

Jany-Catrice, Florence; Sobel, Richard

## Article

# The revue française de socio-economie: Reconnecting with the social science project

economic sociology\_the european electronic newsletter

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne

*Suggested Citation:* Jany-Catrice, Florence; Sobel, Richard (2010) : The revue française de socio-economie: Reconnecting with the social science project, economic sociology\_the european electronic newsletter, ISSN 1871-3351, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne, Vol. 11, Iss. 2, pp. 44-47

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/155943>

## Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

## Terms of use:

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*

# The Revue Française de Socio-Economie: Reconnecting with the Social Science Project

## Florence Jany-Catrice

Assistant Professor, Editor of the *RFSE*,  
[Florence.jany-catrice@univ-lille1.fr](mailto:Florence.jany-catrice@univ-lille1.fr)

## Richard Sobel

Assistant professor, assistant editor of the *RFSE*,  
[Richard.sobel@univ-lille1.fr](mailto:Richard.sobel@univ-lille1.fr)

### 1. The *RFSE*: a pragmatic undertaking

The *Revue française de socio-économie* (*RFSE*) is first and foremost the result of an association, both intellectual and personal, among French academics in the social sciences. The idea for a new journal first took shape within Clersé (*Centre lillois d'études et de recherches sociologiques et économiques*), a research center at the University of Lille 1, whose founding idea is that dialogue between economists and sociologists is fruitful. The journal's original founding group quickly expanded of course beyond Lille, thanks to the support for the burgeoning project lent by like-minded members of French research centers and teams, such as Matisse1, IDHE2 etc. Many academics expressed an interest in setting up a journal that naturally positioned itself at the confluence of three strands of research in the social sciences: heterodox economics, economic sociology and social economics. (1) French heterodox economics, in all its diverse constituent strands (Keynesian, Marxist, conventionalist, institutionalist, regulationist), is based on the key principles of pluralism and historically situated and therefore necessarily contingent analysis. (2) Social economics, for its part, is intrinsically part of the field of socio-economics because it has its origins in a political project as well as in a fruitful dialogue between economists and sociologists. (3) Economic sociology and the practices, methods and results associated with it are a reminder that there are a number of different paths that can be taken in order to advance economic knowledge. Shaped by its own historic trajectory, each strand seemed willing to share intellectual points of view, focusing first on research problem-

atics and then on methods, concepts, chains of reasoning and results, all of which are sources of mutual enrichment.

Of course the collaborations occasioned by the *RFSE* are not confined to these three native schools of thought, which together constitute a sort of French socio-economics that is clearly defined and therefore substantivised. What defines this French journal of socio-economics is a significantly more procedural approach, and the *RFSE* provides a home for social science research that subjects its economic objects to distinctive and open-ended scrutiny. Such research quite naturally has a place in the journal, just as the work of scholars in the fields of economic philosophy, history, economic anthropology, political science and management does. Although it is not a journal of the history of thought, the *RFSE* does not exclude articles on the major theorists (Smith, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Polanyi, Keynes, etc.) whose works constitute the social sciences' shared intellectual heritage, if their purpose is to enhance our understanding of current economic phenomena or to shed new light on the issues they raise<sup>3</sup>.

There is obvious potential for collaboration between these different social sciences and schools of thought, and the *RFSE* provides a forum for testing and realising this potential. The possibilities for collaboration are located at both the epistemological or theoretical and the practical or empirical levels. Epistemologically speaking, all the social sciences are derived from political philosophy and deal with the institutions that characterise life in society, which gives them an anti-naturalist stance<sup>4</sup>. In practical terms, the nature of the objects of investigation, from the most general (the market, the firm, rules, well-being, wealth, institutions) to the most specific (unemployment, social justice, health, services, the environment), means that these various sciences of the social are indeed closely interwoven. Thus it is that, mediated through these two aspects, the empirical or epistemological hearts of these various schools of thought and strands of research interact with each other. And it is this beating heart of socio-economic analysis and interrogation that the *RFSE* seeks to reflect. Its aim, in principle and in practice, is to be one of these spaces for dialogue and collaboration.

