

## **Call for Contributions – Special Issue of *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques***

### **Social Network Analysis: Addressing Social Inequalities**

#### **Extension of the Call**

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Over the past decade, Western countries and their public policies have shown an increasing willingness to address issues of inequality and discrimination. However, inequalities between different groups persist, and new forms of inequality continue to emerge, such as digital divides and new manifestations of social exclusion and exploitation.

The relational perspective views the world through the lens of relationships between entities rather than focusing solely on the entities themselves. Individuals, institutions, societies, businesses, and social groups interact and maintain relationships that evolve over time. The development, orientation, and structuring of these relationships into networks often reveal more than the study of these entities in isolation.

Social network analysis has developed notably in the wake of the Chicago School's work. It seeks to identify and interpret relationships between individuals within their social circles. It has since expanded to encompass links between texts, objects, places, companies, digital accounts, and more. Few aspects of social life escape a network perspective. Recent decades have seen numerous applications of social network analysis across most disciplines, in both the exact sciences and the humanities.

Network data consist of two basic elements: nodes and ties. Nodes may represent people providing support, scientists publishing together, adolescents forming friendships at school, or blogs connected through cross-references. Nodes can also represent institutions engaged in shared activities or social exchanges, such as when hospitals refer patients to other healthcare services. Social network analysis is a perspective on social worlds in which actors are interdependent, ties serve as channels for resource exchange, relationships are structured rather than random, and networks provide both constraints and resources to actors (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). This perspective does not oppose other approaches, nor does it claim to replace institutional, organizational, or collective analyses. Rather, it complements them and does not constitute a science in itself. For this reason, we also welcome research in which network analysis represents only one component.

In this call for papers, we propose to gather contributions that apply social network analysis to the study of inequalities, with the aim of examining how this approach can contribute to existing work and potentially offer new perspectives. As Charles Tilly pointed out, sociology must move from analyzing inequalities in contract to examining inequalities in contact, notably homophily. This mechanism applies not only to social class but also to ethnicity, gender, age, and other dimensions, and it contributes to the persistence of inequalities. The overlap of multiple forms of homophily constitutes a promising line of research for sociologists interested in intersectionality within a transactional and dynamic perspective.

Similarly, information, transactions, and resources are not randomly distributed within networks but are more efficiently accessed through certain segments of individuals who are more or less connected. The overall structure of the network therefore matters greatly, whether it is more or less dense, centered on one or several actors, or composed of isolated components. Individual positions within this structure, whether occupied by people, texts, companies, or places, are also crucial. Dense connections and strong ties may reinforce homogeneity and create cohesive constraints, whereas more peripheral and loosely connected ties may offer greater alternatives.

These issues of homophily, diffusion, selection, and influence, at the level of both nodes and ties, clearly demonstrate their effects on access to socially valued goods. Network analysis also enables the description of the many social transactions that shape organizations, highlighting complex and nuanced distributions of power that go beyond formal categories and hierarchical positions. For example, understanding disparities between men and women in leadership positions requires an analysis of relational dynamics within organizations, including power structures, biased hiring practices, and the nature of relationships between men and women.

Methods for measuring and analyzing networks have sometimes been criticized for prioritizing technical sophistication over the cultural and interpretive depth of social life. Yet relationships and transactions are imbued with meaning and cannot be reduced to an individual's structural position within a network. Anthropology can usefully complement the sociological dimension of this perspective. Social ties are associated with norms and expectations (Fuhse, 2009), which are intersubjective and context-dependent. For instance, a man–woman relationship does not carry the same meaning across different social circles. Conversely, networks also interact with the categories that compose them, and from this perspective, the value of a category depends on the network in which it circulates.

Finally, social ties are dynamic. Research on personal and organizational relationships shows that a significant proportion of actors disappear and reappear over time; ties emerge, dissolve, reconnect, and transform; and networks are continuously renewed. Ethnography and qualitative research are therefore essential for studying the content of social exchanges and understanding why some ties are more stable than others.

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## Call for Contributions

Articles should be between **55,000 and 65,000 characters (including spaces)**. Authors should include an abstract of approximately **1,500 characters (including spaces)** with their submission.

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## Timeline

Articles, in English or French, must be submitted by **March 2, 2026** to [redactionrsa@uclouvain.be](mailto:redactionrsa@uclouvain.be).

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## References

EMIRBAYER, M. 1997. Manifesto for a relational sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103, 281-317.

- FUSHE, J. A. 2009. The Meaning Structure of Social Networks. *Sociological Theory*, 27, 51-73.
- TILLY, C. 1998. *Durable inequality*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- WASSERMAN, S. & FAUST, K. 1994. *Social network analysis : methods and applications*, Cambridge ; New York, Cambridge University Press.
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### **About the journal *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques***

*Recherches sociologiques* was founded in 1970 by Pierre de Bie, Clio Presvelou, and Claire Leplae, professors at the University of Louvain (Belgium). In 2005, marking a closer connection with anthropology, the journal became *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques* (RS&A). It publishes research results on a wide range of topics (education, urban and rural issues, religion, social policies, family...), theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches. Rooted in sociology and anthropology, it is open to related disciplines such as political science, history, philosophy, socio-economics, and psychosociology. RS&A is an internationally recognized publication within the French-speaking sociological community. However, it also accepts articles in English. The journal is fully and freely accessible online: <https://journals.openedition.org/rsa/>