

RT 47 – Visual and Film Sociology
French Sociological Association (AFS)

Documentary Approaches and Visual Explorations
International mid-term conference – June 3–5, 2026, Paris

In partnership with LITEM Lab (Paris-Saclay), Centre Pierre Naville, and MSH Paris-Saclay

Rationale

Across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, as well as among practitioners (in institutions, associations, businesses, or the field), there is a growing shift away from relying solely on text or speech to conduct research and disseminate findings. Instead, images and sound—photographs, videos, drawings, comics—are increasingly used to engage broader audiences with research questions, results, and knowledge. This conference seeks to explore and critically examine the cross-disciplinary role of visual and filmic expression in research, emphasizing its capacity to rigorously engage with diverse methodologies and epistemologies.

Images and sound have become powerful tools for research across all fields. In physics, biology, materials science, sociology, ethnology, geography, history, and beyond, visual and auditory materials enable deep, repeatable observation and analysis.

When used to express research findings or ideas—traditionally conveyed through writing—these media challenge conventional modes of presentation. While often grounded in rational processes, they also engage the senses and imagination, elements typically marginalized in academic discourse.

The RT 47 (Visual and Film Sociology) Meetings of the French Sociological Association bring together sociologists, managers, creators, psychologists, and others. Through presentations of their own work (or borrowed materials), the conference will interrogate the role and impact of images and sound in research processes and modes of presentation/reception. How do sensory experiences intersect—or conflict—with rationality in scholarly and creative practices?

Conference Format

The conference is structured around a core principle: each thematic workshop begins with an introductory masterclass, led by a specialist who presents their work, methods, and theoretical frameworks. This is followed by a contributory session, where participants present their research or creative projects—completed or in progress—and receive methodological and conceptual feedback from all attendees.

This format encourages continuous knowledge exchange, interdisciplinary dialogue (sociology, anthropology, documentary film, photography, body studies, urban studies, visual arts), and the confrontation of field experiences. All workshops are open to the public, fostering genuine cross-disciplinary engagement and active participation from researchers, doctoral students, artist-researchers, and students.

Thematic Axes for Proposals

1. Documentary Writing and the Construction of Reality

This axis explores how documentary film constructs intelligibility of reality through formal processes. It examines narrative choices, temporal structures, enunciation devices, and editing techniques as meaning-making operations. Proposals may address the tension between recording, interpretation, and scientific formalization.

2. Filming Techniques and the Construction of Documentary Film

The material and technical conditions of filming—lightweight equipment, natural light, resource constraints, mobility—shape the researcher’s approach and relationship to the field. This axis invites reflection on the methodological and epistemological implications of technical choices. How do technical constraints influence the aesthetics, ethics, and scientific validity of documentary film?

3. Images as Knowledge and Thought

This axis interrogates images as forms of knowledge and tools of thought in the social sciences. Beyond their traditional function, how do images produce knowledge and contribute to the development of analysis? What relationships emerge between observation, interpretation, and meaning-making in visual research? Can images function as autonomous spaces for reflection, capable of formulating hypotheses and opening new analytical perspectives?

4. Experimental Sciences and Technical Images

In physics, biology, and computational sciences, images often serve as central instruments for data production. This axis examines the epistemological status of images derived from instrumental devices (microscopy, digital imaging, modeling). How do these visualizations contribute to scientific demonstration and the construction of evidence?

5. The Language of Research: A Barrier to the Visual?

Does the dominance of written language in academic tradition limit the integration of visual media? This axis analyzes the semiotic hierarchies between text, image, and sound in knowledge production. How can conceptual rigor and visual expressiveness be balanced without reducing images to a merely illustrative role?

6. Emotions, Affects, and Regimes of Visibility in Documentary Film

This axis explores how documentary film renders affects and emotions visible as analytical data. How can gestures, intonations, silences, and intensities be objectified without psychologizing them? Does the filmic medium offer a unique approach to understanding affective regimes in research?

7. Visual Organization of Research Materials and Field Notes

Can the graphic structuring of data (mappings, diagrams, visual sketches) serve as a heuristic tool? This axis examines visual formatting as a stage in the construction of sociological reasoning. Does visualization transform categorization, comparison, and interpretation?

Organizing Committee

Christine Louveau, Jean-Luc Moriceau, Elizaveta Chebotareva, Joyce Sebag, Jean-Pierre Durand, Bruno Péquignot, Réjane Vallée, Isabela Paes, Brigitte Rasoloniaina

Submission Guidelines

Proposals (maximum 3,500 characters, including spaces) must include:

- Author(s)' full name(s)
- Institutional affiliation(s)
- Contact email(s)
- Selected thematic axis
- Proposal title
- Abstract outlining the theoretical framework, methodology, and expected contributions

Submit proposals to: RT47.AFS.2026@gmx.fr

Key Dates

April 25, 2026: Proposal submission deadline

April 30, 2026: Notification of acceptance

June 3–5, 2026: RT47 Inter-Congress, Paris

Practical Information

The conference is open to all RT47 members, sociologists (tenured and non-tenured), doctoral students, students, AFS members, and colleagues not yet affiliated with the association. Researchers from other disciplines working on visual issues, as well as image and sound professionals, are warmly invited to participate.

International contributions are welcome; presentations may be delivered in English (please indicate your preference in your submission).

Participation is free and open to all.

Venue:

Campus Nation – Université Sorbonne Nouvelle
33 rue de Picpus - 75012 Paris - France