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Ten Years After

(doi: 10.2383/83877)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 1, gennaio-aprile 2016

Ente di afferenza:

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Ten Years After

by Marco Santoro *and* Elena Esposito

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When *Sociologica* started, in 2007, few of the founders could imagine what the journal would be ten years later. Of course, we had the reasonable hope that our proposal of a new journal – an online, open access journal specifically devoted to sociological debate – would meet the demand of our colleagues in Italy for a new, fresh venue in which to publish their research (at first, either in Italian or English). Above all, we hoped it would be a venue for exciting new ideas, especially in subfields for which existing Italian journals seemed relatively indifferent, such as historical sociology, analytic sociology, and critical social theory. After a couple of years it was clear that the future of *Sociologica* would depend less on its location in Italy than on the transnational network of scholars who became acquainted with the new journal, praising it for the quality of the articles and for the discussions and debates which were its signature feature. One of the highlights come in August 2010, when Harvard sociologist Michèle Lamont, in an article in the *New York Times* pointed to debates in *Sociologica* as “being frontier knowledge even though they are not peer reviewed.”¹

In fact, *Sociologica* was not really “not peer reviewed”: it was testing viable alternatives to the standard “double blind peer review,” resorting for instance to open peer review in the form of solicited commentaries to forthcoming articles (usually previously submitted to a peer review procedure unless they were solicited by the

¹ “Scholars Test Web Alternative to Peer Review,” by Patricia Cohen, NYT AUG. 23, 2010 (available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/arts/24peer.html>)

same editors), or “not blind” peer review through internal reading (inside the board) and feedback to the authors. Nothing in fact has ever been published in *Sociologica* without some form of (peer) review. But the main idea of the *NYT* article was right: in the minds of its founders, *Sociologica* had to be a frontier knowledge journal relatively free from the historical apparatus of science as an established institution. Which doesn't mean we refused science but we didn't want to be prisoner of the institutionalized devices set forth by scientists in the past to guarantee standards of quality. Still, being in a peripheral European country, we thought, we could be well-placed to put ideas and persons in contact, i.e., in dialogue. We could ask American sociologists to confront British ones, or French scholars to interact with both American and Australian, and so on. We tried, and it worked!

In these ten years many things of course have changed, in communication in general and in scientific communication specifically. Many of these transformations were unpredictable and came as surprises also for us in *Sociologica*, but the general lines of development seem to us a confirmation of the approach that guided the journal's founders in 2007. We think, of course, of the decision to publish in English (after an initial experiment publishing in Italian or English). At the time, that decision was innovative in a peripheral country like Italy, and now is almost inevitable in Italy as elsewhere. But not only this. Online publishing and open access have been spreading very quickly, leading to growing restlessness and dissatisfaction with the traditional forms of scientific publications, which in these years are becoming more rigid both formally and in terms of content. These trends can serve as confirmations of our founding guidelines; but they are also stimuli for new developments.

Now that the scientific community is coming on our side, we want to go even further. We are actually working on a number of innovations in several areas, and the tenth anniversary of the journal is a good opportunity to present some of them.

First of all, the transnational dimension has to be fostered and furthered. Not enough to publish in English, we hope to produce work that goes beyond provincial debates of whatever type. *Sociologica* always did it, but now the presence of David Stark as new Associate Editor gives a new impetus. He is not the first American to join us, and it is with great pleasure that we thank Peter Bearman and George Steinmetz as our past Associate Editors. David is now joining *Sociologica* offering his contribution as a scholar who has always been active both in the US scientific world and in the European one. Our Editorial Board now also includes more researchers working outside Italy, as part of a network of contacts that keeps extending and is open to new members. *Sociologica* wants to be a reference for its readers to be updated on how contemporary sociological issues are being debated in different national and international settings.

The digital format also offers a wider space of experimentation. *Sociologica* exploited it from the beginning, without setting limits to the length of contributions and encouraging interaction with its readers (this was indeed the less successful of our ideas, we have to admit). *Sociologica*'s Essay-Forum format as well as its Symposium format are based on flexibility and dialogue and have been developed in different forms across the years. Our Flashback feature, devoted to the history of the discipline, has also been adapted to ideas and suggestions coming from authors willing to explore the possibilities of the web in recruiting scholars and reviving old texts, typically known only in closed circles of aficionados or buried in some archive. But now the protocols and the power of digital media allow to do much more, such as integrating written texts, images, and possibly video in the same item, working with links and connections, or even proposing articles with different formats and outlooks. This is the future we envision. Sociology, which observes communication and its transformations, has, more than other disciplines, the opportunity and the need to communicate in different ways, with which we want to go on experimenting.