

Call for papers

Special issue 2021, vol. 47(3) of the
Swiss Journal of Sociology

Associative Worlds. Grasping Politics by doing Ethnography on Associations

Guest editors:

Lionel Francou (Université catholique de Louvain), lionel.francou@uclouvain.be

Maëlle Meigniez (Haute école de travail social et de la santé Lausanne),
maelle.meigniez@eesp.ch

This special issue aims to discuss ethnographic approaches that allow to shed light on the plurality of associations, societies and clubs. The aim is to examine the plurality of associational practices and meanings of associations, in order to contribute to a new scrutiny of the political dimension of associations. On the one hand, the papers will allow, by relying on ethnographic enquiries, to *grasp the large variety of situations and worldviews that the world of associations entails*, and through this, to open the way for underlying sociological questions. On the other hand, they shall *question the contribution of ethnography to an exploration of the political potential of associational action* - without limiting themselves to an organizational or motivational approach of the origins of an association. The special issue aims to clarify how the ethnographic approach can renew the sociology of associations, which originated in Switzerland in the 1970s (Kellerhals 1974).

From civic initiatives to elaborating public policies, without forgetting community or voluntary actions, associations take many forms, according to their relationship to the State. This relationship to the state is situated on a continuum, going from critical opposition to collaboration (Laville and Salmon 2015), and sometimes through a quest for independence and autonomy. If associations are *de facto* distinct entities from the State, “making the transition from private to public sphere through an interpersonal encounter” (Laville 1997, 66), they are not necessarily opposed to it; nor are they the sign of non-commitment or deregulation of the State (Chaniel 2001). Through ethnographies of associations, a sociology of the conditions of cooperation (Candau 2012) and conflict (Simmel 2003) takes shape, mindful of the ways individuals and social groups engage with each other in order to stand up for causes, promote their interests or organize the collective. This special issue seeks to go beyond the traditional opposition between social movement studies and the analysis of public policies. We

consider that if the associations deal with public action, politics can also take more diffuse or “ordinary” forms (Carrel and Neveu 2014; Berger, Cefaï and Gayet-Viaud 2011). Furthermore, as Eliasoph (1998) showed, the activism from which an association originates can also go hand in hand with a “culture of political avoidance”. While associations have a prime role in Swiss public action, it is important to examine their political dimension and to study associations comparatively, thereby addressing various national realities.

Using ethnography gives researchers the opportunity to shed light on the plurality of associations, of their institutional shapes, of the practices they encapsulates, and of the worlds of meaning around them. Moreover, associations are also shaped in *situative action*, they are transformed as collectives (in formation, stabilized, institutionalized or about to be dissolved) and constantly redefine themselves. If associations mostly rely on a voluntary engagement, they also face the institutionalization of their practices and their “ruling relations”, as underlined by the “institutional ethnography” of Smith (2005). Furthermore, the understanding of associative practices, often set in a local space, requires exiting that space, by multiplying observations on different sites (Marcus 1995) or by combining situations to study the many operations that constitute these activities (Dodier and Baszanger 1997).

All submissions examining associative dynamics are welcome, for instance reconsidering often studied forms of associations or paying attention to new or original forms. Submissions examining the following questions are particularly welcome: how can we make an ethnography of these plural and hybrid spaces called “associations” that act following both public action and civic engagement? What meaning and worldviews are created, maintained or reconfigured in these associations? How can we shed light on the regulations and room of manoeuvre available to the actors in these organizations? Or what are the methodological and epistemological issues that characterize the political ethnography of associations?

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Please submit your proposal for a contribution to Maëlle Meigniez (maelle.meigniez@eesp.ch) and Lionel Francou (lionel.francou@uclouvain.be) by **15 November 2019**.

Your submission for the special issue should include the following:

- name, email address, and affiliations of all the authors
- title of the paper,
- abstract of around 500 words, structured (topic, aim, methods, results, discussion, conclusion).

The guest editors will decide on the acceptance or rejection of the abstract until **15 December 2019**.

Selected authors will be invited to submit their manuscript (max. 8,000 words, 50,000 characters including tables, figures and references) by **1 June 2020**. The manuscripts will go through the usual peer-review process of the Swiss Journal of Sociology. Accepted languages are English, German or French. More information about the Swiss Journal of Sociology and the submission process are available on <https://szs.sgs-sss.ch/en/>

Publication is planned for **November 2021**.

For any queries, email maelle.meigniez@eesp.ch.