

5th International REIACTIS Conference  
Lausanne, Switzerland, February 10-12, 2016

## **AGEING AND EMPOWERMENT**

### **Between resources and vulnerabilities**

#### **Call for contributions**

The 5th International REIACTIS Conference (International Network on Age, Citizenship and Socio-Economic Integration) will focus on the dynamics of vulnerabilities and resources associated with growing older. Co-organized by the Social Work Department of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland and the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research “Overcoming Vulnerability: Life Course Perspectives” (NCCR LIVES), this conference intends to explore these dynamics from the perspective that older people can maintain or acquire agency throughout their life trajectories.

Participants will examine and question the pertinence of concepts most frequently used to portray and analyze processes at work during the life course. This includes such concepts as integration, exclusion, socialization, *déprise* or “selective letting go” and empowerment whether they be used in the context of an examination of the public sphere (employment and training opportunities, active use of democratic rights, social participation and involvement in the voluntary sector), the private domain (family, couple or neighbourhood relations, etc.) or the articulation between public and private areas (notably institutional life). In pursuing these debates the conference organizers encourage contributors to re-examine the definitions of resources and vulnerabilities as related to ageing. How should these be approached so as to respect individual decisions and principles of justice and solidarity in the various periods and contexts of the life course? How can differential dynamics of vulnerabilities and resources be explained? What part do gender, generation, social and/or “ethnic” background play in these dynamics? How do the economic context, public policies (e.g. access to health services and home care) or social representations (such as ageism) shape empowerment throughout the different stages of ageing? The multidirectional exchanges expected during this 5th international conference will enable participants to get a better grasp of the ways in which ageing can simultaneously bring about loss of power, forms of emancipations, vulnerabilities and new resources.

Set up as an exchange platform on issues such as citizen participation and social integration of ageing people, the REIACTIS network has been promoting pluralistic analyses focusing on cultural and anthropological traditions, social and health institutions as well personal

experiences in a globalized environment. Since 2006 the network joins researchers, professionals and older citizens and fosters exchanges between various actors interested in dealing with issues of ageing whether this be as an object of study or as a field of intervention. In keeping with the international and multidisciplinary approach inherent to REIACTIS since its foundation, the 5th conference in Lausanne will provide an opportunity to open the debate on research and practices from a wide variety of national and regional contexts.

The originality of the 2016 conference lies in the presentation of papers which tackle the controversial question of age-related vulnerabilities by linking it at the micro-, meso- or macro-social level to such counterpoints as resources and empowerment. The aim is to view ageing populations in their diversity and ability to manage their own lives, remain socially, economically and politically integrated and build individual and/or collective resistance strategies. The conference will also offer an opportunity to identify and call into question the forms and conditions of emancipatory social innovation (through new modalities of information and communication as well as through the support offered to learning, training, self-education and expression processes). Moreover, the conference will allow for an examination of the part played by national, regional or local social movements in influencing political decision-making. In a comparative perspective, we invite to look at the ways in which different economic contexts (growth in certain Asian and African countries and, conversely, economic crisis in a number of European countries) lead to the implementation of new public policies or the revision of existing ones which weaken and/or strengthen certain categories of older people. More specifically, issues examined will be structured along three main themes:

### **1) Empowerment viewed through the lens of social innovation and collective action**

Older people's agency is linked to the types of solidarity and integration they are able to mobilize (e.g. family solidarity, neighbourhood and community relationships or voluntary involvement) and the ability of individuals and social groups to make their voice heard and define their own needs through such different forms of collective action as social movements, citizen's organizations, support groups or coalitions seeking to influence decision-making processes at various levels of administrative structures. Thus these types of solidarity and the various forms of collectives linked to age and ageing shed light not only on needs and expectations of older people but also on the resources that these ageing individuals and social groups use.

In a context of budgetary restrictions, changing economic models, family re-composition and growing numbers of age-related dependency, national and international authorities (EU, OECD, UN) currently call for social innovation to sustain the development of ageing policies. This theme will provide an opportunity to focus on *new perceived needs* or alternatively on *failings* revealed by collective action and exemplified by new types of solidarity at the individual level (combating isolation) or societal level (compensating for inadequate social service provision). This theme will also broach questions on the modes and limits of the *innovation* that these collectives demonstrate, for instance through new

types of service organizations or through the ability to put new issues on the agenda. Indeed, practiced publicly or privately, such collectives demonstrate solidarities exhibiting many signs of (or protections against) vulnerabilities.