Thus the journal's objective is simple and yet ambitious: to suggest and encourage close collaboration between economics and sociology and, through its role as an intermediary, to be a vehicle for the diffusion of a social science whose construction is driven by the requirement for pluralism. This pluralism applies as much to the methods used and the theoretical perspectives adopted as to the results. This requirement is obviously consistent with the aims and objectives of the *Association française d'économie politique* (AFEP)<sup>5</sup>. Its recent president rightly declared, incidentally, that this pluralism 'goes beyond the ideal of tolerance appropriate to all intellectual activities, whether in the natural sciences, the social sciences or any other discipline. Pluralism is a way for the economics community to think about its social role. It is a mechanism for uncovering the interests that are seeking to instrumentalise it'<sup>6</sup>.

This reconciliation or collaboration takes two forms, none of which is in principle excluded here. These two forms are to be found in the contents of the issues published to date. On the one hand, the collaboration may revolve around common objects, which at the very least makes it possible to adopt interdisciplinary approaches, thereby enriching the effects of the knowledge produced. On the other hand, the collaboration may be focused on common questions, which is more demanding but leads to the production of articles written by several authors from different disciplines. By way of example, we cite below three articles written by scholars from different disciplines that have appeared at intervals in the journal since its inception<sup>7</sup>:

**Philippe Batifoulrier, Jean-Paul Domin, Maryse Gadreau:** The changing patient and the construction of a market in health. The French experience. In: *Revue française de socio-économie*, n° 01.

■ **Didier Demazière, François Horn, Marc Zune:** The worlds of *free* in the digital era: a problematic agreement on free software. In: *Revue française de socio-économie*, n° 01.

■ **Thomas Dallery, Fabien Eloire, Jordan Melmiès:** Price setting in situations of uncertainty and competition. Keynes and Whyte at the same table. In: *Revue française de socio-économie*, n° 04.

## 2. The RFSE: a critical stance

Having emerged from a historical context in which mainstream economics occupies a position of hegemony, the

RFSE was of course born out of a dialectic process in which a feeling of *strength* mingled with a form of frustration. The strength lays in the potential gains to be made by reconnecting with the precepts of political economy, multidisciplinary and empiricism, or at least the most commendable aspects of those concepts. The *frustration* arose out of our inability to identify, in most French-language journals, a space for academic debate and the diffusion of ideas that might strengthen dialogue, since the journal has from the outset been informed by the notion of a dual embeddedness: of economic phenomena in the social environment and of social phenomena in economic structures.

The performative nature of the dominant economic theory is seldom compatible with this pluralistic epistemology. This orthodox economic theory, characterised as it is by normativity, conceptual esotericism, methodological hermeticism and a weak ability to engage in the debate between civil society and the world of the expert, has frequently led its advocates astray, since the 'science' to which they lay claim is constructed around scientific 'certainties' that are in fact extremely tenuous. More often than not, it has lost its bearings and failed to recognise that the goal of political economy is to construct knowledge and develop policies based on an analysis of capitalist economies as they function in practice, in all their complexity.

Is it any longer necessary to point out the extent to which mainstream economics has conceptualised itself to the exclusion of all the other social sciences and has, in less than three decades, constructed a clear divide not only within the social sciences but also, and more particularly, within economics itself? In structuring their field<sup>8</sup>, economists sometimes seem to confuse 'scientific character' with 'scientism'<sup>9</sup>.

Although it is an avowedly academic publication, the RFSE aims also to be one of the possible channels of communication for a community that seeks to fulfil its social role in public debates. This social role is made possible, firstly, by the articles it publishes. These articles, the journal's cornerstone, address the major economic and social problems. Do companies have any responsibility towards the wider society?<sup>10</sup> Should care services be provided through family transactions or the market economy?<sup>11</sup> What role is played by *numbers* in contemporary public policies, and what social values do they reflect?<sup>12</sup> This social role is also being taken on by spaces for debate that have been opened up within and by the RFSE and, through the journal, by the members of its editorial board<sup>13</sup>: editorials, written by one or more of the board's members, set out

the journal's political position. Besides the editorial vision and policy set out in issue no. 0114, the other editorials have focused on the following debates and controversies: equality between men and women, the teaching of economic and social sciences and the unity of the social sciences, the expansion of the student loan scheme, and the founding of the AFEP (*Association française d'économie politique*). Book reviews and a section entitled *Critical Notes* also constitute a pragmatic way of identifying the boundaries of the *RFSE* and defining its scope. They are written by more or less established researchers and thus constitute a space in which the editorial board is able to take on the task of teaching writing and positioning, particularly for the benefit of PhD students.

