

To the presidents and the secretaries of the Research Committees, Working and Thematic Groups of the International Sociological Association

*VP Research letter #3: Towards the 2020 Forum of Sociology*

*“Challenges of the 21st Century: Democracy, Environment, Inequalities, Intersectionality”  
Porto Alegre, 14-18 July 2020*

Dear colleagues,

Fifty-two Research Committees and all our seven Working and Thematic Groups have confirmed their participation in the Fourth ISA Forum of Sociology that will take place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from July 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>. It will be a major event for the ISA and a fantastic opportunity to foster global dialogues with strong insights by our Latin American colleagues.

The **2020 Forum general theme** reflects global challenges to which every field of sociology and every RC connects in some way: **Democracy, Environment, Inequalities and Intersectionality**. RC/WG/TG are invited to refer to some of these themes in their call for sessions, in their program or in some of their sessions. It is however not compulsory, as each RC composes its call for sessions and its program at the ISA Forum in total autonomy. The Forum theme and the calls will be available on the following page: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/forum/porto-alegre-2020>

For the RCs, the preparation of the conference has started 18 months ahead of the event, with the nomination of program coordinators and the preparation of the calls for sessions. While some program coordinators have acquired a solid experience in previous ISA Congresses and Forums, other are new at the task. **My most important advice to all of them would be to read carefully the Guidelines for Program Coordinators and Session Organizers** posted on the ISA website and to come back to them at each step of the process, as they provide the calendar and a series of helpful advices. <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/forum/porto-alegre-2020/guidelines-for-program-coordinators-and-session-organizers-2020>

We are also fortunate to count on a very efficient, experienced and helpful ISA Secretariat to help us out for a range of practical questions. The mailing list among RC/WG/TG presidents and secretaries ([isa-rcpresidents@listes.uclouvain.be](mailto:isa-rcpresidents@listes.uclouvain.be)) may be another tool to ask questions and share advices.

For this Forum, we count on an efficient **Local Organization Committee**, chaired by our colleague Hermilio Santos, from the Pontifical Catholic University of Porto Alegre (PUC). He wrote us a welcoming letter that you will find on page 4.

As it was the case in previous ISA Forums, **a local liaison person** will be assigned by the LOC to each of the participating RC/WG/TG. These volunteers are researchers or post-graduate students based in

Porto Alegre and generally with some interest in your research field. They will help you out for practical and logistical questions connected to the city or the event (e.g. suggest a bar or a restaurant for the socializing evening you want to set up, connect with local actors...).

In addition to regular sessions and joint sessions in your regular program, every RC/WG/TG is also entitled to propose up to two **Common Sessions**. These sessions will be organized at the end of the day and focus on one or several of the “global challenges” listed in the Forum theme (democracy, environment, inequalities, intersectionality (see page 3)). The proposal should be sent **before May 15, 2019** to the VP Research ([Geoffrey.Pleyers@uclouvain.be](mailto:Geoffrey.Pleyers@uclouvain.be) and to the ISA secretariat [isa@isa-sociology.org](mailto:isa@isa-sociology.org) (see page 6)).

While **pre-conferences** are not part of the official program of the ISA Forum and are thus directly under the responsibility of the RCs. Previous experiences have shown that these meetings are particularly efficient to socializing and fully including new members and to building a collaborative and convivial spirit in a RC. Therefore, we will ease their organizations by providing free rooms at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in Porto Alegre (see page 6). I would like to thank Professors Lorena Fleury, Paulo Niederle and their colleagues for welcoming these pre-conferences in their department.

For this Forum in Latin America, we will also count on the participation and support of dynamic national and regional associations. Our main partners will be the Brazilian Sociological Society (SBS) that is very much involved in the Local Organization Committee; the CLACSO (Latin American Council for Social Sciences), whose new president Karina Batthyany is an active member of the ISA, and our long-time partner the Latin American Sociological Association (ALAS). The latter has an open call for papers and sessions for its next congress that will be held in Lima, Peru, in December 2019 (<http://sociologia-alas.org/xxxii-congreso-internacional-alas-peru-2019>).

I would like to thank the ISA Secretariat, the Local Organizing Committee and all the colleagues who have accepted to act as program coordinators for their RC/WG/TG. Their commitment and contributions to the organization of this academic encounter will allow thousands of sociologists to share their most recent research results, to discuss their perspectives on the global challenges of our times and to show the relevance of sociology in an increasingly polarized world.

Geoffrey  
ISA Vice-President for Research  
President of the Fourth ISA Forum of Sociology, Porto Alegre, 2020.  
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### *I. Forum Title and Theme*

#### **Challenges of the 21st Century: Democracy, Environment, Inequalities, Intersectionality**

Twenty years after the start of our century, the optimism of the Millennium has faded and the challenges we face for living together on a limited planet are even more urgent.

