For several years now AIS, the Italian Sociological Association, has developed collaborative relationships with sociological associations of Southern Europe. Without underestimating the value of global sociological knowledge, AIS – in continuous exchange with the Portuguese, French and Greek Associations and the Spanish Federation of Sociology – is aware that there is a common set of research themes, social problems and scientific methods uniting the countries of Southern Europe. The involvement of AIS in activities promoted by the Research Network 27 arises from this awareness. RN27 – Regional Research Network on Southern European Societies – is a section of the ESA, European Sociological Association focusing on theoretical and empirical research in Southern European countries. RN27 is also promoted by RESU (REseau des associations de sociologie de l’Europe et de pays du SUd), a network of France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain national associations, which encourages the cooperation of researchers belonging to the Mediterranean area and other countries who are interested in working on common themes in a comparative perspective (https://www.europeansociology.org/research-networks/rn27-regional-network-southern-european-societies).

The present issue of Sociologia italiana, the journal of AIS, is placed in this broad framework of scientific cooperation. Together with Sociology On Line, the journal of the Portuguese Association of Sociology, and RES-Revista Española de

DOI: 10.1485/AIS_2018/12_3435563
Sociología, the journal of the Spanish Federation of Sociology, a joint call for papers was launched on the topic Connecting sociological research with social problems and public policies: implications for Southern European societies. The three journals have jointly addressed their scientific communities on issues that are particularly significant for Southern European societies, such as changes in the Welfare State, work and employment, education, migration, social cohesion, and political participation.

A further result of the continued collaboration in these international networks is the joint organization of AIS Mid-term conference (on the theme «Sociology and European societies: social structures, cultures and institutions», at the University of Catania, Department of Social and Political Sciences, October 5–6, 2018) with the Mid-term conference of the RN26 and RN27 of the ESA. This special issue of Sociologia italiana and the Catania conferences have a common goal: to account for the specificities of European social structures, cultures and institutions in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. The joint conferences inspire and support scholars from different countries to investigate common themes and problems in a comparative perspective.

This special issue aims at integrating three crucial aspects of sociological knowledge: international reach, rigorous academic research and public impact, i.e., the ability to tackle social problems in specific local contexts. The call for papers also intended to overcome the self-referencing effect in sociological studies. This is partly produced by the characteristics of the current international research system, which is continuously and increasingly required to compete in the global market of scientific knowledge, mainly oriented to researchers using English as the dominant language.

In this perspective, the joint call welcomed submissions to one of the three journals on the relevance of contemporary sociological knowledge as a scientific platform to understand the societies of Southern Europe at local, regional and cross-national level. Articles could be submitted in the language of the national associations or in English, on one of the following topics:

- empirical and theoretical approaches to social problems that characterize Southern European societies, with particular reference to the transfer of knowledge and use in public policies;
- impact of the economic crisis on Southern European societies, institutional transformations, social movements and forms of coexistence;
- analysis and evaluation of European policies and their impact on societies;
- transfer of knowledge in sociology: theoretical approaches, forms of organization and research;
the role of sociology as an academic discipline in highlighting social problems and contributing to the design of public policies in Europe.

As a result of the call, Sociologia Italiana received twenty-three abstracts. In step one evaluation, authors of thirteen abstracts were invited to write a full paper to be submitted to peer-review. Step two evaluation selected six full papers. Five are presented in the Focus section of this issue and one in the Theory and Research section. The study for Fosco Bugoni and Giovanni Battista Corvino, entitled «Voci dalla ‘trincea’: ricerca sul lavoro emozionale degli operatori nei centri di detenzione amministrativa per stranieri irregolari» [Voices from the ‘frontline’: the emotional work of staff in administrative detention centers for irregular immigrants] analyzes the emotional labor of staff working in immigrant centers, and the strategies of defense that they put in place to keep a balance between involvement and detachment. «Welfare, élites distributrici e clientele sociali. Un’analisi comparativa a proposito delle indennità per il bracciantato agricolo in Calabria e in Andalusia» [Welfare, supply élites and social clients. A comparative analysis on the allowances for agricultural laborers in Calabria and in Andalusia] is the title of Valentina De Luca’s study, which investigates the relationship between the welfare system, nepotism and political consensus in two different regions of the Mediterranean area. In «Gender and Time Inequalities. Retail Work and the deregulation of shop opening hours», Annalisa Dordoni compares the working condition of store clerks in the most famous shopping streets in Milan and London, in order to highlight the difficulties in reconciling the highly atypical work shifts with personal needs and family life in particular. In their article «Contrastare la povertà estrema a partire dalla casa. L’Housing First in Calabria, tra limiti e potenziali sviluppi» [Combating extreme poverty, starting from housing. The potential and limits of Housing first in Calabria], Sabina Licursi, Giorgio Marcello and Emanuela Pascuzzi explore the Housing First model, as part of the plan to combat homelessness in Europe, and they illustrate results of an application of this model which was recently installed in Calabria. Finally, in his article «L’Impatto della crisi nei sistemi sanitari dei paesi mediterranei» [The impact of the crisis in the health systems of Mediterranean countries], Mauro Serapioni adopts a comparative approach to examine the recent health system reforms, the performance inequalities and the evolution of health inequalities coinciding with the economic crisis in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.