascent attempts to re-brand many well-known indigenous foods as superfoods, has entailed a stark disembedding of these foods from their indigenous food systems and a forceful insertion into a new dietary milieu.

This session seeks papers that explore and document historical or current activities related to the advancement and re-valorization of rural or Indigenous foods and food knowledge. Papers in the fields of Food Studies, Ethnobotany, Public Health, Rural Development, Gastronomy, and Agriculture are particularly welcome. Coverage of wild or marginal foods, such as sansai (Japan), ulam (maritime Southeast Asia), quelites (Latin America), etc. is also warmly encouraged. In addition, we are interested in papers addressing shifts in food culture as a consequence of rural-urban migration or contact with Indigenous people, including new imaginaries of heritage and national cuisine.

**Title: Farmer and farm ontologies: Rethinking agriculture after the more-than-human turn****Organizers:**

Hugh Campbell, University of Otago, [hugh.campbell@otago.ac.nz](mailto:hugh.campbell@otago.ac.nz)

Matt Comi, University of Kansas, [mcomi@ku.edu](mailto:mcomi@ku.edu)

James Hale, University of Otago, [jameswhalephd@gmail.com](mailto:jameswhalephd@gmail.com)

Katharine Legun, University of Otago, [katherine.legun@otago.ac.nz](mailto:katherine.legun@otago.ac.nz)

Paul Stock, University of Kansas, [paul.stock@ku.edu](mailto:paul.stock@ku.edu)

Following the 'more than human' turn in social theory, the question of how farmers have agency turns into a question of how farmers and farms express, enact, or create agencies. This intriguing question is taking shape across different strands of rural sociology through explorations of ontology -

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theorising how farms are enacted in particular relations, objects and practices of farming. Ontologies scholars in rural sociology are interested in how farms and their participants can be understood as vital agents at the centre of important worlds that can either act to stabilise modernity or to disrupt taken-for-granted realities. This session seeks to draw together, for the first time, the existing body of scholarship emerging on the ontology of farmers and farms. We also invite scholars working in other social theoretical approaches; such as ANT, STS, multiplicity, assemblage, utopias, repeasantisation, and post-colonial engagements; to join discussion panels. Discussions will question how theories of farm and farmer ontologies can provide new insights into a variety of rural social concerns: how farms are enacted as real and how farms change; human-environmental entanglements and collaborations on farms; disruption of existing scientific and modernist realities of farming and science; the significance of new technical objects and relations; AI and loss of autonomy by farm decision-makers; indigenous ontologies; and how all these insights shape our understanding of alternatives to modernist farming worlds. Of particular interest to panel organizers is how a theorisation of ontologies provides potential insight into political action around food and farming. This session invites scholars from Developing and Developed World contexts with an interest in ontologies and their political consequences to join this session either through presentation of papers, or by joining a panel to discuss key intellectual dialogues that can be enabled by an engagement with ontologies.

Reports from ESRS in Trondheim, June 2019



The RC40 pre-conference session was centered around the topic of financialisation of agri-food systems. Eleven papers were presented covering empirical studies with a gravity in Europe, but also from across the world. An engaged audience attended the session. Post-session we are discussing potential for bringing some of the papers forward for publication in IJSAF. As part of our strategy to increase the visibility of RC40 a poster was developed for the session and the ESRS conference.

SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD (RC40)  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION  
<https://www.isa-agrifood.com/>

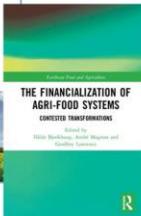
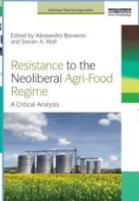
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- Academic research
- Professional development
- Engaged scholarship
- Good times

**IV ISA Forum of Sociology**  
Porto Alegre, Brazil • July 14-18, 2020 • Events Center PUCRS

**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**  
April 25 – September 30, 2019

 International Sociological Association [www.isa-sociology.org](http://www.isa-sociology.org)



**Executive Council 2018-2022**  
Contact: Steven Wolf, [saw44@cornell.edu](mailto:saw44@cornell.edu),  
Hilde Bjørkhaug, [hilde.bjorkhaug@ntnu.no](mailto:hilde.bjorkhaug@ntnu.no)



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## RC40 members with sessions at ESRS

### Report by Nadine Arnold:

ESRS 2019 Working group “Imagining Better Food Futures: Articulating Ethics, Responsibility, and Accountability in Food System Innovations”

*Convenors: Nadine Arnold (University of Lucerne), Gianluca Brunori (University of Pisa), Joost Dessein (University of Gent), Francesca Galli (University of Pisa), Allison Loconto (Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée) Damian Maye (University of Gloucester), Ghosh Ritwick (New York University)*

Calls for more responsibility in food systems have prompted the emergence of manifold policies and innovations. The questions of how these interventions shape food systems and what consequences these interventions have formed the thematic foci of our working group “Imagining Better Food Futures: Articulating Ethics, Responsibility, and Accountability in Food System Innovations” at this year’s ESRS. The room allocated to us was the most beautiful, wonderfully flooded with light. However, it was the 25 strong contributions that shed light on the links between ethics, responsibility, and accountability in various contexts, such as food certification schemes, digitization endeavors in agriculture, or local food markets.

Due to a dense program, the time for discussion was short. However, two major themes that we will examine together in the future have crystallized. On the one hand, it became clear that the actual practice of responsibility in food systems is marked by conflicts and controversies that can be observed in discourses on food systems. On the other hand, the contributions have shown that the creation of responsibility implies new relations of accountability at the corporate level. The formation and effects of these hidden dynamics of accountability are the second issue that we will pursue together in the form of a joint publication.

Report on Working Group 1: Digital Agriculture and Sustainable Rural and Food Futures

### Report by Vaughan Higgins, University of Tasmania, Australia

As part of the recent European Society for Rural Sociology (ESRS) Conference held in Trondheim, Norway, I was involved in leading a working group aimed at exploring the relationship between Digital Agriculture and Sustainable Rural and Food Futures. The co-convenors of the working group were Jérémie Forney (University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland), Michael Carolan (Colorado State University, USA), Steven Wolf (Cornell University, USA), Laurens Klerkx (Wageningen University, The Netherlands) and Kelly Bronson (University of Ottawa, Canada). In the lead-up to the conference, the working group generated considerable interest with a total of 25 abstracts being accepted. This necessitated using the full five sessions allocated to us by the conference organisers. The sessions covered a range of topics including:

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- Responsible Innovation and the Development of Digital Agriculture
  - Enacting and Adapting Digital Agriculture Technologies On-Farm
  - Institutions, Intermediaries and Networks in the Governing of Digital Agriculture
  - Human – Non-human Assemblages and the Implementation of Digital Agriculture
  - Digital Agriculture and the Future of Farming: Competing Visions of Sustainability

All of the sessions were well-attended with excellent discussion and debate. One of the clear messages to come out of the sessions was that as rural sociologists we can make an important contribution in highlighting the limitations associated with new digital agricultural technologies, and in identifying how they can be developed and implemented in ways that support more sustainable rural futures. A working group will be convened at next year's World Congress of Rural Sociology in Cairns, Australia, to build on the momentum generated at the ESRS conference. The working group is entitled: Exploring Social Realities in the Quest for Responsible Digital Agri-'Cultures' and your participation is welcome. For further information see: <http://www.irsa2020.com/program/session-themes/>