



## **President's Report to the General Assembly of the European Sociological Association held at the 14<sup>th</sup> ESA Conference 2019**

### **Introduction:**

This has been a hardworking and collegial Executive and I have enjoyed working with its members and with the staff in the Office, even with the inevitable challenges.

In my view we have achieved a good deal since August 2017, although much of the hard work has happened behind the scenes and is, like housework, largely invisible. Hopefully unlike housework it won't all have to be repeated at regular intervals but will have made things easier for the next Executive and better for ESA members.

Speaking of members, we currently have 2750 fully paid up members, which is around 100 more than two years ago. I would hope that we could reach 3000 by the time of the next conference.

### **The Conference:**

As most of you will know the 14<sup>th</sup> ESA Conference was to be held in Paris. This had been decided by the 2015-17 President and Executive, and an agreement made with Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne. However, for complex reasons to do with the close proximity of dates to the French Sociological Association conference it became clear that this would not be feasible. This meant that in December 2018, I was in the unenviable position of needing to find a venue for a 3000-delegate conference with only 18 months until the event.

Dagmar Danko and I explored the logistics – the availability of venues, especially those large enough for plenaries, and also of a LOC – in a number of European cities. In this process I discovered that a Manchester team had wished to bid for 2019 and, in the event of the venue already having been agreed, had decided to put forward a proposal for 2021. They were happy to bring this forward to 2019 and here we are! There were of course pros and cons of having a conference in the UK in the context of BREXIT – on the one hand would people be concerned about travel chaos and not come and on the other should we take the opportunity to hold what could be the last ESA conference in the UK, if in future Brexit makes it seem just too complicated to contemplate. I am very pleased that we took the risk and that so many sociologists (3025) decided that Manchester was the place to be in August 2019.

The conference theme 'Europe and Beyond: Boundaries, Barriers and Belonging' seemed particularly apposite in these troubled times, with the contested issue of migration and the rise of nationalisms.

With this conference we have moved further in the direction set by the previous Executive towards the major part of the organisation being undertaken by the ESA office, coordinated by Dagmar Danko. The work of the LOC has still been invaluable, but we have not used a Professional Conference Organiser. This new method has proved very successful and the development enables the ESA to have a more professional staff team who can undertake other work as well as supporting the conference.

We did raise the conference fees slightly, which seemed appropriate given that they had not been raised over the last three conferences (2013-2015-2017), but we didn't change them for (PhD) students. We also introduced the Solidarity Fund to support those who might otherwise not be able to attend.

One major lesson in the process has been that our conference is now too large for many European Cities – as many Universities do not have sufficient rooms for all the parallel sessions and large Plenary Venues are in short supply and can be very expensive. Our growth does mean that the next Executive will need to consider the best way to decide on conference venues in the future.

#### **The Office:**

I was clear at the outset that a major aspect of my presidency would be to support the development of the staff and the ESA's administrative processes and practices. In the autumn of 2017, we advertised for a full-time administrator and in a very competitive process appointed Andreia Batista Dias, who had previously been employed on a temporary appointment. Andreia's title is 'Executive Administrator' and since her appointment she has availed herself of a number of training opportunities, including in accounts, English and graphic design. We have clarified Dagmar Danko's role and changed her title to 'Director' in line with equivalent positions in similar organisations in Europe. It is my view that the President now works in a 'team of two' with the Director and that this will ensure that the Executive is well informed and that there is continuity and good governance from one Executive to the next.

I have made a number of visits to the Paris Office, as well as those necessitated by Executive meetings, in order to work with Dagmar and Andreia in the development of systems, to share ideas and offer support and leadership. They are highly skilled in the different areas necessary and work well together. In my view the ESA is now in a strong administrative position and members should increasingly experience the benefits of this.

We have strengthened our relationship with FMSH – the ESA's host institution – and I have had a number of meetings with Michel Wieviorka, the President. One advantage has been the provision of an extra office during the period leading up to the conference during the period when we have a temporary administrative assistant and an intern in the office.

#### **Finances:**

Most of the issues will be covered in the Treasurer's report, but just a few comments here. First to thank Laura Horn for stepping in and taking on the role

of Treasurer so ably when Kathrin Komp was on sick leave and had to resign as treasurer – also many thanks to Kathrin for the work she undertook up to that point.

We had a difficult start with regard to finances as our bookkeeper sadly died in October 2017 and it took some time to establish a regular replacement. We now have an excellent bookkeeper and in addition and importantly, Andreia Batista Dias has undertaken training and has done a great deal of work, alongside the Treasurer and the Bookkeeper, to complete the ESA accounts for 2017 and 2018 in a most satisfactory manner. This new process means that the new Executive will be able to demonstrate the financial health of the ESA and therefore will be in a strong position to apply for subventions to support the Association's activities, both within France and from the EU. I have every confidence that we will be successful in the future in this regard.

The Association relies heavily on the conference income and the membership fees to ensure that its financial needs are covered for the two-year period between conferences. However, very large conferences are expensive to run, and we don't want to have to raise membership and conference fees more often than absolutely necessary, so we must diversify our income streams. We are unlikely to derive much income from our Publications, at least in the near future, in the context of Open Access, so other sources such as subventions and new activities need to be explored.

