

Unscheduled Events



Sociology
of Disasters

Issue: Spring 2021

Research Committee on the Sociology of Disasters

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to this issue of *Unscheduled Events*.

I am delighted to continue serving you as president of our research committee. While we are still trying to overcome global pandemic, the ISA Forum was held virtually and was a tremendous success. The executive committee of the ISA is still planning for a visit to Melbourne, Australia in some capacity for the World Congress of Sociology. RC Presidents have had a couple meetings with the coordinating committee during the last few weeks to provide our insight and concerns about a World Congress. We do not yet know all of the details, but I expect that clarification is soon to be announced.



I want to thank all who participated in the forum to make it a success. And, I am indebted to Michèle Companion and Victor Marchezini for serving as our co-organizers at the Forum. Thank you so much for everything you have done for us.

We highlight “Voices from the Forum” in this issue of our newsletter. I hope you enjoy this issue of *Unscheduled Events*. Stay safe and be well!

Bill Lovekamp

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MASS EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS EDITING TEAM



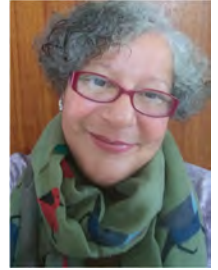
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NORMA VALENCIO

Como bem mencionaram os Presidentes da ISA e do IV Fórum da ISA, os temas da “Democracia, meio ambiente e interseccionalidade” ganharam relevância ímpar a essa altura do século XXI, quando velhos e novos desafios sociais - de grande magnitude e multifacetados – vêm se entrecruzando e, assim, impondo igual necessidade de conexão entre diferentes olhares científicos e agendas de investigação. Ao terem a ousadia de aceitar o desafio inédito de ajustar o espaço do referido Fórum para o formato virtual - providenciando, em tempo recorde, a alteração de suas estratégias de encontro, as quais se revelaram bem-sucedidas -, os organizadores não apenas se esforçaram em garantir o espaço de voz imprescindível para as epistemologias do Sul global, mas em estimular a comunidade dos cientistas sociais, especialmente a dos sociólogos, a calibrar celeremente o seu modo de comunicação, de reflexão e de interação entre pares e com o público, fornecendo preciosas contribuições ao debate e fazendo frente aos mencionados desafios.



O RC-39 não foi pego de surpresa no contexto da maior catástrofe global, relacionada à pandemia de Covid-19. Afinal, catástrofe é um estrato superior de desastres e esse é o tema central deste RC, o qual configurou, sob diferentes subtemas e prismas, as Sessões ali apresentadas. Para os estudiosos de Sociologia dos Desastres, as dinâmicas de crises inéditas ou recorrentes relacionadas à fatores conhecidos ou emergentes, bem como as transformações estruturais de que se necessita para debelá-las através de esforços interseccionais, é parte constituinte de sua agenda regular de debates há pelo menos seis décadas. O IV Fórum contribuiu para garantir a continuidade desse espaço já tradicional da Sociologia dos Desastres no ISA. Desde o mesmo, os coordenadores e pesquisadores do conjunto de Sessões se esforçaram em expor recortes originais de objetos conhecidos ou emergentes, em apresentar novos exercícios metodológicos para lidar com bases de dados conhecidas, e em fornecerem novas interpretações teóricas codunadas com o contexto histórico regional e local no qual suas investigações se situam. Não menos importante, as Sessões do RC-39 estimularam a interface com outros campos disciplinares, como os da demografia, economia e geografia, dentre outros, além de um agradável ambiente virtual de polifonia, envolvendo pesquisadores de diferentes gerações e instituições, desde reputáveis cientistas, com obras fundamentais para se entender riscos e desastres na contemporaneidade - como os Professores M. Lindell (Estados Unidos) e B. Wisner (Reino Unido) -, até aqueles que estão às voltas com os seus primeiros achados, tateantes teoricamente, mas simpaticamente acolhidos e estimulados em suas buscas, para se aprimorarem e nos surpreenderem mais adiante. Ficou a impressão de que o grupo que participou desse RC tem potencial para estreitar seus laços em novas parcerias, uma vez que ideias ali lançadas ficaram germinando na cabeça dos participantes. O solo de trocas pós-Fórum continua sendo fertilizado por conversas paralelas entre participantes; e a colheita, certamente, será próspera e coletiva, ampliando o escopo interpretativo sobre as catástrofes do presente e, quem sabe, subsidiando a contenção daquelas que se anunciam no horizonte.

