

8th. ESA Conference, Glasgow 3rd– 6th Sept., 2007

ESA General Assembly

Wednesday Sept. 5th, 2007

President Report (2005-2007)

We meet here in Glasgow when our 8th Conference is turning towards its end. Each of you has got her/his own idea about this event, but I believe we can all say that this has been a large conference and a very successful one; on behalf of the all Executive, and I am sure of the ESA General Assembly, I want to express all our gratitude to Sara Arber, our Vice-president for the Conference program, to Bill Hughes, Jacqueline Tait and the all staff of the Local Organizing Committee and congratulate with all of them for this success.

However, we need also to be aware that this Conference has raised a problem to our Association: instead of increasing our membership, as usually previous Conferences did, here 1600 delegates have participated, but less than half of them have registered to ESA—and this despite the reduction of our membership fees, the increased issues of our Journal and a membership campaign that I have been personally doing among old members that we had lost on the way between our Conferences.

This Conference has been the first one organized under a new system, in which ESA membership and registration to the Conference work separately; this had been thought during the previous Executive in order to allow registration to the Association also outside Conferences, giving thus to ESA a more stable membership. Afterwards, we can say that the test of the Glasgow Conference shows some failures in this idea. It is not just a financial issue, since we have a contract with Glasgow university giving ESA a 50% share on surplus, and a larger Conference does produce surplus, but we need to find a solution to avoid a decreased membership for the good of ESA and of our Journal as well. The first thing coming up to the mind is of course to increase the gap between fees of members and non-members, but I am afraid we shall have to increase them a lot before we can compensate inconvenience of a double registration procedure; or we could decide to limit access to our Conferences to ESA-members, but our RNs might oppose to this. I am afraid the new Executive will have to take into serious consideration these unexpected results of this new system of membership and try to find out possible solutions to be tested at the 9th ESA Conference in Lisbon.

Having said this on our Conference, let us turn now to more general considerations about these two years of Presidency which are coming to an end, fortunately enough, I must confess, because it has required really a big amount of work that I would not be able to provide for any longer. In the last two years the Association has gone through a period of relevant changes. To report on them to the ESA General Assembly, I would like to start by recalling two points of J.P. Roos Report two years ago: he stressed a need for more continuity in ESA governing bodies and remarked that a consolidated financial situation was leaving our Executive with the easy task of spending.

The two things were not so independent from each other, working on continuity indeed implied some costs. We tried to give a more stable structure to **our office in Paris**, turning into a chance what was mainly a cost, that is the end of secretarial support from the French CNRS. We had to hire our own secretary and this has been the occasion for reshaping the work of our office, also thanks to a bookkeeper who is by now stably cooperating with our secretary and Treasurer. Our headquarters are still hosted by the French CNRS in the building of rue Pouchet in Paris, where we share an office with the French Association of Sociology; our presence there is by now consolidated, although our Agreement with the CNRS is still under renewal. Possible

developments are that ESA office will be hosted in a different building, a sort of “Maison de la Sociologie” that seems to be in the CNRS future plans.

We have been also considering the need for a more active **website**. Together with Rene Bekkers who has worked as a volunteer webmaster for the last six years, we decided that the Association has grown and needs by now a more flexible site that can be updated and expanded in an more direct way than passing each time through the webmaster. Rene could not engage in this new step given his own work, therefore we have expressed to him for his voluntary long support all the gratitude of ESA that I am sure is shared by the General Assembly, and we hired a person in Paris who is currently rebuilding our website and will train our secretary to manage it; it is now to the next Executive to go on in refining our website.

Of course, continuity of the Association is not an issue only depending on office and website; this Executive has discussed about the opportunity to find out new rules for ensuring more continuity within the Executive Committee itself. We have been thinking of a possible change in the electoral mechanism which would allow to renew only partially the Executive at each term, and not the whole, as it is the case in other associations. It is indeed important that an Executive includes a significant number of people having already some experience of its work; at the same time, we are aware that it is less and less easy to find people really engaging in volunteer work. At any rate, this Executive had not enough time to discuss this point in depth, given the importance of changes this would imply; therefore we decided to leave to the next Executive the task of further thinking about this issue and possible changes in the ESA statutes to be presented to the next General Assembly.

