

ESA President's report 2003-2005

European Sociological Association was established in 1989. It was based on an obvious need: all other continents had their own regional associations, but not Europe. The reason for this anomaly was also obvious, just as “men” often believe they represent the whole mankind, European sociologists have thought that they represent the sociology of the whole world and thus need no European sociological association. This is no longer true, although the origins of sociology are clearly European. Sociology has spread all over the world and there are vigorous sociological communities in many diverse countries and regions, Latin America, China, Japan, and of course the USA, which boasts of the largest and wealthiest Sociological Association, the ASA, with more than 10 000 members. Our present membership is only around 1 200.

In Europe, where there are at least as many sociologists than in the USA (probably more), and more people, too, we only have one tenth of the American membership. So something should be done to correct this anomaly.

According to ESA Statutes, the term of a president is two years, not renewable. Two years is a rather short time to get anything done in an organization, especially an international one. There is need for continuity, i.e. a president with previous experience in the ESA executive. Another guarantee of continuity is a permanent secretariat.

In both these aspects, we have been lucky, until now. At present, our contract concerning the secretariat is rather uncertain, and it is possible that we have to find a new place very soon. But let us hope for the best. Still, something else is needed to guarantee a continuing growth. This cannot be based on congress participation only.

ESA has been part in many important initiatives. Thus, we are now a founding member of the Initiative for Science in Europe and have signed the letter in which a demand for European Research Council was expressed and which has led to positive results. The European Research Council which was established this summer will hopefully help develop a more scientifically oriented approach to financing research in the European Union (its sociologist members are Manuel Castells and Helga Nowotny).

The ESA has also succeeded to become the recognized sociology organization in a European Union context. In addition, we have joined the International Sociological Association, which now has a European regional organization as well.

During my time in the executive, there has been a continuous need to change the statutes. This time we propose two small, but important changes of statutes: firstly in the Council of national associations (its president is now elected for three years), which should coincide with that of other ESA officers, i.e. two years (the present three year period makes a democratic election impossible among other things). Another more fundamental change is the introduction of more precise requirements concerning the research networks. Now we require that they have statutes, that their presidents cannot be elected indefinitely and that they give regular reports of their activities. It is important that the Research Networks which are the backbone of our activity, can not become the permanent fiefs of a single researcher. And that they will stay vigorous and active.

In a more practical vein, it is now at last possible to pay ESA membership fees separately from the congress fee. Thus, we will hopefully have more permanent members who don't lose their membership if they do not attend the congress.

Regardless, one thing is certain: ESA is presently a financially very solid organization. But it would be important to start using these resources in a way which is useful for our membership (if not for other reason but to keep our status of a non-profit organization under French law). This will be the pleasant task of the next Executive and its president. I wish it every success in this task.

And as some help towards this purpose, I suggest the establishment of an ESA European Sociology Prize for important achievements. I think we should have two prizes: one for a young promising sociologist and one for a prominent European sociologist.

To end in a personal note: we have had a very pleasant two years in the executive, especially compared to previous periods. On the other hand, some of the executive members have experienced personal tragedies or health problems which have affected their ability to work in the executive. Bearing this in mind, I would like to thank all the vice presidents for a very efficient and diligent work and good cooperation, as well as the general secretary who has been an important link between the ESA and the CNRS.

We have now had as our main activity, six biannual congresses. Our next conference will take place in August/September 2007 in Glasgow which presented a very well founded application and had a strong competition from Moscow. We hope that the conference in 2009 will be organized in Russia, but this is the responsibility of the next executive.

I wish all the best for the next Executive in its important work to advance the cause of European sociology!

J P Roos

President of ESA 2003-2005