As the Presidents of ISA and the IV ISA Forum have rightly mentioned, the themes of "Democracy, environment and intersectionality" have gained unique relevance at this time of the 21st century, when old and new social challenges - of great magnitude and multifaceted - have been intersecting and thus imposing an equal need for connection between different scientific perspectives and research agendas. By daring to accept the unprecedented challenge of adjusting the space of this Forum to the virtual format - providing, in record time, the change of their meeting strategies, which proved successful - the organizers not only endeavoured to ensure the indispensable voice space for the epistemologies of the global South, but in stimulating the community of social scientists, especially that of sociologists, to rapidly calibrate their mode of communication, reflection and interaction between peers and with the public, providing precious contributions to the debate and facing the aforementioned challenges.

The RC-39 was not taken by surprise in the context of the largest global catastrophe related to the Covid-19 pandemic. After all, catastrophe is a superior stratum of disasters and this is the central theme of this RC, which configured, under different subthemes and prisms, the Sessions presented there. For scholars of Sociology of Disasters, the dynamics of unprecedented or recurrent crises related to known or emerging factors, as well as the structural transformations that are needed to derail them through intersectional efforts, has been a constituent part of their regular agenda of debates for at least six decades. The IV Forum contributed to ensuring the continuity of this already traditional space of Sociology of Disasters in ISA. Since the same, the coordinators and researchers of the set of Sessions have endeavored to expose original snippets of known or emerging phenomena, to present new methodological exercises to deal with known databases, and to provide new theoretical interpretations [?] with the regional and local historical context in which their investigations are located. Not least, the RC-39 Sessions stimulated the interface with other disciplinary fields, such as demographics, economics and geography, among others, in addition to a pleasant virtual polyphony environment, involving researchers from different generations and institutions, from reputable scientists, with fundamental works to understand risks and disasters in contemporary times - such as Professors M. Lindell (United States) and B. Wisner (United Kingdom) -, even those who are presenting their first findings, theoretically groping but sympathetically welcomed and stimulated in their search, to improve and surprise us later. It was the impression that the group that participated in this RC has the potential to strengthen its ties in new partnerships, since ideas launched there were germinating in the participants' heads. The soil of post-Forum exchanges continues to be fertilized by parallel conversations between participants; and the harvest will certainly be prosperous and collective, expanding the interpretative scope on the catastrophes of the present and, who knows, subsidiating the containment of those who are announced on the horizon.

JOY SEMIEN

This year I had the opportunity to attend the ISA Forum. As a first-time participant in the forum, I was initially saddened that I could not attend the forum in person. Adapting to a virtual conference platform because of COVID-19 was challenging, but I was still ecstatic about presenting my research to a broader international audience. One challenge that I faced was presenting my research and preparing for the audience's questions; I had to remember to speak slowly, clearly, and concisely for non-English speakers.



After my presentation I was able to connect with various disaster researchers who encouraged me to keep pursuing this line of work, as well as challenged me to explore other areas that I initially left out in my original study. Many of the researchers that I spoke to were people I had previously cited in my own work, so it was exciting to network with so many trailblazers in the field of disaster research and beyond.

My encouragement to any graduate student reading this is to be sure to attend this forum if and/or when you are given the opportunity. I can hardly count the ideas that each conversation and presentation sparked, many of which I would like to explore post-graduation. I am profoundly grateful for this unique opportunity that I was given to attend and present at this year's ISA-Forum.

BEN WISNER

Attending, co-organizing and presenting in sessions on disaster, I was treated to many insights and reminders and found my zest for research and understanding was renewed. That's not easily achieved at 77 years old!



