

# Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **Innovating Aging**

Practices, discourses, policies

Call for papers, Special Issue of «Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia», edited by FRANCESCO MIELE (University of Padova) and SILVIA FORNASINI (Fondazione Bruno Kessler and University of Trento)

Demographic aging is a typical phenomenon of Western modern societies, often defined at the same time as a *grand challenge* (Östlund 2004) and an opportunity for the development of scientific and technological innovations aimed at ensuring the health and the well-being of older people (Peine *et al.* 2015). Over the last years several innovations have emerged with the aim of improving the health and well-being of senior citizens, these include complex remote monitoring systems; self-tracking devices; service robot platforms; ambient assisted living environments; social gaming apps; regenerative medicine and tissue engineering. The recent COVID-19 outbreak has enhanced research and development processes in various fields (e.g. diagnostic, vaccines and therapeutics), paying particular attention to older people's health with the aim of containing the effects of the epidemic on this target population.

This special issue invites papers that investigate the social processes through which techno-scientific innovations are co-produced and adopted, and how they contribute at (re)shaping social representations and practices interwoven with ageing processes. This issue will address the following two cross-cutting themes.

Firstly, contributors are invited to explore the social processes through which techno-scientific innovations are co-produced, involving heterogeneous actors such as scientific communities, national and supranational policy makers, research funding agencies, market and industrial systems, digital and traditional media, designers and users. These actors play a key role in the construction of the cultural meanings associated to ageing and define what are the best solutions for improving the well-being of an aged population. While for a long time aging has been associated to a process

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characterized by a continued cognitive and physical decline, over the last two decades *active aging* discourses have become more and more common (Boudiny 2013) and resulted in promoting the emergence of scientific and technological innovations aimed at the same time at supporting elderlies in an active engagement with life and at contrasting the probability of disease onsets and disease-related disabilities. Furthermore, more recently, there has been a significant increase in discourses and innovation processes which come under the label of *anti-aging medicine* (Vincent 2006; Mykytyn 2006; Brooks 2010), claiming that aging process is a disease that can be alleviated in its symptoms (e.g. using anti-wrinkle surgeries), slowed (e.g. through new care protocols for curing the diseases associated with old age) or eradicated (e.g. identifying genes for aging and limiting cell damage). COVID-19 outbreak have placed again on the agenda the frailty of older people and stimulated the circulation of public discourses aimed at representing old people an undue burden on society and more specifically on the health system (Shimoni 2020). In this regard, also in the light of the ongoing global health crisis, we welcome contributions investigating the emergence of techno-scientific innovations, exploring practices, discourses and policies that favour or obstruct them.

Secondly, we invite contributions that explore how technological and scientific innovations have become incorporated into the daily life of older people, in and outside healthcare organizations. On the one hand, several innovations have been produced in order to support older people at home and to prevent their placement in healthcare institutions. Common examples are well-being technologies for life-style change (Peine *et al.* 2016), the so-called smart-home devices for helping seniors in daily routines and monitoring their physical safety (Compagna, Kohlbacher 2014) or the clinical interventions for preventing the intensifying of certain diseases (Kaufman 2010). On the other hand, over the last years, techno-scientific innovations have been turning care processes into healthcare organizations, such as hospital wards or long-term facilities. Sometimes these innovations are used by professionals to monitor at distance older patients with chronic conditions, such as the remote monitoring systems (Pols, Moser 2009; Mol *et al.* 2010; Mort *et al.* 2012), while other times they are used to manage long-term residents, this is the case of clinical protocols used for reducing the symptoms of alzheimer (Gjødsbøl *et al.* 2017). At the moment national and supranational institutions, through dedicated funding programs, are stimulating the acceleration of some of these innovation process (e.g. in the field of remote monitoring and surveillance technologies) for facing the COVID-19 outbreak, with consequences on elderlies' lives that have yet to be investigated. Topics coming under this theme might explore how seniors, caregivers and professionals

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appropriate techno-scientific innovations and how in turn enact new social practices, connecting them to old ones and re-defining their own identities.

We welcome theoretical and theoretically grounded empirical papers on the following, but not limited to, topics:

- Innovation, participatory design practices and older people
- European and national policies concerning aging and innovation
- Scientific research on ageing processes
- R&D and aging technologies
- Aging and anti-aging discourses and practices
- Media discourses on ageing and techno-scientific innovations
- Innovation, active-ageing and empowerment of older people
- Innovation and chronic disease management at home
- Innovation and care processes in long-term care organizations
- Innovation and welfare systems in Western societies
- Innovation and critical effects on older people (in terms of, for example, quality of care, quality of life, privacy, individual freedom, acceptance of ageing)

## **Deadlines and guidelines**

Abstracts are due by **October 15, 2020**. All abstracts (500 words), with 5 keywords in English, should be sent as e-mail attachments (Word format) to: francesco.miele@unipd.it and s.fornasini@fbk.eu.

Decisions concerning the selection of articles will be given by **November 15, 2021**. Submission of first versions of articles to be refereed should be sent to the editors by **February 15, 2021**.

Articles, written in English, should follow the journal guidelines and sent to: francesco.miele@unipd.it and s.fornasini@fbk.eu.

Communication from the editors concerning the peer-review process will take place by **April 15, 2021**.

Revised versions sent to the editors **by June 15, 2021**.

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