## **2) Public intervention and reconfigurations of older people's citizenship**

The ability of individuals to cope with ageing depends on the capacity of public policies and service professionals to implement programmes and measures that can adequately help sustain people through economic, social and political dynamics. National, regional and also local social policies and intervention programmes play a part in defining the contours of citizenship. Civil, political and social rights as well as access to these rights and the capacity to exercise them are determined and given concrete significance by these very policies and programmes. In Western countries public policies and social interventions seem to focus on a goal of *active* citizenship for older people, favouring the personalization of support, the autonomy of individuals and free choice of services. Here one may refer to new forms of social/health interventions focusing less on care than on support, to the development of technology that transforms the ways in which dependency is experienced or to the new forms of housing and of urban planning geared towards the social integration and the quality of life of older people. These policies may in turn create constraints, exclusions, inequalities or new vulnerabilities. Thus the competencies required to use, understand, know about or even find financing for various types of assistance, technological tools or service arrangements are socially available in highly unequal ways. Similarly, many of the reforms implemented in Europe and elsewhere during the recent economic crisis have direct implications for certain groups of elderly people (loss of rights to benefits, termination of assistance and support programmes, higher insecurity, etc.).

This theme opens the floor to questions that inquire about the ways in which various forms of public action and social intervention play a role in the redefinition of older people's citizen participation. How and with what mechanism are maps of social exclusion and inclusion currently drawn in terms of social, employment and health policies linked to age? Public intervention and links to citizen participation may be examined through the instruments used (be they technical, architectural, institutional, etc.), the populations they target, the range of actors concerned (public, market-oriented, non-profit) or the modes of intervention they deploy. In a comparative approach, the role of new reference frameworks and the concepts associated with reforms such as *New Public Management*, the goal of efficiency or even the very terminology of *empowerment* may equally be analyzed.

## **3) Adaptation and socialization in the ageing life course**

In some configurations ageing can be associated with loss of self-determination as well as with decreases in social, economic and political power. How do (older) individuals deal with a world in constant evolution? Do shifts in orientation towards the family, self, economy and politics make certain ageing populations more fragile? How do older people prepare for grief and the transitions, crises and opportunities they face? This theme will focus on gaining a better understanding of the *characteristics* or the *mechanisms* that lead certain (older) individuals to live better than others through societal changes and/or changes in personal situations (in terms of health, economic resources, social relations, etc.). An analysis of these processes should help gain in-depth knowledge on age-related vulnerabilities and the means these require to get to terms with them.

In a more general way this theme will provide an opportunity to reflect on the notion of *socialization*, specifically the dispositions and competences obtained along the life course that pertain to ageing. If all (older) individuals can be viewed by and large as the product of successive and/or simultaneous socialization experiences, and if social vulnerability is the result of a disjunction between socializing experiences and the contexts of actions, is it then still appropriate to speak of socialization processes in old age?

### **Proposals for communications**

For the conference three types of contributions may be proposed:

1. **Oral communications:** they will take place within sessions organized along the three themes presented above;
2. **Posters:** they will be exhibited and presented during a special session;
3. **Symposiums (panel sessions):** they will be proposed by authors and should focus on a specific issue identified as pertinent for the conference and its themes. These panel sessions should be comprised of three or four contributions by researchers from different countries or working on different national settings. Altogether communications should last 90 minutes. The format of these panel sessions is purposely left open, but session leaders will be encouraged to organize them in a way that will promote exchanges with the public. Panel session proposals should include the following: names and affiliations of panel leaders, symposium title, abstract, names, e-mail addresses and affiliations of proposed speakers, and issues on which contributions will focus.

Proposals for contributions, posters and symposiums may be submitted in French, English or Spanish.

Proposals of no more than 3000 characters in length should be submitted by **April 30, 2015**, with an indication, where appropriate, of the theme to which they are associated.

All proposals must be **directly submitted through the Conference web site [www.reiactis2016.ch](http://www.reiactis2016.ch)**

The full texts of accepted communications must be sent to the organizers by November 30, 2015, so that they can be transmitted to the moderators.

Communications may be held in French, English or Spanish. However, the availability of simultaneous translation cannot be guaranteed for all sessions.

### **Timetable**

Deadline for submission of proposed contributions: **April 30, 2015**

Notification of acceptance/refusal of contribution proposals: **July 15, 2015**

Deadline for the submission of the contributions: **November 30, 2015.**

### **Conference venue**

University of Lausanne, Amphimax Building, Sorge, 1015 Lausanne

<http://www.unil.ch/ci/fr/home/menuinst/bienvenue/plan-dacces.html>

### **Organizing committee**

Jean-François BICKEL, Michèle GUIGNARD, Valérie HUGENTOBLER, Rosita KORNFELD, Alexandre LAMBELET, Barbara LUCAS, Pascal MAEDER, Christian MAGGIORI, Dario SPINI, Daniel THOMAS, Jean-Philippe VIRIOT-DURANDAL, Peter VOLL.

### **Scientific committee**

A scientific committee composed of internationally recognized experts will review proposals. For a complete list of committee members, see: [www.reiactis2016.ch/comite\\_scientifique](http://www.reiactis2016.ch/comite_scientifique)

### **Contact address for the 2016 REIACTIS Conference:**

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