Our “easy task of spending” has not been limited to improve structural continuity. Given ESA good financial situation, we have been pursuing a much broader strategy of **rebalancing income and expenditure**, namely by investing more money in the statutory goals of the Association. First of all, we took on us the task of **reviewing our membership fees** to the advantage of our members: fees have been restructured, by reducing their amount, despite increased issues of our Journal, and rationalizing their functioning (2 calendar years, an ID ESA number); the next executive will have to pursue their restructuring by refining ESA categories of “Western” and “Eastern” countries which do not fit any longer to the situation of Europe. Then, we have increased our investments in **activities for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers** (a longer Student Workshop at ESA Conferences, a new ESA Summer School on European issues for years in-between, the ESA Prize for young sociologists) under the supervision of a newly established **Post-doctoral Research Committee** (chaired by Catherine Delcroix). Furthermore, investments have also been increased for our **Research Networks** (there is no longer any limit to the number of grants from ESA in years between Conferences, up to 15 RNs have been funded in 2006). Finally, new investments have also been necessary in order to pursue the goal of consolidating ESA as representative of Sociology at the level of European science policy, as reported below.

A further relevant change has occurred in our journal *European Societies*, with the arrival of a new General Editor, prof. John Scott from Essex University, and the partial renewal of the Editorial Board. I am sure I interpret this General Assembly in thanking very much Claire Wallace for her great job establishing our Journal and in welcoming John Scott at its head. John Scott was also able to help us to close a **new contract with Routledge** for our publications (till 2016). The main gains with the new contract are the increase of our Journal from 4 to 5 issues per year, at the same price for at least 2 more years, and the possibility of downloading a paperback edition of books in our book-series “Studies on European Societies”. It is very important that all our members and RNs are aware of such extensions in our publications and consider submitting articles to the Journal and book-proposals to the book-series.

Throughout such changes, my presidency has been driven from two fundamental orientations. First of all, the conviction that ESA RNs need to be more involved in the life and choices of the Association; for this, we have created a new body of consultation, the **ESA Research Networks Council**, where the Executive and representatives of all RNs will have a chance to directly exchange their views. The Council meets for the first time here in Glasgow and will

continue to meet at each ESA Conference. I must acknowledge that not all RNs did promptly respond to our attempts to involve them, and often the Executive has no means to reach them other than their chairperson's e-mail address. We need to improve communications with them, this is why they have been asked to bring to the Council a form-page with main information for our office records. I have also tried to involve them in our consultation strategies for enhancing the role of ESA as representative of the scientific community of sociologists in Europe, but here too reactions were not too active. I believe it is important that most RNs react, otherwise there would inevitably be some sort of dominance from the most active ones. I hope that the new ESA RNs Council and more information in our records will be helpful means towards the goal of more involving our RNs in ESA actions.

Secondly, my effort has been to consolidate the presence of ESA at the European level. It is my view that ESA needs its own goal to propose to our members, and that goal cannot be but offering to sociologists from all European countries a chance to take part through ESA into a debate about what is **European Sociology**, within a broader discussion about EU science policy. It is the task of ESA to help constructing common views about needs and priorities for the development of Sociology in Europe. To this purpose, a new **External Relations Committee** has been created within the Executive (chaired by Carlo Ruzza), with the specific task of helping the President to promote ESA presence within the action of European scientific community. Since J.P. Roos presidency, ESA has been part of the Initiative for Science in Europe, a network of scientific associations which was at the origins of the European Research Council and is now an interlocutor for the ERC and the European Commission on matters of science policy. I have tried to strengthen our role within the ISE: ESA is by now the only social sciences association represented in ISE working group and works together with representatives of other sciences on a "Vision for a science in Europe" a sort of Manifesto on general principles and needs shared by the all European scientific community. We have also strengthened our links with the representatives of Sociology within the ERC, namely with Helga Nowotny, and with the social sciences section of ESF, thanks to Dagmar Kutsar.

In order to legitimate such a role for ESA, we have opened a process of consultation with all national associations of sociology, making the ESA Council of National Associations the place where a discussion about needs and perspectives for Sociology in Europe can be brought on with the purpose of building up common views for the sociology community. A first meeting in Paris last Dec. 2006 opened the way, the Council meeting here in Glasgow has followed. Next step will be to get also our RNs actively participating to such consultation, as already said. We want to make ESA a platform where European Sociology is collectively thinking and acting for its own purposes. As a conclusion, I can only say that the External Relations Committee and myself we have put lots of energies into these activities; I strongly recommend that the next President and Executive will pursue in consolidating what is by now a new field of action for ESA but ought to become, at least in my view, the core of ESA mission within our scientific community of European sociologists.

Giovanna Procacci
ESA President
2005-2007