I welcomed and was encouraged by sessions that included the risk perceptions and understandings of young people as research interlocutors and the voices of young researchers. I avoided the phrase "research subjects" in the last sentence because of my concern with research ethics. The tension between qualitative and quantitative methods of social research will persist forever, but making the best of this, turning tension into complementarity, involves treating other human beings

with due recognition and care whatever methods are employed. I was pleased to find that research ethics came up several times in these sessions.

I also experienced a sense of urgency in several sessions such as the one on the dam collapses in Brazil, "Mariana, Brumadinho and their Brothers" and those on displacement and relocation as well as on disaster risk creation. There was a substantive or political urgency behind attempts to move beyond the bland buzzwords of the United Nations such as "DRR", meaning disaster risk reduction by juxtaposing the more active term "creation" with all its implication of identifiable (even indictable) agency. In addition, papers calling for decolonization of disaster studies and for the inclusion of new and neglected voices held for me epistemological urgency.

The clearer focus on these two kinds of urgency for which I am indebted to the RC39 sessions also have enabled me to interrogate humanitarianism more radically. Is there not a tendency to reduce human beings to statistics, to physical "flows" channeled and diverted by boundaries (borders), "pushed" and "pulled" by "drivers"? In another domain, I have witnessed a resurgence of the hazard-focused paradigm in the era of climate change, once (in the 1980s and 1990s) replaced by a vulnerability-focused approach. In a similar way, the dehumanization of migrants and displaced persons today seems to hark back to long-dormant physicalist models in geographical theory.

These were for me the highlights of a very rich series of sessions organized by esteemed colleagues Michele Campion and Victor Marchezini.

SANDRA MARIA PFISTER

From 23rd to 28th February, the IV ISA forum took place. I was very excited, as it was the very first time for me to attend in an ISA conference. All the more, I am pleased to share my experience during the ISA forum. First and foremost, it was not just a nice opportunity to hear about recent studies and about what is currently going on in our field, but also an amazing experience to meet, at least virtually, fellow researchers from all over the world and get the face to names, which one may have read in publications. Anyway, I felt honored to be part of this amazing community.



Impressions from the Research Panels

Although I did not manage it to listen to each of the 15 panels, which were organized by RC 39, they sounded very promising and brought together an interesting range of contributions. Some of the key topics, that stick in my mind, include studies on vulnerability (in terms of both, material conditions and contexts of our livelihoods and social vulnerabilities; no matter, which aspects are highlighted, the relevance of the vulnerability concept seems to be unbroken), risk communication, and perspectives of citizens and disaster-affected people themselves. Somehow, I was surprised that the current Corona crisis did not attract much attention in the RC-39 panels and contributions (at least for those, where I joined), while it became a vital topic within the broader sociological strand. This may be due to the fact that the panels were planned long time ago, and that we still do not study public health crises to the same extent as other occasions. However, it might be a unique opportunity for disaster research to further strengthen its position as a sociological subdiscipline, getting more attention within the broader discipline, and to benefit from synergy effects. I would like to learn more on if and how disaster researchers locate the current Corona crisis within our conceptual frameworks and which conclusions they make.

What is more, I found it quite inspiring, how other disaster researchers apply a diverse set of methods. Still, there seems to be a strong affinity to case studies (somehow self-explanatory) and the classical repertoire of social science research methods still seems to be pretty common. Among other things, what particularly sticks in my mind, are the manifold contributions that suggested to apply methodologies, which allow to involve the target population more actively in the research process (participatory research). This not just seems to be an exciting research experience but also extremely promising for manifold questions, such as examining the perspectives and experiences of the affected population, or the disaster- and risk-related needs and challenges that are related to the actual livelihoods of people.

Further, I felt that the often outlined practical orientation and inherent normativity of our field of studies (by this I mean that our studies often aim to contribute to the mitigation of harm, or – more generally speaking – to the ways, in which societies deal with disasters and disaster risks) still characterizes our research efforts. Further, fundamental theoretical and (meta)critical contributions also acquire attention. As an example, I want to highlight Gaillard's plea for rethinking our most central concepts, such as vulnerability or gender, e.g., in terms of their conceptual boundaries and cultural embeddedness, in order to understand, where they perfectly fit, and where they reach their limits. Against this background and the many other points made during the sessions (here and there more explicit or implicit) I became quite interested in research from a comparative perspective in terms of cultural or regime context and over the time.