While the expansion and the deepening of democratization was taken for granted at the turn of the Millennium, *democracy* has been at stake in an increasing number of countries, while its key component such as diversity and equal respect for all citizens are threatened. The hope for a global democracy able to tackle global issues such as climate change, migrations and rising inequalities have faded. It has now become clear that to face global challenges, democracy needs to be re-invented within and beyond the representative system.

The environmental crisis and climate change are now a worrying reality. How can we live together on a limited planet? Land and food have become again major objects of struggles. Environmental and socio-territorial conflicts have multiplied against extractivist industries. Who are the actors who bring innovative solutions to keep our societies thriving within the planetary boundaries? How does the global environmental crisis lead us to re-think our world and our discipline?

*Inequalities* have considerably increased since the turn of the Millennium. We can now count twenty-six persons who own more wealth than the poorest half of humanity. This level of inequality is a major threat to democracy and to ecology. Inequalities particularly affect marginalized populations and women in their professional, public and private lives.

*Intersectionality* has become major theme in the ISA conferences and in our discipline over the last 20 years. Overcoming the lasting and interconnected economic, racial, colonial and gender discriminations and the violence that maintain them is another major challenge of our time. The rising consciousness of intersectionality is both a result and a trigger of the rise of subaltern actors and movements since 1992. Indigenous communities, minorities, feminists and small farmers have resisted injustice by combining practices, social struggles and alternative worldviews.

The 2020 ISA Forum will provide sociological analyses of these four global challenges paying particular attention to their interconnections and to possible solutions. We will discuss how both progressive and conservative actors and movements tackle these challenges and their conflictive perspectives. We will use this Forum to ask how our discipline has been meeting these four global challenges and it has been transformed by them. What are the contributions of the actors and epistemologies of the South? What are the new trends in global sociology that allow innovative analyses of these challenges? What are the main obstacles we face to tackle these problems? How can innovative sociological analyses contribute to grasp and to face our common problems in the Global Age?

## ***II. Letter by Hermilio Santos, chair of Local Organizing Committee***

We are fast approaching the next ISA Forum of Sociology, to be held at PUCRS, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, July 14 – 18 (2020). For the first time since the establishment of the association, in 1949, a big ISA meeting will take place in Brazil - and only for the second time in South America. Such an event is a great opportunity for Brazilian and Latin-American sociologists to engage more fully with their colleagues from all over the world. At the same time, it will be a unique occasion for sociologists from different countries to establish dialogue with diverse social contexts, at the same time different and similar to their own, with its challenges, inequalities, diversity and peculiarities.

The city of Porto Alegre became internationally known for introducing, in 1989, a widely acclaimed participatory budget policy, and for hosting four editions of the World Social Forum. Recently, in 2013, Porto Alegre was the first and main scenario for important public protests, one year before the World Cup, and before the protests started spreading all over the country. Political engagement belongs to the “character” of Porto Alegre! In this sense, the recent Brazilian presidential elections will most likely not have a negative impact over the organization of the IV ISA Forum, since political expression is part of our democratic performance.

The Forum will take place at the very pleasant campus of PROVIDE FULL NAME PUCRS, with many options for lunch and snacks, and green areas for relaxing between sessions – and without crossing any street! Those RC’s that intend to organize pre-Forum meetings will receive support from the Local Organizing Committee to find a suitable place at PUCRS or at the campus of our partner universities, UFRGS and Unisinos, as well as suggestions of pleasant sites for hosting the RC’s receptions outside the campus. The LOC is already negotiating with the local hotels in order to guarantee accessible prices for accommodations with convenient transport options to the campus, besides the existing options (Bus, Taxi and Uber).

Reducing costs and contributing to produce less environment damage are also central goals: we will avoid, as much as possible, printing materials that could easily be made available through digital media. Regarding the organization of Plenary Sessions under the responsibility of the LOC, we will introduce some innovations that will soon be shared with you.

We really want to welcome all Research Committees in Porto Alegre, and we are already working intensively to ensure a pleasant and productive Forum for all.

Hermílio Santos  
Chair of the LOC IV ISA Forum of Sociology  
Porto Alegre 2020  
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### III. Calendar and call for sessions

The ISA webpage for program coordinator provides a calendar and important advices for each step of the long preparation process. Please check it out regularly. It is very helpful.

<https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/forum/porto-alegre-2020/guidelines-for-program-coordinators-and-session-organizers-2020>

The first step will be to publish your call for sessions, which should be done in the next few days. It usually draws on some axes the Research Committee wants to explore and may point to some connections with the Forum general theme and its four global challenges. The easiest way to diffuse the call for sessions to your members is to include it in your newsletter and to publish it in your social media. Remember that the Forum is two days shorter than the congresses, which means that the number of sessions is lower. It often leads to difficult choices when composing the program and selecting sessions.