### 3. Why a journal?

The *RFSE* is not of course the only space for dialogue and debate in the social sciences. In France, and even more so in the English-speaking world, there are journals whose requirements and aspirations are similar to those that shape the *RFSE*'s editorial policy. Apart from the house journals of particular schools of thought, such as the *Revue de la Régulation*, or the *Cahiers d'Economie Politique*, there are excellent journals concerned with particular topics, such as *Formation et Emploi*, or certain thematic issues of *Economies et Sociétés* (*Socio-économie du travail*, *Æconomia*). Internationally, of course, journals play a comparable role: the *Journal of Socio-Economics*, the *Socio-Economic Review* or the *Journal of Economic Issues*. Nevertheless, there is a theoretical space to be opened up, to be occupied by a multi-thematic, generalist form of socio-economics, both theoretical and applied, with the explicit aim of structuring the academic field. From this point of view, the journal has to be published in French, since the English-speaking world already has this type of journal and even specialist newsletters, such as *Economic Sociology: The European Electronic Newsletter*, whereas such publications can still create some new space in the French debate.

At the same time, the *RFSE* aims to be a genuinely academic journal, that is one that adheres to the rules laid down by the profession<sup>15</sup> and which publishes articles that have been scrutinised by two anonymous referees, with a final decision on acceptance or rejection made by the editorial board. To date, more than 250 French-speaking referees<sup>16</sup> have helped to maintain the *RFSE*, and there are very few articles that have not been enhanced by the frequently stimulating and wide-ranging comments

made by these referees and the members of the editorial board. Although they are careful to exercise a degree of caution with regard to externally imposed rules that could undermine the journal's editorial vision and personal approach, the founding members of the *RFSE* are convinced that such a procedure guarantees an objectivity constructed by scholars, and by them alone. Incidentally, this never in principle precludes acceptance for publication of adventurous or provocative articles.

### 4. What is the *RFSE*'s track record to date?

At a time of far-reaching reforms<sup>17</sup>, the institutional context of French, and indeed European academic research provide individual scholars with very strong incentives to publish, with all the risks inherent in this frenzy to produce in order automatically to keep pace with the rudimentary performance indicators that have been put in place to assess academics. Nevertheless, the diversification of outlets in the French-speaking world has not to date given rise to the competitive rivalry that some undoubtedly feared. Indeed the contrary is the case. The editorial space and the policy adopted by the editorial board, which sought pragmatically to 'demonstrate movement by walking'<sup>18</sup>, have created considerable space for complementarities. Thus several journals simultaneously published special reports on care, a situation that was fairly well received by specialist publications. The same is true of the special report on corporate social responsibility. It might also be noted that very few articles dealing solely with work and employment have been published to date in the *RFSE*. Thus the *RFSE* has not taken the bread out of other journals' mouths, particularly not those jewels in the crown of French heterodox economics that concentrate on work, employment, training or social protection. Experience shows that the *RFSE* has been able to carve out its own niche in the world of academic publishing.

The result to date is certainly not perfect, but what other journal could boast of having achieved perfection? Nevertheless, the publication of two editions a year enables us to uncover a hitherto invisible part of socio-economics in the process of creating itself, and is also a way of encouraging a certain degree of optimism among the most fatalistic.

Thus this adventure (for such indeed it is) has been marked by successes and new developments; the epilogue has not yet been written, but after two full years of existence the

furrow it has ploughed is certainly clearly defined. Over and above subjective feelings, the *RFSE* can be proud of having staked out a position for itself on the academic journal scene, as is confirmed by the increasing interest and enthusiasm we have encountered<sup>19</sup> over the past two years. The assertion of plurality has been confirmed. The thematic special reports have dealt (or will soon deal) with care services, corporate social responsibility, modern analyses of capitalism, development, issues around quantification, the new peasantry, representations of the entrepreneur, the social uses of household credit<sup>20</sup> etc. A variety of articles from the leading edge of socio-economic research has supplemented and will continue to supplement this diversified panorama. The authors of these more independent articles include Michel Lallement, François Vatin, François Eymard-Duvernay, Christian Bessy, Roland Canu, Jérôme Denis, Gérald Gaglio, Claude Didry and Jean-Marie Harribey. Their contributions have focused on themes falling within the scope of the three strands identified above: the sociology of markets, social economics and economic analysis of the contemporary capitalist system viewed from a conventionalist, regulationist or institutionalist perspective, or have come under the heading of the sociology of work or economic sociology. They have drawn on a wide diversity of methodologies, ranging from case studies to statistical analysis, via articles focusing more on the theoretical dimension of research.

