The Future of Work

For most of us, work is the main source of income and status. It defines who we are to ourselves and to others. But work is changing, and the social and political implications of its emerging forms are unclear.

Since the 1970s, the service sector employs a larger share of the workforce than manufacturing in advanced industrial economies. Moreover, the number of women in the workforce has risen dramatically, though gender inequality persists with regard to wages, hiring, promotions, and treatment at the workplace. On the other hand, current technological developments—especially in the IT-sector and the bio-sciences—are reshaping work routines and labor markets across the world. Venture capital, start-ups, and online platforms increasingly drive business and innovation.

New opportunities arise in this context for creative people who enjoy flexible work schedules and increased mobility. The technology-driven "gig economy" affords new income-making alternatives to low-skill workers as well. Social identities are redefined in the process. But robotization and automation, coupled with economic globalization, lead to the progressive disappearance of traditional working-class jobs in the richer parts of the world. And employment stability is undermined by the financialization of the economy, which also has an impact on social inequality. What is commonly referred to as non-standard employment, which includes contingent employment relations, involuntary part-time work, and temporary work arrangements, has replaced, in many areas, well-paying, secure, long-lasting jobs. In fact, the distinction between work and nonwork has become increasingly blurred in the wake of the digital revolution.

These developments have the potential to fundamentally transform society, impacting every form of social organization, from families and households to neighborhoods and cities, local and transnational communities, social movements and NGOs, hospitals and health care providers, public bureaucracies, and political systems. Social scientists are yet to unpack many of these changes. How do demands for geographical mobility and round-the-clock availability of skilled workers affect couples and families? Does the lack of a stable income disrupt traditional household formation and reproduction strategies? What mental and physical health problems stem from precarity? And what skillsets should schools be teaching to the next generation of workers? Should "digitalizing" primary education, for example, be a priority?

The task seems urgent because policymakers appear ill-equipped to tackle the societal challenges stemming from the transformation of work. Indeed, the spread of non-standard employment raises new regulatory issues about the rights of workers, the duties of employers, and the role of the state. Moreover, important segments of the labor force lack territorial anchoring (e.g. telecommuting) and escape national regulations. Welfare provision schemes also need to adapt to protect vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, the elderly, and the underemployed. And efforts to salvage manufacturing jobs such as the protectionist measures enacted by Donald Trump create geopolitical tensions in a world where nation-states are losing much of their power to transnational corporations.

By choosing "The Future of Work" as the theme of its next congress, the Swiss Sociological Association thus extends an invitation to the Swiss and the international academic community to reflect on changes that affect not only workers and the economy but society as a whole. Sociology boasts an array of methodological tools, and it has the potential to develop new perspectives, concepts, measures, and indicators to capture the changing realities of labor. Its ability to do so will also shape the future of sociologists and their work.

We invite proposals for plenary sessions and workshops on the future of work from different perspectives. Given the importance of work in all social realms, research committees are encouraged to contribute to this discussion from their own perspectives.

For Plenary sessions: Please submit your proposal, including plenary title and abstract, presentation titles and names of speakers as well as the plenary organizer(s) affiliation and contact information by **January 15, 2019** to: socio.congress2019@unine.ch. A plenary session includes three presentations. Decisions will be communicated no later than **February 15, 2019**. If your proposal is accepted, we will ask you to submit the program of the plenary session containing all relevant information by **March 15, 2019**.

For Workshop sessions: Please submit your proposal, including workshop title, abstract and call for papers as well as workshop organizer(s) affiliation and contact information by **January 15, 2019** to: socio.congress2019@unine.ch. Decisions will be communicated no later than **February 15, 2019** and you will be responsible for organizing the workshop. If your proposal is accepted, we will ask you to submit the program of the workshop containing all relevant information by **May 15, 2019**.

For more information, please visit www.unine.ch/socio/sociocongress2019 or contact us at socio.congress2019@unine.ch.