Furthermore, I want to share my experience as a speaker, too. My presentation took place in the last panel of the week. Two contributions examined, how

civic actors become involved. One discussed the role that religious leaders played in the response to Typhoon Haiyan, the other, which was mine, examined the strategies that were used by disaster expert actors to construct field boundaries and, thus, preserve the field order and their own position in the field. I really enjoyed the benevolent climate of discussion and the critical comments. Particularly, it was inspiring to hear about the findings of others and reports from empirical occasions that (may not) fit into my conceptual framework and thus exploring the scope (and limits) of applicability. I want to emphasize that this dynamic and encouraging climate of discussion exceeded my expectations in manifold ways. Actually, I assumed the discussion during such a huge, international conference to be very short and superficial due to the strict time restrictions (I actually made such an disillusioning experience in another conference). Therefore, the climate and quality of discussion exceeded my expectations in manifold ways. Actually, I do not know, if this is owed the circumstances (e.g., few contributions in the panel), or the spirit within the community of disaster researchers and the engagement of the RC 39 board members, but it was a pleasure and I am rather grateful for this experience.

Impression from the Organizational Setting

Besides the research panels, I want to share my thoughts about some organizational issues as well. Certainly, the corona crisis in general, and more specifically the postponement of the ISA forum and the switching to the virtual format was demanding. Unfortunately, some researchers were not able to participate, whereby the range of promising contributions was shrinking. Moreover, one missed the physical co-presence, getting to know research fellows during the coffee breaks, informal chatting and going out together. This gap was, at least to a part, filled by the ISA platform, which provided an easy tool to contact other participants. Anyway, the digital format opened new opportunities as well. Albeit some researchers were not able to attend, for others it was made easier: Conference fees were reduced, and travel costs were almost zero. Hence, restricted access to resources was not such a big hindrance for attendance as it might be for conferences that require physical attendance. Once again, the opportunities to collaborate in spite of physical distance became obvious. What is more, the loss of some papers was a kind of “blessing in disguise”, as it made additional time available for speakers and discussants, and some distributed papers (including myself) were provided with the opportunity for a full presentation.

Moreover, I decided to join the RC-39 business meeting, which took place on Friday. The board members gave a nice overview on the research committee’s recent activities, including the IJMED journal and the board elections, and some planned activities were proposed and discussed, e.g., the ISA World Conference, and an obituary on fellow researchers, whom we lost to the pandemic. I appreciated that new and potential members were welcome to bring in their perspective, the transparency and commitment to reply to each question and to share information, and the extremely warm and welcoming atmosphere. It was really encouraging to have a look on what is going on “behind the scene”. And once more, I felt that there is an amazing collegial spirit within our research community, in that it is committed to involve and support both junior researchers and local researchers from all over the world. Among other things, this became obvious in the supportive stance and sympathetic attitude for problems that research fellows reported regarding their research and/or institutionalization, requests for collaboration, and new ideas.

To sum up, the IV ISA forum was subject to multiple challenges and it might have been demanding for everyone who attended, and more specifically for those, who have been involved in the planning. Nonetheless, everyone was getting the best from it and it was a great experience, which I would not like to miss. I hope that I will have the opportunity to attend again in the future.

I want to end with a personal thanks to the organizers for their great work.

VICTOR MARCHEZINI

We always face challenges during our academic life. Sometimes the challenges can be transformed in motivation. This was the case when in 2019 the RC 39 President, Dr. Bill Lovekamp, invited me to be one of the program coordinators of RC 39 in the IV ISA Forum in Brazil, together with professor Michèle Companion, from University of Colorado.