Firmly established on the scene, the *RFSE* aspires to be not only an academic journal but also a sounding board for the critical strands that run through French society and that the divisions between academic disciplines frequently prevent us from taking seriously. It is by taking on this twofold challenge in a balanced way that it will undoubtedly have won its wager.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Research team in heterodox economics at the *Centre d'économie de la Sorbonne* (Paris).

<sup>2</sup>The *Institutions et dynamiques historiques de l'économie* team includes historians, economists and sociologists.

<sup>3</sup>See *RFSE* special report n°. 03 coordinated by Richard Sobel and Bruno Tinel.

<sup>4</sup>See *RFSE* editorial n°.01, Bernard Convert, Florence Jany-Catrice, Richard Sobel.

<sup>5</sup>See the open letter stating the intention to set up the *French Association for Political Economy* on the AFEP website.

<http://larsg.over-blog.com/article-pour-une-association-francaise-d-economie-politique-38803983.html>

<sup>6</sup>Inaugural speech by André Orléans, 2009. See

<http://www.assoekonomiepolitique.org/spip.php?article35>.

<sup>7</sup>In all, 6 articles have been written jointly by scholars from different disciplines. This amounts to almost 10% of the articles published.

<sup>8</sup>That is the key actors in the social systems determining access to academic positions in economics and in the promotion of academic economists.

<sup>9</sup>See the open letter by elected members on the *AFEP*'s website. Economics section of the Conseil national des universités: "*L'excellence scientifique* comme prétexte au scientisme" (*Scientific excellence* as a pretext for scientism).

<sup>10</sup>*RFSE* special report no. 04, published in the 2nd half of 2009. Report coordinated by Nicolas Postel.

<sup>11</sup>*RFSE* special report no. 02, published in the 2nd half of 2008. Report coordinated by par Florence Jany-Catrice and Chantal Nicole-Drancourt.

<sup>12</sup>*RFSE* special report no. 05, 1st half 2010. Particular reference is being made here to the article by A. Ogien in this issue on *La valeur sociale du chiffre. La quantification du politique entre performance et démocratie. The social value of numbers. The quantification of policy between performance and democracy*.

<sup>13</sup>The current composition of the editorial board is as follows: Eveline Baumann (economist), Laurent Bazin (anthropologist), Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann (sociologist), Benoit Lallau (economist), Catherine Comet (sociologist), Bernard Convert (sociologist), François Denord (sociologist), François Horn (economist), Hélène Ducourant (sociologist), Florence Jany-Catrice (economist), Danilo Martuccelli (sociologist), Nicolas Postel (economist), Sandrine Rousseau (economist), Richard Sobel (economist), Bruno Tinel (economist), Marie-Hélène Toutin-Trelcat (economist).

<sup>14</sup>To be found on its website:

<http://rfse.univ-lille1.fr/projet/editorial.htm>

<sup>15</sup>We have adapted our policy to the (stricter) rules laid down by the economics discipline and which are outlined further on in the main body of the text. Other major and justly renowned journals in other social sciences are not governed by these rules. Thus there is no procedural determinism in this respect. Furthermore, we have added a rule to which our research ethic obliges us to adhere: no member of the current editorial board may publish an article in the *RFSE*.

<sup>16</sup>With a few exceptions.

<sup>17</sup>Particularly the 2007 Act on Freedoms and Responsibilities of Universities.

<sup>18</sup>As set forth in the journal's first editorial written by B. Convert, F. Jany-Catrice and R. Sobel.

<sup>19</sup>Estimated quantitatively by the number of articles that embark on the evaluation process each month. Currently, we receive on average nine articles per month.

<sup>20</sup>List of reports in progress or to come. All calls for papers are available on the *RFSE* website.