As the Forum is taking place in Latin America, some of the sessions will probably take place in Spanish. Unfortunately, it is impossible for the Forum organizers to provide translation. I would however encourage RCs to accept some sessions or some papers in Spanish as it will allow insightful contributions from our Latin American colleagues.

The Guidelines for Program Coordinators and Session Organizers provide a list of session types. For instance, you may start your program by an “invited sessions” with leading scholars of your field, or organize a “Roundtable sessions” that will allow you to accommodate more participants as five simultaneous tables will take place in the same room.

The number of sessions depends on the number of members of each RCs on October 15th 2018. Here is the table for the 2020 ISA Forum.

2020 ISA Forum of Sociology, Porto Alegre, Brazil							
N° of sessions allocated to Research Committees, Working and Thematic Groups							
N° ISA members October 2018	250 +	200-249	150-199	100-149	75-99	50-74	< 50
N° of sessions	20	18	16	14	12	10	8
	RC16	RC02	RC01	RC07	RC08	RC03	RC36
	RC28	RC04	RC05	RC18	RC13	RC10	RC50
	RC31	RC06	RC09	RC23	RC17	RC12	TG07
	RC32	RC24	RC11	RC33	RC20	RC26	
	RC48	RC34	RC14	RC39	RC35	RC27	
			RC15	RC40	RC37	RC29	
			RC19	RC41	RC38	RC42	
			RC21	RC44	RC53	RC43	
			RC22	RC46	RC54	RC45	
			RC25	RC51	RC55	RC49	
			RC30	RC52		WG01	
			RC47	RC56		WG05	
			TG03	RC57		TG06	
				TG04		TG08	

#### ***IV. Common sessions on global challenges***

In addition to your RC regular or joint sessions, each RC may apply to co-organize up to two Common Sessions.

Each session must be supported by at least three RC/GT/WG and tackle at least one of the global challenges enlisted in the Forum title (democracy, environment, inequalities, intersectionality and their interconnections) or one of the questions raised in the Forum theme.

Research committees or working groups from regional or national associations (e.g. thematic groups from the CLACSO, ALAS or the Brazilian Sociological Society) may act as co-organizers of a common sessions, as long as the co-organizers group count at least with two ISA RC/WG/TG.

These sessions will take place in a dedicated timeslot, from 17h45 to 19h15, with only 4 or 5 sessions running simultaneously. They should thus gather a large audience. It may be an opportunity to invite leading scholars or to initiate an exchange between RCs whose topics provide complementary perspectives on global challenges.

The proposal should be sent **before May 15<sup>th</sup> 2019** to the VP Research [Geoffrey.Pleyers@uclouvain.be](mailto:Geoffrey.Pleyers@uclouvain.be) and to the ISA secretariat [isa@isa-sociology.org](mailto:isa@isa-sociology.org)

The Program Committee will select the 12 best proposals and announce the selection on June the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

The Common Session proposal should contain:

- A 400-word description of the session theme and argument
- The list of proposed speakers, with their professional affiliations, countries and provisory titles for their presentations
- The list of RC/WG/TG and/or regional thematic groups that support the panel, with the name and contact of each president and program coordinator(s).
- The name and e-mail address of one (or possibly two) session organisers that will act as coordinator(s)

Once the panel is accepted, session organisers will have to upload all invited abstracts to the Forum on-line platform before September 30, 2019

Please note that the ISA will not provide travel costs or registration for the speakers. Your RC/WG/TG may however decide to allocate to the invited speakers one of the registration grants provided to each RC/WG/TG by the ISA, or use its own budget to pay for a speaker's travel and/or housing.

## *V. Pre-conferences*

Following the success of the formula in previous Forums and Congresses, we would like to encourage RC/WG/GT to hold a “pre-conference” in Porto Alegre.

“Pre-conferences” are internal meetings organized by a RC on the day (or the 2 days) before the start of the Forum. It is less formal than the Forum settings and allows members to meet and get to know each other before the huge event that the ISA Forum has become.

RC may choose to open this space to invite leading scholars, held socializing activities, meet local researchers and actors and/or organize workshops for early career sociologists. Previous experiences have shown that these meeting as particularly efficient to socializing and fully including new members in the RC projects and to building a collaborative and convivial spirit in the RCs.

Each RC that wishes to organize a pre-conference will have access to a room at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in Porto Alegre, free of charge. The agreement may be extended to WG and GT, depending on room availability. The **rooms can be booked until January 10<sup>th</sup> 2020**, by sending an e-mail to Professor Paulo Nierdele [pauloniederle@gmail.com](mailto:pauloniederle@gmail.com).

Pre-conferences are autonomous initiatives by each RCs and do not require to be organized so much ahead as the sessions during the ISA Forum. Speakers may be invited a few months before the event. Just make sure you announce the date on time to your member to invite them to come to Porto Alegre one or two days before the Forum.

Note that pre-conferences are optional. They are not part of the official program and their logistical organization and their program is hence the responsibility of each RC.