I was motivated because “Sociology of Disasters” has been neglected in Brazil, despite many disasters that happened in the country in the last decade. Additionally, there were scientific reasons that motivated me. When attending seminars and congress in Sociology, people didn’t know that this line of research exists. When presenting studies in those events, participants considered the topic of disasters “exotic”. But nobody asked details about the research findings. When I started to work at the Brazilian Early Warning Center (Cemaden), there were other situations that triggered me other emotions. Scientists from hard and biological sciences used to ask me: “*What is a sociologist doing here?*”. I responded to this question in a scientific article (Marchezini, 2020) and since that many people have written to me sharing similar situations they faced or that are still living.

The ISA Forum in Brazil, planned to occur in July 2020 in Porto Alegre, would be an interesting opportunity to promote “Sociology of Disasters”, especially in Brazil. So, I accepted the invitation from Bill and worked with Dr. Michèle Companion, who I met in person in the III ISA Forum in Vienna, Austria. They told me that RC 39 was open to organize sessions in Spanish and Portuguese, to promote inclusiveness. Then, Michèle and I started to plan the call for sessions and decided to create the @IsaRC39 twitter account. Of 16 sessions planned in the RC 39 during the IV ISA Forum, two were totally conducted in Spanish and were co-chaired by scientists from different countries of Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), and Spain. Other sessions were co-chaired by scientists from LAC and Oceania, Europe etc.

Once the sessions were chosen, we had another phase of call for abstracts. Surprisingly, we received more than 140 abstracts to allocate in our 15 sessions. The chairs of each sessions were essential to help us in this challenge.

Then, the pandemic of Covid-19 started to affect our lives, interrupting the plans to have the IV ISA Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. We had to be resilient, and we adapted the sessions, their chairs and also to think about participants in order to reduce the impacts of different time zones, lack of funding to cover the expenses etc. Most communications have to be prepared in Portuguese and in Spanish, to guarantee that chairs and participants will keep interested in participating in the virtual forum.

We started the RC 39 activities at IV ISA Forum with the first session “Education and Citizen Science in Disaster Studies”. I had the opportunity to chair this session that had speakers from USA, Germany, the Philippines and the New Zealand. We had an interesting debate not only about the citizen science, but the epistemological, methodological and ethical dimensions involved on this topic.

Our sessions were very diverse and cover many important topics, such as climate change, displacement and refugees, disaster risk creation, urban risks, community engagement, emerging risks and etc. Not only the topics were important, but the way the sessions were conducted. We had multilingual sessions where some speakers presented in Portuguese and/or Spanish and their power point presentations were in English.

We also combined intergenerational aspects in co-chairing activities. I had the honor to co-chair one session with Professor Ben Wisner, who has studied vulnerability to disasters since 1966. The session co-chaired was “Disaster Risk Creation in the Global South”. Professor Ben Wisner introduced the session with the concepts and giving a brief overview about the case studies that each speaker would talk. After the presentation of each speaker, the dialogue continued and engaged about 25 participants in the session.

I had the opportunity to participate in other sessions and to co-chaired another two, one in Spanish and another in English. These sections had speakers from different ages, countries, talking about different topics etc. What made me happy was the satisfaction of people that attended in these sections. In the session “The Future of Disaster Studies”, more than 25 participants engaged in the discussion about research challenges and how to decolonize disaster studies. I had the opportunity

to co-chair this session with JC Gaillard that are in New Zealand, 16 hours ahead of Brazilian time zone. JC Gaillard and participants had the opportunity to discuss the presentations and to disseminate some efforts related to the disaster studies manifesto, an initiative to reduce power imbalances in disaster studies.

I am sure that in the near future we will have more sociologists of disasters researching and working in academia, governments, NGOs etc. I can not guarantee that people will not receive the same questions that I needed to reply. But I am sure that these new generation of sociologists of

ALEX ALTSHULER

The IV ISA Forum of Sociology in Porto Alegre (Brazil) was by no means "normal". It was conducted in the midst of a global pandemic, virtually through the Zoom platform and required practitioners and scientists across the globe to adapt themselves to "crazy" hours of presentations and discussions due to the time differences. Is it a recipe for a complete failure? In my modest experience and opinion, it was just on the contrary. It was a much required gathering of the ISA and especially of RC-39 in the face of a global crisis that illustrated care, solidarity, scientific curiosity and collegial empathy.