### **Publications and Open Access:**

During 2018 I noted that the ESA's contract with Taylor and Francis (for the publication of *European Societies* and the *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*) had an end date of December 2020 with the requirement to give one year's notice of any change. This meant that the 2017-19 Executive had to consider the ESA's publishing strategy within its period of office. This situation was followed, in September 2018, by the publication of PlanS from Science Europe which, coupled with the commitment already made, by the previous Executive, to publish an ESA Open Access journal, meant that actions were needed. The Executive agreed that in the changing context we wanted to undertake a tender process rather than simply renew our contract with Taylor and Francis. We established a Working Group to support both the tender process and Open Access developments, and appointed two consultants, on a freelance basis, one with expertise in drawing up tender documents and the other in contractual matters. The detail is in the Publications Committee report, but I am discussing it here as it has taken up a good deal of my time.

We felt strongly that the ESA needed a publishing partner who shared our values and we are confident that we have found this in Bristol University Press, a not for profit academic publisher where there is no risk of takeover. We are currently in negotiations with Taylor and Francis about the transfer and expect that BUP will take over the publication of ES and EJCPS from January 2021. Meanwhile we are working with them to develop this new Open Access Journal to be entitled 'Open Sociology' and with the intention to launch it on a new platform with low APCs for ESA members. We are exploring the possibility of working with National

Associations and others, across Europe, to see how we can facilitate wider publication on the 'Open Sociology' platform.

I am delighted with the way in which the new *European Sociologist* has developed during my Presidency and many thanks should go to Dagmar Danko for her very able editing, but I also have played a part in its development, from exploring themes to proof reading. I am sure that it will now go from strength to strength and provide an increasingly important platform for sociological discussion and information sharing across Europe.

#### **Web and Social Media Developments:**

We have continued to develop the website and member database. Indeed, the conference website and *The European Sociologist* are entirely new additions to the ESA's online portfolio. In this context Dagmar has met regularly with our IT partner Sinnoptics and we have agreed the various developments and improvements, including for example the election tool. The website is working well, although as with all websites it is a work in progress. In addition the ESA now has a Twitter account which is in regular use.

#### **External Activities:**

I have represented the ESA on the Board of the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) and attended meetings and conferences on this context, including a specialist round table on Open Access with representation from Science Europe in February 2019. I have contributed to the development and content of a number of papers – putting forward, for example, the case for more flexibility in the research themes with regard to social science and for a more equal distribution of funding. EASSH, while still a relatively new organisation, has already had some success in this regard.

I have developed some expertise in OA/PlanS matters, including in the context of being the OA lead for the UK Academy of Social Sciences, and given a number of presentations on this including at a Westminster Forum Meeting in London, in May 2019 where I was invited as ESA President.

I spoke on a Plenary Panel at the joint RN26 and RN27 midterms held in collaboration with the Italian Sociological Association conference, in Catania in October 2018. This joint meeting was a success and is to be recommended as a model for other RN mid-terms. I was invited as ESA President to give the inaugural lecture at the Institute of Social Science in Lisbon in November 2018. I have given lectures at the ESA PhD Summer Schools in 2018 and 2019 and a talk at the National Associations Conference in 2018. Sadly, I have had to decline some invitations due to diary clashes.

#### **Statutes and By Laws:**

This Executive has continued the work of its predecessors and added more clarification as well, but as this is a separate item I will say no more than that it has taken up a good deal of time, especially of Laura Horn's time in her role as Chair of the Policy Committee, so special thanks are due to her.

**Governance:**

There have been discussions in past ESA Executives about ways of mitigating the problems which can arise, in the governance of any organisation, where the President and often many Executive members change every two years, but finding a solution is especially difficult in the context of this two-year cycle. This Executive has agreed to establish an Advisory Board, made up of the previous President, Vice Presidents and Committee Chairs (unless any of them are continuing on the new Executive) to be in the background to offer advice and clarification to the new President and Executive, as necessary. We hope that if this development is successful that it will be permanently established.

As mentioned under Publications, we established a Working Group to support the tendering and transition process for the ESA's current Journals and to develop expertise in relation to Open Access in the context of PlanS, including advising on a new OA Journal. This Working Group is made up of: The President (Myself); the Chair of Publications (Lena Näre); Vice Presidents - Marta Soler and Apostolos Papadopoulos; the ESA Director (Dagmar Danko) and an external OA expert and ESA member (Professor John Holmwood). It was our intention from the outset that this group would continue to exist (assuming that the new Executive agrees) until the transfer of the Journals is complete, the new OA Journal launched, and a sustainable OA strategy developed. It is expected that the new Chair of Publications will join the Working Group.

To be clear: these moves are not about this Executive keeping control but ensuring that valuable experience is not lost, and that the next Executive has the capacity to develop new areas of benefit to our members. I would recommend to the next Executive that it consider a Governance Review to ensure that the Association continues to be financially and legally secure, operates with appropriate responsibility both as an employer and a membership services organisation. I feel that we have moved a long way towards meeting the goals of good governance and that now is the time for a forward-looking review to set the ESA on the strongest course for the next decade.

**Conclusion:**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Executive and especially the Vice Presidents Marta Soler, Lena Näre and Apostolos Papadopoulos, and also, and especially, Dagmar Danko and Andreia Batista Dias, the ESA staff for all of their hard work and support during my presidency.

I wish the next President and the new Executive well in their endeavours to ensure that the ESA continues to support both sociology and sociologists across Europe.

**Professor Sue Scott President 2017-2019**  
**August 23, 2019**