

# Social Justice in Times of Uncertainty

*The 2021 Congress of the Swiss Sociological Association (SSA)*

28–30 June, 2021

Organized by the University of Geneva, Sociology Department, and the Haute École de Travail Social de Genève HES-SO, with the participation of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Anthropology and Sociology of Development

## **Introducing the congress theme and relevance**

The health pandemic that erupted in 2020 led societies across the world – including in Switzerland – to cope with disruptions in the provisioning of goods and services, means of livelihood, and fundamental freedom – not least, that of movement. The crisis also revealed global and local inequalities, translated into who has the right to live or not, and raised new questions around (un)justices in the contemporary world. With attention focused on attenuating its spread, the virus also served to temporarily render other crises less visible, including rising populism, and the compounded issues of climate change and migration. More profoundly, the pandemic resulted in State-led interventions that placed a primacy on human life, health services and economic support, putting aside the usual panacea for social ills: economy-wide growth. As human activities grinded to a halt, the natural environment flourished and various forms of community-based solidarity emerged. Individual and collective wellbeing was brought into question, reflecting different scales of belongings and interests, and uncovering oft-implicit assumptions about how ‘the good life’ is defined and by whom. At the same time, borders closed, jobs were lost, the digital divide widened, and the gap between privileged and precarious groups deepened. In light of the turmoil experienced, as a globalized society and within our communities, this congress emphasizes the relevance of social and environmental justice in the making of a fair society, asking the question: *in times of uncertainty, what does it mean to live a good life in a just society?* We welcome contributions that address theoretically and empirically this issue, forging new concepts and using appropriate empirical data relevant to understanding uncertainty and social justice, but also demonstrating how and in what way social change can be supported or imagined in the future.

The scientific and public discourse about ‘injustice’ is contested and conceptually diverse. While social justice can be apprehended in different ways, procedural justice relates to how people come to be involved in decision-making processes, for example decisions around health and education, access to the city and public spaces therein, or work and social protection. Underpinning this notion of justice is the question of (in)adequate access to information, lack of participation, or restricted access to legal rights. Distributational justice, however, involves the unequal access to services and resources, including economic and cultural capital, that reflects other inequalities, in relation to gender, for example, or across life courses. In relation to environmental justice, the right to a ‘good life’ for future generations is central, in that it relies on the sustainability of ecological systems all living beings, including non-humans. Injustice in recognition relates to the lack of respect for differences, vulnerabilities or diverse needs, bearing the mark of unequal social and power relations that permeate our contemporary societies. A perspective of justice ‘from below’ also reveals the various forms in which questions of (in)justice are mobilized explicitly or implicitly in daily social relations established at the level of the family, the neighborhood, the school, the world of work, associations or social institutions.

The congress theme is proposed as a starting point for reflections by the 13 different research networks of the Swiss Sociological Association (SSA), including: Economic sociology; Gender studies;

Health and medicine sociology; Interpretive sociologies; Life course; Migration and minorities; Religion and society; Social problems; Sociology of the arts and culture; Sociology of education; Sociology of law; Sociological theory; and Urban sociology.

**Deadline for submission: 02 November 2020**

**Abstract proposals: 300-500 words**

We are currently accepting proposals for organizing semi-plenaries and paper session, among other formats. The call for individual papers and abstracts will follow in a second phase, based on what paper session proposals have been accepted. This year, we are also opening up the program to other formats. Should you have any other ideas, we look forward to receiving them. The final decision on sessions will be made based on time and space availability.

- **Semi-plenary:** 2-3 sessions take place in parallel and usually involve three main speaker presentations, followed by a discussion. Please include the title of the overall semi-plenary session, an introduction to the theme, as well as information on the speakers you plan to include (names, affiliations and bios).
- **Paper session:** these are sessions for which we will be inviting paper presentation abstracts in a second phase. Each Swiss research network is guaranteed a paper session track. Please include the title of your paper session; you may include possible papers/authors, but this is not obligatory.
- **Book presentation:** If you have a book coming out and would like to present it at the conference, please include the title, (expected) publication date, the publisher and a brief summary of the book.
- **(Short) film screening and discussion:** if you would like to present a (short) film and moderate a discussion, please include the title of the film, a description, any speakers, and the duration of the film. You must also indicate whether you can secure the rights for a public viewing.
- **Roundtable discussion:** if you would like to invite non-academic actors in a discussion at the interface of science and society, please provide a title, brief description, and a set of suggested speakers (names, affiliations and bios).
- Anything else you would like to organize, either in person or virtually? Let us know.

For more information, please contact us at [contact@sociocongress2021.ch](mailto:contact@sociocongress2021.ch) or visit our website <https://www.sociocongress2021.ch>