We are similar and different at the same time; we can learn a lot from "the other" — various "others" in different situations — if we have a need and the passion to do that. It is true in less turbulent times and especially true in a time of a global pandemic. We really need people who will enable that learning process and will "open the door" — the wonderful

team of RC-39 has been those enablers and facilitators. The rich mosaic of lively sessions and the engaging and uniting RC-39 business meeting created a global circle of hope, in spite of so many multidimensional challenges.

Let's keep learning and "opening the doors" for others in every single moment we have within our reach!

Voices from the forum

XX ISA World Congress of Sociology



**Resurgent Authoritarianism:
Sociology of New Entanglements of
Religions, Politics, and Economies**

Melbourne, Australia | July 24-30, 2022
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
www.isa-sociology.org



After an incredible set of presentations at the VI ISA World Forum, I cannot wait to have the opportunity to hear about more of your work. It is hard to believe that the XX ISA World Congress is right around the corner! Valerie Ingham (left), the RC-39 Program Co-coordinator, and I are already reaching out to get people involved. Val lectures in Emergency Management at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst Campus, Australia. She is discipline lead for the Doctor of Public Safety and Fire Investigation courses. Many of you may have met Val over the years at ISA events. I think I met Val for the first time at the World Forum in Vienna in 2016. She is amazing, and we are thrilled to have her! I'm excited to work closer with her and learn more about her in the process. As for me, your other program co-coordinator, I'm Michèle Companion (right), Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, USA. I've been bouncing around ISA since Yokohama in 2014.



As we are already planning for 2022, we wanted to remind you that YOU are the key to creating an engaging and informative program. The first step in the planning process is to collect the topics for broad sessions. RC-39 will have **17** sessions available to us for 2022! By topical sessions, we are referring to the broad themes for each session, such as "Displacement and Relocation: a spotlight on refugees and internally displaced persons," "Education and citizen science in disaster studies," "Disasters in Urban Contexts," and so on. We'd love to have some sessions that reflect work done in the Pacific Islands and in the Australia and New Zealand regions. We'd also love to see more Spanish language sessions in 2022 to provide greater opportunities for non-English speakers to participate. This is a great opportunity for participation from colleagues around the globe in the form of presentations and distributed papers.

To achieve these goals, we need your help! Topical session abstracts must be submitted through the ISA webpage: [XX ISA World Congress of Sociology \(isa-sociology.org\)](http://www.isa-sociology.org)

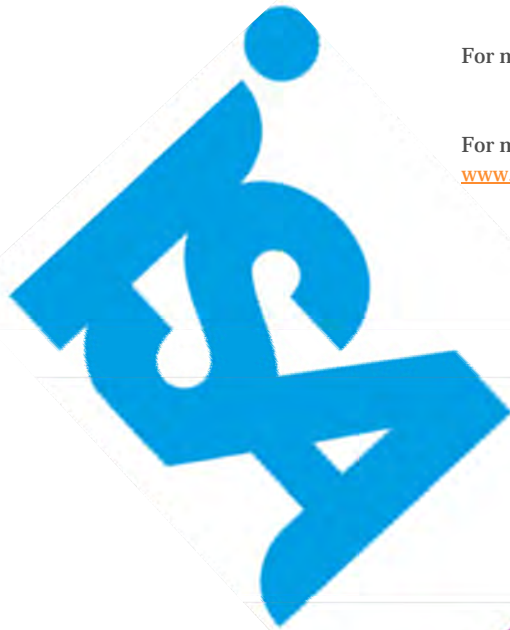
The portal for submissions will be open from **30 April – 31 May, 2021**. Please submit session abstracts to help up build the program! Once session topics have been established, paper/presentation abstracts can be submitted to the sessions from 1 July – 30 September 2021.

We cannot wait to learn more about your work and see you in Melbourne!

For more information about our research committee, please visit <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/research-networks/research-committees/rc39-sociology-of-disasters/>

For more information about our journal *IJMED*, please visit <http://www.ijmed.org/>

For more information on the 2022 ISA World Congress of Sociology, please visit <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/melbourne-2022>



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